Departmental Ditties

Rudyard Kipling
Uniform with this volume, by Rudyard Kipling: Barrack-Room Ballads.
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I HAVE eaten your bread and salt,
   I have drunk your water and wine,
The deaths ye died I have watched beside,
   And the lives that ye led were mine.

Was there aught that I did not share
   In vigil or toil or ease,—
One joy or woe that I did not know,
   Dear hearts across the seas?

I have written the tale of our life
   For a sheltered people's mirth,
In jesting guise—but ye are wise,
   And ye know what the jest is worth.
GENERAL SUMMARY.

We are very slightly changed
   From the semi-apes who ranged
   India's prehistoric clay;
Whoso drew the longest bow,
Ran his brother down, you know,
   As we run men down to-day.

"Dowb," the first of all his race,
Met the Mammoth face to face
   On the lake or in the cave,
Stole the steadiest canoe,
Ate the quarry others slew,
   Died—and took the finest grave.

When they scratched the reindeer-bone,
Some one made the sketch his own,
   Filched it from the artist—then,
Even in those early days,
Won a simple Viceroy's praise
   Through the toil of other men.
GENERAL SUMMARY.

Ere they hewed the Sphinx's visage
Favoritism governed kissage,
Even as it does in this age.

Who shall doubt the secret hid
Under Cheops' pyramid
Was that the contractor did
    Cheops out of several millions?
Or that Joseph's sudden rise
To Comptroller of Supplies
Was a fraud of monstrous size
    On King Pharaoh's swart Civilians?

Thus, the artless songs I sing
Do not deal with anything
    New or never said before.
As it was in the beginning,
Is to-day official sinning,
    And shall be for evermore.
THE POST THAT FITTED.

THOUGH tangled and twisted the course of true love,  
This ditty explains  
No tangle's so tangled it cannot improve  
If the Lover has brains.

ERE the steamer bore him Eastward,  
Sleary was engaged to marry  
An attractive girl at Tunbridge, whom he called "my little Carrie."  
Sleary's pay was very modest; Sleary was the other way.  
Who can cook a two-plate dinner on eight paltry dibs a day?

Long he pondered o'er the question in his scantily furnished quarters—  
Then proposed to Minnie Boffkin, eldest of Judge Boffkin's daughters.  
Certainly an impecunious Subaltern was not a catch,  
But the Boffkins knew that Minnie mightn't make another match.
THE POST THAT FITTED.
So they recognized the business, and, to feed and clothe the bride, Got him made a Something Something somewhere on the Bombay side. Anyhow, the billet carried pay enough for him to marry— As the artless Sleary put it:—“Just the thing for me and Carrie.”

Did he, therefore, jilt Miss Boffkin— impulse of a baser mind? No! He started epileptic fits of an appalling kind. (Of his modus operandi only this much I could gather:— "Pears' shaving sticks will give you little taste and lots of lather.")

Frequently in public places his affliction used to smite Sleary with distressing vigor—always in the Boffkins' sight.
THE POST THAT FITTED.

Ere a week was over Minnie weepingly returned his ring,
Told him his "unhappy weakness" stopped all thought of marrying.

Sleary bore the information with a chastened holy joy,—
Epileptic fits don't matter in Political employ,—
Wired three short words to Carrie—took his ticket, packed his kit—
Bade farewell to Minnie Boffkin in one last, long, lingering fit.

Four weeks later, Carrie Sleary read—and laughed until she wept—
Mrs. Boffkins' warning letter on the "wretched epilept."
Year by year, in pious patience, vengeful Mrs. Boffkin sits
Waiting for the Sleary babies to develop Sleary's fits.
STUDY OF AN ELEVATION, IN
INDIAN INK.

THIS ditty is a string of lies.
But—how the deuce did Gubbins rise?

POTIPHAR GUBBINS, C. E.,
Stands at the top of the tree;
And I muse in my bed on the reasons
that led
To the hoisting of Potiphar G.

Potiphar Gubbins, C. E.,
Is seven years junior to Me;
Each bridge that he makes he either
buckles or breaks,
And his work is as rough as he.

Potiphar Gubbins, C. E.,
Is coarse as a chimpanzee;
And I can't understand why you gave
him your hand,
Lovely Mehitabel Lee.
STUDY OF AN ELEVATION, IN INDIAN INK.

Potiphar Gubbins, C. E.,
Is dear to the Powers that Be;
For They bow and They smile in an affable style
Which is seldom accorded to Me.

Potiphar Gubbins, C. E.,
Is certain as certain can be
Of a highly paid post which is claimed by a host
Of seniors—including Me.

Careless and lazy is he,
Greatly inferior to Me.
What is the spell that you manage so well,
Commonplace Potiphar G.?

Lovely Mehitabel Lee,
Let me inquire of thee,
Should I have riz to what Potiphar is,
Hadst thou been mated to Me?
A CODE OF MORALS.

LEST you should think this story true,
I merely mention I
Evolved it lately. 'Tis a most
Unmitigated misstatement.

NOW Jones had left his new-wed
bride to keep his house in order,
And hied away to the Hurrum Hills above
the Afghan border,
To sit on a rock with a heliograph; but
ere he left he taught
His wife the wording of the Code that
sets the miles at naught.

And love had made him very sage, as
Nature made her fair;
So Cupid and Apollo linked, per heliog-
graph, the pair.
At dawn, across the Hurrum Hills, he
flashed her counsel wise—
At e'en, the dying sunset bore her hus-
band's homilies.
**A CODE OF MORALS.**

He warned her 'gainst seductive youths in scarlet clad and gold,

As much as 'gainst the blandishments paternal of the old;

But kept his gravest warnings for (hereby the ditty hangs)

That snowy-haired Lothario, Lieutenant-General Bangs.

'Twas General Bangs, with Aide and Staff, that tittupped on the way,

When they beheld a heliograph tempestuously at play;

They thought of Border risings, and of stations sacked and burnt—

So stopped to take the message down—and this is what they learnt:—

"Dash dot dot, dot, dot dash, dot dash dot" twice. The General swore.

