

Poems published in “Freedom”

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth

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Sonnet

(Dedicated to the thousands of Revolutionaries languishing in Soviet prisons.)

Still serving thee, O Freedom, thee alone,
Great formless spirit brooding earth and air,
Flashing in sunlight, in wild waves that dare
The age-old rocks, flung back with cry and moan.
Serving, though we be pillowed on a stone,
Our warders dream-eyed Hope and grim Despair,
We know thou art no mocking vision fair—
These wounds being thine, our darkest griefs thy own.
Laughing at times to muse how those who prate
Of Liberty can think to make a cell
Strong to extinguish thy immortal flame
Unflickering in the windy gusts of hate,
Still steadfast in the ramparts of Power's hell—
Though on its wall it writes thy murdered fame.

Russia

(Dedicated to the Anarchist comrades waiting to be released from Soviet prisons.)

Most might Epic of one swift, bold leap
Which spanned two epochs terrible and vast!
The World-Besieged come staggering, safe at last—
Triumphant, dazed, immortal—burst from sleep
Whose age-long vision terrors grim defied.
A country which bred giants thunderous-named,
And women who could not with whips be tamed,
Unmastered deeply tombed 'neath Neva's tide.
Russia! Our great Beethovian history chord
Which through the centuries pulsed slow and strong,
Still beating out the music of her dreams—
To set them in one hour in one wild word,
One flaming breath which hurled like chaff her wrong.
Russia! That thou shouldst strive to stem Thought's streams!

Power.

They built the house of Power on Force and Fear,
And gave authority the key to hold,
Stamping it with the hall-mark of dead gold,
And rusting it in human Blood and Tear.
"Behold!" cried Power, "The glory of my state!

Here I conserve forever all that Is,
Here, manacled and gagged, my priests shall kiss
My sceptre. Prisons, dungeons, be my Gate!
Whilst outside millions claw and scratch for Bread,
And burdened lives go swiftly to the grave.
Hold fast my key, my mistress, and all's well!"
But Liberty came by with rose-crowned head,
And piped upon her pipe to every slave
These words of Laughter, "Fear is all their spell."

Sonnet.

Who was the great Ozymandias, "king of kings"?
The desert answers with its fiery breath.
Democracy of Time, and Space, and Death
Its fatal arrow at Great Nothing flings.
Law, Force, and Power—dark Superstition's blight,
And all the majesty of sword and chain
Left but his futile image to remain
Half-buried where the sand-storm whirls in flight.
Feebler and feebler grow the decadent line
Which followed on that mightiest Nothingness,
Slave of that Power wherein his weakness lay,
Whom only Human Ignorance held "divine."
With every reasoned thought their shades grow less,
To vanish in the light of ampler day.

Sonnet.

Out of the large, calm, starry night it ran,
Reaching the wine-drugged monarch's inward ear;
Close round his neck, snake-wise, a white arm dear,
Blue-veined, gold-circled—his warm courtesan!
"I, too, have known the couch of last year's gold;
I, too, the splendours of a prison-house,
Wherein all chained and padded men carouse,
And sell their freedoms for the shadows cold.
Now it is Spring and beggars may go blessed
When there are crowns of May on every bough,
And to each mothering bird the cock makes cry."
"Hist!" cried the king, upstarting and distressed,
"What minstrel of my court is singing now?"
The beggar at his gate went laughing by!

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