



**ROBERT
NICHOLS**

***ARDOURS AND
ENDURANCES;
ALSO, A FAUN'S
HOLIDAY &
POEMS AND
PHANTASIES***

Robert Nichols

Ardours and Endurances; Also, A Faun's Holiday & Poems and Phantasies

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INTRODUCTION

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1. *Of the nature of the poet:*

"We are (often) so impressed by the power of poetry that we think of it as something made by a wonderful and unusual person: we do not realize the fact that all the wonder and marvel is in our own brains, that the poet is ourselves. He speaks our language better than we do merely because he is more skilful with it than we are; his skill is part of our skill, his power of our power; generations of English-speaking men and women have made us sensible to these things, and our sensibility comes from the same source that the poet's power of stimulating it comes from. Given a little more sensitiveness to external stimuli, a little more power of associating ideas, a co-ordination of the functions of expression somewhat more apt, a sense of rhythm somewhat keener than the average—given these things we should be poets, too, even as he is.... *He is one of us.*"

2. *Of what English poetry consists:*

"English poetry is not a rhythm of sound, but a rhythm of ideas, and the flow of attention-stresses (*i.e.*, varying qualities of words and cadence) which determines its beauty is inseparably connected with the thought; for each of them is a judgment of identity, or a judgment of relation, or an expression of relation, and not a thing of mere empty sound.... He who would think of it as a pleasing arrangement of vocal sounds has missed all chance of ever understanding its meaning. There awaits him only the

barren generalities of a foreign prosody, tedious, pedantic, fruitless. And he will flounder ceaselessly amid the scattered timbers of its iamboes, spondees, dactyls, tribrachs, never reaching the firm ground of truth."

"AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF
ENGLISH POETRY,"[\[1\]](#) by MARK LIDDELL.

[\[1\]](#) *Published by Grant Richards (1902). This remarkable book, establishing English poetry as a thing governed from within by its own necessities, and not by rules of æsthetics imposed on it from without, formulates principles which, unperceived, have governed English poetry from the earliest times, which find their greatest exemplar in Shakespeare, and which, though beginning to be realized by the less pedantic of the moderns, are in its pages for the first time lucidly expounded and—such is their adequacy—can, in the end, only be regarded as indubitably proven.—R. M. B. N., 1917.*

BOOK I

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ARDOURS AND ENDURANCES

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY TRUSTY AND GALLANT FRIENDS: HAROLD STUART GOUGH (*King's Royal Rifle Corps*) AND RICHARD PINSENT (*the Worcester Regiment*)

"For what is life if measured by the space,
Not by the act?"

BEN JONSON.

THE SUMMONS

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I.—TO—

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Asleep within the deadeast hour of night
And, turning with the earth, I was aware
How suddenly the eastern curve was bright,

As when the sun arises from his lair.
But not the sun arose: it was thy hair
Shaken up heaven in tossing leagues of light.

Since then I know that neither night nor day
May I escape thee, O my heavenly hell!
Awake, in dreams, thou springest to waylay
And should I dare to die, I know full well
Whose voice would mock me in the mourning bell,
Whose face would greet me in hell's fiery way.

II.—THE PAST

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How to escape the bondage of the past?
I fly thee, yet my spirit finds no calms
Save when she deems her rocked within those arms
To which, from which she ne'er was caught or cast.

O sadness of a heart so spent in vain,
That drank its age's fuel in an hour:
For whom the whole world burning had not power
To quick with life the smouldered wick again!

III.—THE RECKONING

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The whole world burns, and with it burns my flesh.
Arise, thou spirit spent by sterile tears;
Thine eyes were ardent once, thy looks were fresh,

Thy brow shone bright amid thy shining peers.
Fame calls thee not, thou who hast vainly strayed
So far for her; nor Passion, who in the past
Gave thee her ghost to wed and to be paid;
Nor Love, whose anguish only learned to last.

Honour it is that calls: canst thou forget
Once thou wert strong? Listen; the solemn call
Sounds but this once again. Put by regret
For summons missed, or thou hast missed them all.
Body is ready, Fortune pleased; O let
Not the poor Past cost the proud Future's fall.

FAREWELL TO PLACE OF COMFORT

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FAREWELL TO PLACE OF COMFORT

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For the last time, maybe, upon the knoll
I stand. The eve is golden, languid, sad....
Day like a tragic actor plays his rôle
To the last whispered word, and falls gold-clad.
I, too, take leave of all I ever had.