"Was ever General Officer addressed as 'dear' before?"
A CODE OF MORALS.

‘My Love,’ i’ faith! ‘My Duck,’ Gad-zooks! ‘My darling popsy-wop!’

Spirit of great Lord Wolseley, who is on that mountain top?”

The artless Aide-de-camp was mute; the gilded Staff were still,
As, dumb with pent-up mirth, they booked that message from the hill;
For, clear as summer’s lightning flare, the husband’s warning ran:—
“Don’t dance or ride with General Bangs—a most immoral man.”

(At dawn, across the Hurrum Hills, he flashed her counsel wise—
But, howsoever Love be blind, the world at large hath eyes.)
With damnatory dot and dash he heliographed his wife
Some interesting details of the General’s private life.
A CODE OF MORALS.

The artless Aide-de-camp was mute; the shining Staff were still,
And red and ever redder grew the General's shaven gill.
And this is what he said at last (his feelings matter not):—
"I think we've tapped a private line. Hi! Threes about there! Trot!"

All honor unto Bangs, for ne'er did Jones thereafter know
By word or act official who read off that helio.;
But the tale is on the Frontier, and from Michni to Mooltan
They knew the worthy General as "that most immoral man."
OLD is the song that I sing—
Old as my unpaid bills—
Old as the chicken that kitmutgars bring.
Men at dák-bungalows—old as the Hills.

A

HASUERUS JENKINS of the
"Operatic Own"
Was dowered with a tenor voice of super-
Santley tone.
His views on equitation were, perhaps, a
trifle queer;
He had no seat worth mentioning, but
oh! he had an ear.

He clubbed his wretched company a
dozens times a day,
He used to quit his charger in a parabolic
way,
His method of saluting was the joy of all
beholders,
But Ahasuerus Jenkins had a head upon
his shoulders.
ARMY HEADQUARTERS.

He took two months to Simla when the year was at the spring,
And underneath the deodars eternally did sing.
He warbled like a bulbul, but particularly at Cornelia Agrippina, who was musical and fat.

She controlled a humble husband, who in turn controlled a Dept., Where Cornelia Agrippina's human singing birds were kept From April to October on a plump retaining fee, Supplied, of course, per mensem, by the Indian Treasury.

Cornelia used to sing with him, and Jenkins used to play; He praised unblushingly her notes, for he was false as they:
ARMY HEADQUARTERS.

So when the winds of April turned the budding roses brown,
Cornelia told her husband:—"Tom, you mustn't send him down."

They haled him from his regiment, which didn't much regret him;
They found for him an office stool, and on that stool they set him,
To play with maps and catalogues three idle hours a day,
And draw his plump retaining fee—which means his double pay.

Now, ever after dinner, when the coffee cups are brought,
Ahasuerus waileth o'er the grand piano-forte;
And, thanks to fair Cornelia, his fame hath waxen great,
And Ahasuerus Jenkins is a power in the State.
This is the reason why Rustum Beg,
  Rajah of Kolazai,
Drinketh the "simpkin" and brandy peg,
  Maketh the money to fly,
Vexeth a Government tender and kind,
Also—but this is a detail—blind.

RUSTUM BEG of Kolazai—slightly
  backward native state—
Lusted for a C. S. I.,—so began to sanita-
tate.
Built a Jail and Hospital—nearly built a
  City drain—
Till his faithful subjects all thought their
ruler was insane.
Strange departures made he then—yea,
  Departments stranger still,
Half a dozen Englishmen helped the
  Rajah with a will,
Talked of noble aims and high, hinted of
  a future fine
For the State of Kolazai, on a strictly Western line.

Rajah Rustum held his peace; lowered octroi dues a half; Organized a State Police; purified the Civil Staff; Settled cess and tax afresh in a very liberal way; Cut temptations of the flesh—also cut the Bukhshi's pay;

Roused his Secretariat to a fine Mahratta fury, By a Hookum hinting at supervision of dasturi; Turned the State of Kolazai very nearly upside down; When the end of May was nigh, waited his achievement crown.
Then the Birthday Honors came. Sad to state and sad to see,
Stood against the Rajah's name nothing more than C. I. E.!

Things were lively for a week in the State of Kolazai.
Even now the people speak of that time regretfully.

How he disendowed the Jail—stopped at once the City drain;
Turned to beauty fair and frail—got his senses back again;
Doubled taxes, cesses, all; cleared away each new-built thana;
Turned the two-lakh Hospital into a superb Zenana;
Heaped upon the Bukhshi Sahib wealth and honors manifold;
A LEGEND OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE.

Clad himself in Eastern garb—squeezed his people as of old.
Happy, happy Kolazai! Never more will Rustum Beg Play to catch the Viceroy's eye. He prefers the "simpkin" peg.
THE STORY OF URIAH.

“Now there were two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor.”

JACK BARRETT went to Quetta

Because they told him to.

He left his wife at Simla

On three-fourths his monthly screw:

Jack Barrett died at Quetta

Ere the next month’s pay he drew.

Jack Barrett went to Quetta.

He didn’t understand

The reason of his transfer

From the pleasant mountain-land:

The season was September,

And it killed him out of hand.

Jack Barrett went to Quetta,

And there gave up the ghost,

Attempting two men’s duty

In that very healthy post;

And Mrs. Barrett mourned for him

Five lively months at most.

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THE STORY OF URIAH.

Jack Barrett's bones at Quetta
Enjoy profound repose;
But I shouldn't be astonished
If now his spirit knows
The reason of his transfer
From the Himalayan snows.

And, when the Last Great Bugle Call
Adown the Hurnai throbs,
When the last grim joke is entered
In the big black Book of Jobs,
And Quetta graveyards give again
Their victims to the air,
I shouldn't like to be the man
Who sent Jack Barrett there.
PUBLIC WASTE.

WALPOLE talks of "a man and his price."
List to a ditty queer—
The sale of a Deputy-Acting-Vice-
Resident-Engineer,
Bought like a bullock, hoof and hide,
By the Little Tin Gods on the Mountain Side.

BY the Laws of the Family Circle 'tis
written in letters of brass
That only a Colonel from Chatham can
manage the Railways of State,
Because of the gold on his breeks, and the
subjects wherein he must pass;
Because in all matters that deal not with
Railways his knowledge is great.

Now Exeter Battleby Tring had labored
from boyhood to eld
On the Lines of the East and the West,
and eke of the North and South;
Many Lines had he built and surveyed—
important the posts which he held;
And the Lords of the Iron Horse were
dumb when he opened his mouth.
PUBLIC WASTE.
Black as the raven his garb, and his heresies jettier still—
Hinting that Railways required lifetimes of study and knowledge;
Never clanked sword by his side—Vauban he knew not, nor drill—
Nor was his name on the list of the men who had passed through the "College."
Wherefore the Little Tin Gods harried their little tin souls,
Seeing he came not from Chatham, jingled no spurs at his heels,
Knowing that, nevertheless, was he first on the Government rolls
For the billet of "Railway Instructor to Little Tin Gods on Wheels."
Letters not seldom they wrote him, "having the honor to state,"
It would be better for all men if he were laid on the shelf:
PUBLIC WASTE.

Much would accrue to his bank book, and he consented to wait
Until the Little Tin Gods built him a berth for himself.

“Special, well paid, and exempt from the Law of the Fifty and Five,
Even to Ninety and Nine”—these were the terms of the pact:
Thus did the Little Tin Gods (long may Their Highnesses thrive!)
Silence his mouth with rupees, keeping their Circle intact;

Appointing a Colonel from Chatham who managed the Bhamo State Line,
(The which was one mile and one furlong—a guaranteed twenty-inch gauge).
So Exeter Battleby Tring consented his claims to resign,
And died, on four thousand a month, in the ninetieth year of his age.

27
DELILAH.

We have another Viceroy now, those days are dead and done,
Of Delilah Aberyswith and depraved Ulysses Gunne.

DELILAH ABERYSWITH was a lady—not too young—
With a perfect taste in dresses, and a badly bitted tongue,
With a thirst for information, and a greater thirst for praise,
And a little house in Simla, in the Prehistoric Days.

By reason of her marriage to a gentleman in power,
Delilah was acquainted with the gossip of the hour;
And many little secrets, of a half-official kind,
Were whispered to Delilah, and she bore them all in mind.
DELILAH.
She patronized extensively a man, Ulysses Gunne,
Whose mode of earning money was a low and shameful one.
He wrote for divers papers, which, as everybody knows,
Is worse than serving in a shop or scaring off the crows.
He praised her "queenly beauty" first; and, later on, he hinted
At the "vastness of her intellect" with compliments unstinted.
He went with her a-riding, and his love for her was such
That he lent her all his horses, and—she galled them very much.
One day, They brewed a secret of a fine financial sort;
It related to Appointments, to a Man and a Report.
DEILAH.
'Twas almost worth the keeping (only seven people knew it),
And Gunne rose up to seek the truth and patiently ensue it.

It was a Viceroy's Secret, but—perhaps the wine was red—
Perhaps an aged Councillor had lost his aged head—
Perhaps Delilah's eyes were bright—
Delilah's whispers sweet—
The Aged Member told her what 'twere treason to repeat.

Ulysses went a-riding, and they talked of love and flowers;
Ulysses went a-calling, and he called for several hours;
Ulysses went a-waltzing, and Delilah helped him dance—
Ulysses let the waltzes go, and waited for his chance.
The summer sun was setting, and the summer air was still,
The couple went a-walking in the shade of Summer Hill,
The wasteful sunset faded out in turkis-green and gold,
Ulysses pleaded softly and . . . that bad Delilah told!
Next morn a startled Empire learnt the all-important news;
Next week the Aged Councillor was shaking in his shoes;
Next month I met Delilah, and she did not show the least
Hesitation in affirming that Ulysses was a "beast."
We have another Viceroy now, those days are dead and done,
Of Delilah Aberyswith and most mean Ulysses Gunne!
WHAT HAPPENED.

HURREE CHUNDER MOOKER-JEE, pride of Bow Bazar, Owner of a native press, "Barrishter-at-Lar," Waited on the Government with a claim to wear Sabres by the bucketful, rifles by the pair.

Then the Indian Government winked a wicked wink, Said to Chunder Mookerjee: "Stick to pen and ink, They are safer implements; but, if you insist, We will let you carry arms wheresoe'er you list."

Hurree Chunder Mookerjee sought the gunsmith and
WHAT HAPPENED.
Bought the tuber of Lancaster, Ballard, Dean and Bland,
Bought a shiny bowie-knife, bought a town-made sword,
Jingled like a carriage horse when he went abroad.

But the Indian Government, always keen to please,
Also gave permission to horrid men like these—
Yar Mahommed Yusufzai, down to kill or steal,
Chimbu Singh from Bikaneer, Tantia the Bhil.

Killar Khan the Marri chief, Jowar Singh the Sikh,
Nubbee Baksh Punjabi Jat, Abdul Huq Rafiq—
He was a Wahabi; last, little Boh Hla-oo
WHAT HAPPENED.

Took advantage of the act—took a Snider too.

They were unenlightened men, Ballard knew them not, They procured their swords and guns chiefly on the spot, And the lore of centuries, plus a hundred fights, Made them slow to disregard one another's rights.

With a unanimity dear to patriot hearts All those hairy gentlemen out of foreign parts Said: "The good old days are back—let us go to war!"

Swaggered down the Grand Trunk Road, into Bow Bazar.

Nubbee Baksh Punjabi Jat found a hide-bound flail,
WHAT HAPPENED.

Chimbu Singh from Bikaneer oiled his Tonk jezail,
Yar Mahommed Yusufzai spat and grinned with glee
As he ground the butcher-knife of the Khyberee.