They shall not say I went with heavy heart:
Heavy I am, but soon I shall be free;
I love them all, but O I now depart

A little sadly, strangely, fearfully,
As one who goes to try a Mystery.

The bell is sounding down in Dedham Vale:
Be still, O bell! too often standing here
When all the air was tremulous, fine, and pale,
Thy golden note so calm, so still, so clear,
Out of my stony heart has struck a tear.

And now tears are not mine. I have release
From all the former and the later pain;
Like the mid-sea I rock in boundless peace,
Soothed by the charity of the deep sea rain....
Calm rain! Calm sea! Calm found, long sought in vain.

O bronzen pines, evening of gold and blue,
Steep mellow slope, brimmed twilit pools below,
Hushed trees, still vale dissolving in the dew,
Farewell! Farewell! There is no more to do.
We have been happy. Happy now I go.

THE APPROACH

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I.—IN THE GRASS: HALT BY ROADSIDE

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In my tired, helpless body
I feel my sunk heart ache;

But suddenly, loudly
The far, the great guns shake.

Is it sudden terror
Burdens my heart? My hand
Flies to my head. I listen....
And do not understand.

Is death so near, then?
From this blaze of light
Do I plunge suddenly
Into Vortex? Night?

Guns again! the quiet
Shakes at the vengeful voice....
It is terrible pleasure.
I do not fear: I rejoice.

II.—THE DAY'S MARCH

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The battery grides and jingles,
Mile succeeds to mile;
Shaking the noonday sunshine,
The guns lunge out awhile,
And then are still awhile.

We amble along the highway;
The reeking, powdery dust
Ascends and cakes our faces
With a striped, sweaty crust.

Under the still sky's violet
The heat thróbs on the air....
The white road's dusty radiance
Assumes a dark glare.

With a head hot and heavy,
And eyes that cannot rest,
And a black heart burning
In a stifled breast,

I sit in the saddle,
I feel the road unroll,
And keep my senses straightened
Toward to-morrow's goal.

There, over unknown meadows
Which we must reach at last,
Day and night thunders
A black and chilly blast.

Heads forget heaviness,
Hearts forget spleen,
For by that mighty winnowing
Being is blown clean.

Light in the eyes again,
Strength in the hand,
A spirit dares, dies, forgives,
And can understand!

And, best! Love comes back again
After grief and shame,

And along the wind of death
Throws a clean flame.

The battery grides and jingles,
Mile succeeds to mile;
Suddenly battering the silence
The guns burst out awhile.

I lift my head and smile.

III.—NEARER

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Nearer and ever nearer....
My body, tired but tense,
Hovers 'twixt vague pleasure
And tremulous confidence.

Arms to have and to use them
And a soul to be made
Worthy if not worthy;
If afraid, unafraid.

To endure for a little,
To endure and have done:
Men I love about me,
Over me the sun!

And should at last suddenly
Fly the speeding death,
The four great quarters of heaven
Receive this little breath.

BATTLE

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I.—NOON

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It is midday: the deep trench glares....
A buzz and blaze of flies....
The hot wind puffs the giddy airs....
The great sun rakes the skies.

No sound in all the stagnant trench
Where forty standing men
Endure the sweat and grit and stench,
Like cattle in a pen.

Sometimes a sniper's bullet whirs
Or twangs the whining wire;
Sometimes a soldier sighs and stirs
As in hell's frying fire.

From out a high cool cloud descends
An aeroplane's far moan....
The sun strikes down, the thin cloud rends....
The black speck travels on.

And sweating, dizzied, isolate
In the hot trench beneath,
We bide the next shrewd move of fate
Be it of life or death.

II.—NIGHT BOMBARDMENT

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Softly in the silence the evening rain descends....
The soft wind lifts the rain-mist, flurries it, and spends
Its grief in mournful sighs, drifting from field to field,
Soaking the draggled sprays which the low hedges
wield
As they labour in the wet and the load of the wind.
The last light is dimming; night comes on behind.

I hear no sound but the wind and the rain,
And trample of horses, loud and lost again
Where the waggons in the mist rumble dimly on
Bringing more shell.
The last gleam is gone.
It is not day or night; only the mists unroll
And blind with their sorrow the sight of my soul.

I hear the wind weeping in the hollow overhead:
She goes searching for the forgotten dead
Hidden in the hedges or trodden into muck
Under the trenches, or maybe limply stuck
Somewhere in the branches of a high lonely tree—
He was a sniper once. They never found his body.