Jowar Singh the Sikh procured sabre, quoit, and mace,
Abdul Huq, Wahabi, took the dagger from its place,
While amid the jungle-grass danced and grinned and jabbered
Little Boh Hla-oo and cleared the dah-blade from the scabbard.

What became of Mookerjee? Soothly, who can say?
Yar Mahommed only grins in a nasty way,
Jowar Singh is reticent, Chimbu Singh is mute,
WHAT HAPPENED.

But the belts of them all simply bulge with loot.

What became of Ballard's guns? Afghans black and grubby
Sell them for their silver weight to the men of Pubbi;
And the shiny bowie-knife and the town-made sword are
Hanging in a Marri camp just across the Border.

What became of Mookerjee? Ask Mahomed Yar
Prodding Siva's sacred bull down the Bow Bazar.
Speak to placid Nubbee Baksh—question land and sea—
Ask the Indian Congress men—only don't ask me!
"They are fools who kiss and tell,"
Wisely has the poet sung.
Man may hold all sorts of posts
If he'll only hold his tongue.

JenNY and Me were engaged, you see,
On the eve of the Fancy Ball;
So a kiss or two was nothing to you
Or any one else at all.

Jenny would go in a domino—
Pretty and pink but warm;
While I attended, clad in a splendid
Austrian uniform.

Now we had arranged, through notes exchanged
Early that afternoon,
At Number Four to waltz no more,
But to sit in the dusk and spoon.

(I wish you to see that Jenny and Me
Had barely exchanged our troth;
PINK DOMINOES.
So a kiss or two was strictly due
By, from, and between us both.)

When Three was over, an eager lover,
I fled to the gloom outside;
And a Domino came out also
Whom I took for my future bride.

That is to say, in a casual way,
I slipped my arm around her;
With a kiss or two (which is nothing to you),
And ready to kiss I found her.

She turned her head and the name she said
Was certainly not my own;
But ere I could speak, with a smothered shriek
She fled and left me alone.

Then Jenny came, and I saw with shame
She'd doffed her domino;

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PINK DOMINOES.

And I had embraced an alien waist—
    But I did not tell her so.

Next morn I knew that there were two
Dominoes pink, and one
Had cloaked the spouse of Sir Julian Vouse,
    Our big political gun.

Sir J. was old, and her hair was gold,
    And her eye was a blue cerulean;
And the name she said when she turned her head
    Was not in the least like "Julian."

Now wasn't it nice, when want of pice
Forbade us twain to marry,
That old Sir J., in the kindest way,
    Made me his Secretarry?
SHUN—shun the Bowl! That fatal, facile drink
Has ruined many geese who dipped their quills in't:
Bribe, murder, marry, but steer clear of Ink
Save when you write receipts for paid-up bills in't.
There may be silver in the "blue-black"—all
I know of is the iron and the gall.

BOANERGES BLITZEN, servant of the Queen,
Is a dismal failure—is a Might-have-been.
In a luckless moment he discovered men
Rise to high position through a ready pen.

Boanerges Blitzen argued, therefore: "I
With the selfsame weapon can attain as high."
Only he did not possess, when he made the trial,
Wicked wit of C-lv-n, irony of L—l.

(Men who spar with Government, need to back their blows,
THE MAN WHO COULD WRITE.

Something more than ordinary journalistic prose.)

Never young Civilian's prospects were so bright,
Till an Indian paper found that he could write:
Never young Civilian's prospects were so dark,
When the wretched Blitzen wrote to make his mark.

Certainly he scored it, bold and black and firm,
In that Indian paper—made his seniors squirm,
Quoted office scandals, wrote the tactless truth—
Was there ever known a more misguided youth?

When the rag he wrote for, praised his plucky game,
Boanerges Blitzen felt that this was Fame:
When the men he wrote of, shook their heads and swore,
Boanerges Blitzen only wrote the more.

Posed as Young Ithuriel, resolute and grim,
Till he found promotion didn’t come to him;
Till he found that reprimands weekly were his lot,
And his many Districts curiously hot.

Till he found his furlough strangely hard to win,
Boanerges Blitzen didn’t care a pin:
Then it seemed to dawn on him something wasn’t right—
Boanerges Blitzen put it down to "spite."
THE MAN WHO COULD WRITE.

Languished in a District desolate and dry;
Watched the Local Government yearly pass him by;
Wondered where the hitch was; called it most unfair.

That was seven years ago—and he still is there.
"Why is my District death-rate low?"
Said Blinks of Hezebad.
"Wells, drains, and sewage-outfalls are
My own peculiar fad.
I learned a lesson once. It ran
Thus," quote that most veracious man:—

It was an August evening, and, in snowy garments clad,
I paid a round of visits in the lines of Hezebad;
When, presently, my Waler saw, and did not like at all,
A Commissariat elephant careering down the Mall.

I couldn't see the driver, and across my mind it rushed
That the Commissariat elephant had suddenly gone musth.
I didn't care to meet him, and I couldn't well get down,
So I let the Waler have it, and we headed for the town.
The buggy was a new one, and, praise
Dykes, it stood the strain,
Till the Waler jumped a bullock just
above the City Drain;
And the next that I remember was a hur-
ricane of squeals,
And the creature making toothpicks of
my five-foot patent wheels.

He seemed to want the owner, so I fled,
distraught with fear,
To the Main Drain sewage-outfall while
he snorted in my ear—
Reached the four-foot drain-head safely,
and, in darkness and despair,
Felt the brute's proboscis fingering my
terror-stiffened hair.

Heard it trumpet on my shoulder—tried
to crawl a little higher—
MUNICIPAL.

Found the Main Drain sewage-outfall blocked, some eight feet up, with mire;
And, for twenty reeking minutes, Sir, my very marrow froze,
While the trunk was feeling blindly for a purchase on my toes!

It missed me by a fraction, but my hair was turning gray
Before they called the drivers up and dragged the brute away.
Then I sought the City Elders, and my words were very plain.
They flushed that four-foot drain-head, and—it never choked again.

You may hold with surface-drainage, and the sun-for-garbage cure,
Till you’ve been a periwinkle shrinking coyly up a sewer.

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MUNICIPAL.

I believe in well-flushed culverts . . .

This is why the death-rate's small;
And, if you don't believe me, get *shik-arrred* yourself. That's all.
THE LAST DEPARTMENT.

Twelve hundred million men are spread
About this Earth, and I and You
Wonder, when You and I are dead,
What will those luckless millions do.

"None whole or clean," we cry,
"or free from stain
Of favor." Wait awhile, till we attain
The Last Department, where nor fraud
nor fools,
Nor grade nor greed, shall trouble us again.

Fear, Favor, or Affection—what are these
To the grim Head who claims our services?
I never knew a wife or interest yet
Delay that pukka step, miscalled "decease;"

When leave, long over-due, none can deny;

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THE LAST DEPARTMENT.

When idleness of all Eternity
Becomes our furlough, and the marigold
Our thriftless, bullion-minting Treasury.

Transferred to the Eternal Settlement
Each in his strait, wood-scantled office
pent,
No longer Brown reverses Smith's appeals,
Or Jones records his Minute of Dissent.

And One, long since a pillar of the Court,
As mud between the beams thereof is wrought;
And One who wrote on phosphates for the crops
Is subject-matter of his own Report.

(These be the glorious ends whereto we pass—
Let Him who Is, go call on Him who Was;
THE LAST DEPARTMENT.

And He shall see the mallie steals the slab
For currie-grinder, and for goats the grass.)

A breath of wind, a Border bullet's flight,
A draught of water, or a horse's fright—
The droning of the fat Sheristadar
Ceases, the punkah stops, and falls the night

For you or Me. Do those who live decline
The step that offers, or their work resign?

Trust me, To-day's Most Indispensables,
Five hundred men can take your place or mine.
TO THE UNKNOWN GODDESS.

WILL you conquer my heart with your beauty; my soul going out from afar?
Shall I fall to your hand as a victim of crafty and cautious shikar?

Have I met you and passed you already, unknowing, unthinking and blind?
Shall I meet you next session at Simla, O sweetest and best of your kind?

Does the P. and O. bear you to me-ward,
or, clad in short frocks in the West,
Are you growing the charms that shall capture and torture the heart in my breast?

Will you stay in the Plains till September—my passion as warm as the day?
Will you bring me to book on the Mountains, or where the thermantidotes play?
TO THE UNKNOWN GODDESS.

When the light of your eyes shall make pallid the mean lesser lights I pursue,

And the charm of your presence shall lure me from love of the gay "thirteen-two;"

When the peg and the pigskin shall please not; when I buy me Calcutta-built clothes;

When I quit the Delight of Wild Asses; forsaking the swearing of oaths;

As a deer to the hand of the hunter when I turn 'mid the gibes of my friends;

When the days of my freedom are numbered, and the life of the bachelor ends.

Ah Goddess! child, spinster, or widow—as of old on Mars Hill when they raised
TO THE UNKNOWN GODDESS.

To the God that they knew not an altar—so I, a young Pagan, have praised

The Goddess I know not nor worship; yet, if half that men tell me be true, You will come in the future, and therefore these verses are written to you.
LA NUIT BLANCHE.

A MUCH-DISCERNING Public hold
The Singer generally sings
Of personal and private things,
And prints and sells his past for gold.

Whatever I may here disclaim,
The very clever folk I sing to
Will most indubitably cling to
Their pet delusion, just the same.

I HAD seen, as dawn was breaking
And I staggered to my rest,
Tari Devi softly shaking
From the Cart Road to the crest.
I had seen the spurs of Jakko
Heave and quiver, swell and sink.
Was it Earthquake or tobacco,
Day of Doom or Night of Drink?

In the full, fresh, fragrant morning
I observed a camel crawl,
Laws of gravitation scorning,
On the ceiling and the wall;
LA NUIT BLANCHE.

Then I watched a fender walking,
And I heard gray leeches sing,
And a red-hot monkey talking
Did not seem the proper thing.

Then a Creature, skinned and crimson,
Ran about the floor and cried,
And they said I had the "jims" on,
And they dosed me with bromide,
And they locked me in my bedroom—
Me and one wee Blood Red Mouse—
Though I said: "To give my head room
You had best unroof the house."

But my words were all unheeded,
Though I told the grave M. D.
That the treatment really needed
Was a dip in open sea
That was lapping just below me,
Smooth as silver, white as snow,
And it took three men to throw me
When I found I could not go.
LA NUIT BLANCHE.
Half the night I watched the Heavens
Fizz like ’8t champagne—
Fly to sixes and to sevens,
Wheel and thunder back again;
And when all was peace and order
Save one planet nailed askew,
Much I wept because my warder
Would not let me set it true.

After frenzied hours of waiting,
When the Earth and Skies were dumb,
Pealed an awful voice dictating
An interminable sum,
Changing to a tangled story—
"What she said you said I said"—
Till the Moon arose in glory,
And I found her . . . in my head;

Then a Face came, blind and weeping,
And It couldn’t wipe Its eyes,
And It muttered I was keeping
Back the moonlight from the skies;
LA NUIT BLANCHE.

So I patted It for pity,
   But It whistled shrill with wrath,
And a huge black Devil City
   Poured its peoples on my path.

So I fled with steps uncertain
   On a thousand-year long race,
But the bellying of the curtain
   Kept me always in one place;
While the tumult rose and maddened
   To the roar of Earth on fire,
Ere it ebbed and sank and saddened
   To a whisper tense as wire.

In intolerable stillness
   Rose one little, little star,
And it chuckled at my illness,
   And it mocked me from afar;
And its brethren came and eyed me,
   Called the Universe to aid;
Till I lay, with naught to hide me,
   'Neath the Scorn of All Things Made.
LA NUIT BLANCHE.

Dun and saffron, robed and splendid,
Broke the solemn, pitying Day,
And I knew my pains were ended,
And I turned and tried to pray;
But my speech was shattered wholly,
And I wept as children weep,
Till the dawn-wind, softly, slowly
Brought to burning eyelids sleep.
MY RIVAL.

I go to concert, party, ball—
What profit is in these?
I sit alone against the wall
And strive to look at ease.
The incense that is mine by right
They burn before Her shrine;
And that's because I'm seventeen
And She is forty-nine.

I cannot check my girlish blush,
My color comes and goes;
I redden to my finger-tips,
And sometimes to my nose.
But She is white where white should be,
And red where red should shine.
The blush that flies at seventeen
Is fixed at forty-nine.

I wish I had Her constant cheek:
I wish that I could sing
All sorts of funny little songs,
Not quite the proper thing.

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MY RIVAL.

I'm very gauche and very shy,
Her jokes aren't in my line;
And, worst of all, I'm seventeen
While She is forty-nine.

The young men come, the young men go,
Each pink and white and neat,
She's older than their mothers, but
They grovel at Her feet.
They walk beside Her 'rickshaw wheels—
None ever walk by mine;
And that's because I'm seventeen
And She is forty-nine.

She rides with half a dozen men,
(She calls them "boys" and "mashers")
I trot along the Mall alone;
My prettiest frocks and sashes
Don't help to fill my programme-card,
And vainly I repine
From ten to two a.m. Ah me!
Would I were forty-nine!
MY RIVAL.

She calls me "darling," "pet," and "dear,"
And "sweet retiring maid."
I'm always at the back, I know,
She puts me in the shade.
She introduces me to men,
"Cast" lovers, I opine,
For sixty takes to seventeen,
Nineteen to forty-nine.

But even She must older grow
And end Her dancing days,
She can't go on forever so
At concerts, balls, and plays.
One ray of priceless hope I see
Before my footsteps shine:
Just think, that She'll be eighty-one
when I am forty-nine.
THE LOVERS' LITANY.

EYES of gray—a sodden quay,
Driving rain and falling tears,
As the steamer wears to sea
In a parting storm of cheers.
   Sing, for Faith and Hope are high—
   None so true as you and I—
   Sing the Lovers' Litany:
   "Love like ours can never die!"

Eyes of black—a throbbing keel,
Milky foam to left and right;
Whispered converse near the wheel
In the brilliant tropic night.
   Cross that rules the Southern Sky!
   Stars that sweep and wheel and fly
Hear the Lovers' Litany:
   "Love like ours can never die!"

Eyes of brown—a dusty plain
Split and parched with heat of June,
THE LOVERS LITANY.

Flying hoof and tightened rein,
Hearts that beat the old, old tune.
Side by side the horses fly,
Frame we now the old reply
Of the Lovers' Litany:
“Love like ours can never die!”

Eyes of blue—the Simla Hills
Silvered with the moonlight hoar;
Pleading of the waltz that thrills,
Dies and echoes round Benmore.

“Mabel,” “Officers,” “Good-by,”
Glamour, wine, and witchery—
On my soul's sincerity,
“Love like ours can never die!”

Maidens, of your charity,
Pity my most luckless state.
Four times Cupid's debtor I—
Bankrupt in quadruplicate.
THE LOVERS' LITANY.

Yet, despite this evil case,
An a maiden showed me grace,
Four-and-forty times would I
Sing the Lovers’ Litany:—
"Love like ours can never die!"
A BALLAD OF BURIAL.

("Saint Praxed's ever was the Church for Peace.")

If down here I chance to die,
Sollemly I beg you take
All that is left of "I"
To the Hills for old sake's sake.
Pack me very thoroughly
In the ice that used to slake
Pegs I drank when I was dry—
This observe for old sake's sake.

To the railway station hie,
There a single ticket take
For Umballa—goods train—I
Shall not mind delay or shake.
I shall rest contentedly
Spite of clamor coolies make;
Thus in state and dignity
Send me up for old sake's sake.

Next the sleepy Babu wake,
Book a Kalka van "for four."
Few, I think, will care to make
Journeys with me any more
A BALLAD OF BURIAL.

As they used to do of yore.
I shall need a "special" break—
Thing I never took before—
Get me one for old sake's sake.

After that—arrangements make.
No hotel will take me in,
And a bullock's back would break
'Neath the teak and leaden skin.
Tonga ropes are frail and thin,
Or, did I a back seat take,
In a tonga I might spin—
Do your best for old sake's sake.

After that—your work is done.
Recollect a Padre must
Mourn the dear departed one—
Throw the ashes and the dust.
Don't go down at once. I trust
You will find excuse to "snake
Three days' casual on the bust,"
Get your fun for old sake's sake.
A BALLAD OF BURIAL.

I could never stand the Plains.
Think of blazing June and May,
Think of those September rains
Yearly till the Judgment Day!
I should never rest in peace,
I should sweat and lie awake.
Rail me, then, on my decease,
To the Hills for old sake's sake.
THE toad beneath the harrow knows
Exactly where each tooth-point goes.
The butterfly upon the road
Preaches contentment to that toad.

PAGETT, M.P., was a liar, and a fluent liar therewith,—
He spoke of the heat of India as the "Asian Solar Myth;"
Came on a four months' visit, to "study the East," in November,
And I got him to sign an agreement vowing to stay till September.

March came in with the köil. Pagett was cool and gay,
Called me a "bloated Brahmin," talked of my "princely pay."
March went out with the roses. "Where is your heat?" said he.
"Coming," said I to Pagett. "Skittles!" said Pagett, M.P.
April began with the punkah, coolies, and prickly-heat,—
Pagett was dear to mosquitoes, sandflies found him a treat.
He grew speckled and lumpy—hammered,
I grieve to say,
Aryan brothers who fanned him, in an illiberal way.
May set in with a dust-storm,—Pagett went down with the sun.
All the delights of the season tickled him one by one.
*Imprimis*—ten days' "liver"—due to his drinking beer;
Later, a dose of fever—slight, but he called it severe.
Dysent'ry touched him in June, after the *Chota Bursat*—
Lowered his portly person—made him yearn to depart.
FAGETT, M.F.

He didn't call me "Brahmin," or "bloated," or "overpaid,"
But seemed to think it a wonder that any one stayed.

July was a trifle unhealthy,—Pagett was ill with fear,
Called it the "Cholera Morbus," hinted that life was dear.
He babbled of "Eastern exile," and mentioned his home with tears;
But I hadn't seen my children for close upon seven years.

We reached a hundred and twenty once in the Court at noon,
(I've mentioned Pagett was portly) Pagett went off in a swoon.
That was an end to the business; Pagett, the perjured, fled
With a practical, working knowledge of "Solar Myths" in his head.

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And I laughed as I drove from the station,  
but the mirth died out on my lips  
As I thought of the fools like Pagett who  
write of their "Eastern trips,"  
And the sneers of the travelled idiots who  
duly misgovern the land,  
And I prayed to the Lord to deliver another one into my hand.
[Allowing for the difference 'twixt prose and rhymed exaggeration, this ought to reproduce the sense of what Sir A—told the nation some time ago, when the Government struck from our incomes two per cent.]

NOW the New Year, reviving last Year's Debt,
The Thoughtful Fisher casteth wide his Net;
So I with begging Dish and ready Tongue
Assail all Men for all that I can get.

Imports indeed are gone with all their Dues—
Lo! Salt a Lever that I dare not use,
Nor may I ask the Tillers in Bengal—
Surely my Kith and Kin will not refuse!

Pay—and I promise, by the Dust of Spring,
Retrenchment. If my promises can bring
Comfort, Ye have Them now a thousand-fold—
By Allah! I will promise Anything!

Indeed, indeed, Retrenchment oft before
I swore—but did I mean it when I swore?
And then, and then, We wandered to
the Hills,
And so the Little Less became Much
More.

Whether at Boileaugunge or Babylon,
I know not how the wretched Thing is
done,

The Items of Receipt grow surely small;
The Items of Expense mount one by one.

I cannot help it. What have I to do
With One and Five, or Four, or Three, or
Two?
THE RUPAIYAT OF OMAR KAL

VIN.

Let Scribes spit Blood and Sulphur as they please,
Or Statemen call me foolish—Heed not you.

Behold, I promise—Anything You will.
Behold, I greet you with an empty Till—
Ah! Fellow-Sinners, of your Charity
Seek not the Reason of the Dearth, but fill.

For if I sinned and fell, where lies the Gain
Of Knowledge? Would it ease you of your Pain

To know the tangled Threads of Revenue,
I ravel deeper in a hopeless Skein?

"Who hath not Prudence"—what was it I said,
Of Her who paints Her Eyes and tires Her Head,
And gibes and mocks the People in the Street,
And fawns upon them for Her thriftless Bread?

Accursed is She of Eve's daughters—She Hath cast off Prudence, and Her End shall be
Destruction . . . Brethren, of your Bounty grant
Some portion of your daily Bread to Me.
THE MARE'S NEST.

JANE Austen Beecher Stowe de Rouse
Was good beyond all earthly need;
But, on the other hand, her spouse
Was very, very bad indeed.
He smoked cigars, called churches slow,
And raced—but this she did not know.

For Belial Machiavelli kept
The little fact a secret, and,
Though o'er his minor sins she wept,
Jane Austen did not understand
That Lilly—thirteen-two and bay—
Absorbed one-half her husband's pay.

She was so good, she made him worse;
(Some women are like this, I think;)
He taught her parrot how to curse,
Her Assam monkey how to drink.
He vexed her righteous soul until
She went up, and he went down hill.
THE MARE'S NEST.

Then came the crisis, strange to say,
Which turned a good wife to a better.
A telegraphic peon, one day,
Brought her—now, had it been a letter
For Belial Machiavelli, I
Know Jane would just have let it lie.

But 'twas a telegram instead,
Marked "urgent," and her duty plain
To open it. Jane Austen read:—
"Your Lilly's got a cough again.
Can't understand why she is kept
At your expense." Jane Austen wept.

It was a misdirected wire.
Her husband was at Shaitanpore.
She spread her anger, hot as fire,
Through six thin foreign sheets or
more,
Sent off that letter, wrote another
To her solicitor—and mother.
THE MARE'S NEST.

Then Belial Machiavelli saw
Her error and, I trust, his own,
Wired to the minion of the Law,
And travelled wifeward—not alone.
For Lilly—thirteen-two and bay—
Came in a horse-box all the way.

There was a scene—a weep or two—
With many kisses. Austen Jane
Rode Lilly all the season through,
And never opened wires again.
She races now with Belial. This
Is very sad, but so it is.
IN SPRINGTIME.

My garden blazes brightly with the rose-bush and the peach,
And the köil sings above it, in the siris by the well,
From the creeper-covered trellis comes the squirrel's chattering speech,
And the blue-jay screams and flutters where the cheery sat-bhai dwell.
But the rose has lost its fragrance, and the köil's note is strange;
I am sick of endless sunshine, sick of blossom-burdened bough.
Give me back the leafless woodlands where the winds of Springtime range—
Give me back one day in England, for it's Spring in England now!

Through the pines the gusts are booming,
o' er the brown fields blowing chill,
IN SPRINGTIME.

From the furrow of the ploughshare
streams the fragrance of the loam,
And the hawk nests on the cliff-side and
the jackdaw in the hill,
And my heart is back in England mid
the sights and sounds of Home.
But the garland of the sacrifice this wealth
of rose and peach is;
Ah! köil, little köil, singing on the siris
bough,
In my ears the knell of exile your cease-
less bell-like speech is—
Can you tell me aught of England or of
Spring in England now?
THE OVERLAND MAIL.

(Foot-Service to the Hills.)

In the name of the Empress of India,
make way,
O Lords of the Jungle, wherever you roam.
The woods are astir at the close of the day—
We exiles are waiting for letters from Home.
Let the robber retreat—let the tiger turn tail—
In the Name of the Empress, the Overland Mail!

With a jingle of bells as the dusk gathers in,
He turns to the foot-path that heads up the hill—
The bags on his back and a cloth round his chin,
THE OVERLAND MAIL.

And, tucked in his waist-belt, the Post Office bill:—

"Despatched on this date, as received by the rail,

Per runner, two bags of the Overland Mail."

Is the torrent in spate? He must ford it or swim.

Has the rain wrecked the road? He must climb by the cliff.

Does the tempest cry "Halt"? What are tempests to him?

The Service admits not a "but" or an "if."

While the breath's in his mouth, he must bear without fail,

In the Name of the Empress, the Overland Mail.

From aloe to rose-oak, from rose-oak to fir,
THE OVERLAND MAIL.

From level to upland, from upland to crest,
From rice-field to rock-ridge, from rock-ridge to spur,
Fly the soft sandalled feet, strains the brawny brown chest.
From rail to ravine—to the peak from the vale—
Up, up through the night goes the Overland Mail.

There's a speck on the hillside, a dot on the road—
A jingle of bells on the foot-path below—
There's a scuffle above in the monkey's abode—
The world is awake, and the clouds are aglow.
THE OVERLAND MAIL.

For the great Sun himself must attend to the hail:—

"In the name of the Empress, the Overland Mail!"
POSSIBILITIES.

AY, lay him 'neath the Simla pine—
A fortnight fully to be missed,
Behold, we lose our fourth at whist,
A chair is vacant where we dine.

His place forgets him; other men
Have bought his ponies, guns and traps.
His fortune is the Great Perhaps
And that cool rest-house down the glen,

Whence he shall hear, as spirits may,
Our mundane revel on the height,
Shall watch each flashing 'rickshaw-light
Sweep on to dinner, dance and play.

Benmore shall woo him to the ball
With lighted rooms and braying band,
And he shall hear and understand
"Dream Faces" better than us all.
POSSIBILITIES.

For, think you, as the vapors flee
Across Sanjaolie after rain,
    His soul may climb the hill again
To each old field of victory.

Unseen, who women held so dear,
    The strong man's yearning to his kind
    Shall shake at most the window-blind,
Or dull awhile the card-room's cheer.

In his own place of power unknown,
    His Light o' Love another's flame,
    His dearest pony galloped lame,
And he an alien and alone.

Yet may he meet with many a friend—
    Shrewd shadows, lingering long unseen
Among us when "God save the Queen"
    Shows even "extras" have an end.

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POSSIBILITIES.
And, when we leave the heated room,
And, when at four the lights expire,
The crew shall gather round the fire
And mock our laughter in the gloom.

Talk as we talked, and they ere death—
First wanly, dance in ghostly wise,
With ghosts of tunes for melodies,
And vanish at the morning's breath.
"You must choose between me and your cigar."

Open the old cigar-box, get me a Cuba stout,
For things are running crossways, and Maggie and I are out.

We quarrelled about Havanas—we fought o'er a good cheroot,
And I know she is exacting, and she says I am a brute.

Open the old cigar-box—let me consider a space;
In the soft blue veil of the vapor, musing on Maggie's face.

Maggie is pretty to look at—Maggie's a loving lass,
But the prettiest cheeks must wrinkle, the truest of loves must pass.
THE BETROTHED.

There's peace in a Laranaga, there's calm in a Henry Clay,
But the best cigar in an hour is finished and thrown away—

Thrown away for another as perfect and ripe and brown—
But I could not throw away Maggie for fear o' the talk o' the town!

Maggie, my wife at fifty—gray and dour and old—
With never another Maggie to purchase for love or gold!

And the light of Days that have Been, the dark of the Days that Are,
And Love's torch stinking and stale, like the butt of a dead cigar—

The butt of a dead cigar you are bound to keep in your pocket—
THE BETROTHED.

With never a new one to light tho' it's charred and black to the socket.

Open the old cigar-box—let me consider a while—
Here is a mild Manilla—there is a wifely smile.

Which is the better portion—bondage bought with a ring,
Or a harem of dusky beauties fifty tied in a string?

Counsellors cunning and silent—comforters true and trie.
And never a one of the fifty to sneer at a rival bride.

Thought in the early morning, solace in time of woes,
Peace in the hush of the twilight, balm ere my eyelids close.
THE BETROTHED.

This will the fifty give me, asking nought in return,
With only a Suttee's passion—to do their duty and burn.

This will the fifty give me. When they are spent and dead,
Five times other fifties shall be my servants instead.

The furrows of far-off Java, the isles of
the Spanish Main,
When they hear my harem is empty, will send me my brides again.

I will take no heed to their raiment, nor food for their mouth withal,
So long as the gulls are nesting, so long as the showers fall.

I will scent 'em with best vanilla, with tea will I temper their hides,
And the Moor and the Mormon shall envy who read of the tale of my brides.

For Maggie has written a letter to give me my choice between The wee little whimpering Love and the great god Nick o' Teen.

And I have been servant of Love for barely a twelvemonth clear, But I have been Priest of Partagas a matter of seven year;

And the gloom of my bachelor days is flecked with the cheery light Of stumps that I burned to Friendship and Pleasure and Work and Fight.

And I turn my eyes to the future that Maggie and I must prove, But the only light on the marshes is the Will-o'-the-Wisp of Love.
THE BETROTHED.

Will it see me safe through my journey, or leave me bogged in the mire?
Since a puff of tobacco can cloud it, shall I follow the fitful fire?

Open the old cigar-box—let me consider anew—
Old friends, and who is Maggie that I should abandon you?

A million surplus Maggies are willing to bear the yoke;
And a woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a Smoke.

Light me another Cuba; I hold to my first-sworn vows,
If Maggie will have no rival, I’ll have no Maggie for spouse!

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