

(April 3, 1914.)

Poetry.

BY MR. ALFRED NOYES.*

AT the special meeting of the Club, held on the 3rd April, Mr. Alfred Noyes provided what proved, in the words of the President, "a unique and altogether delightful contribution to our program, by reading four of his poems, viz., "The Admiral's Ghost," "Forty Singing Seamen," "The Highwayman," and "The Barrel Organ." Mr. Noyes simply prefaced the several poems with a few words of introduction, and made two or three passing comments during the readings. The audience, of some four hundred men, was loth to have the poet cease reading. Mr. Noyes said:

"I have been asked to inflict some of my own poems upon you. I know you will understand the circumstances. I should like, however, before beginning to read, to sweep away at one blow what the reporters have said about the financial aspect of poetry. (Laughter.) I would ask you to pay attention if you can to the poems, rather than to the person who reads them.

"The first poem I shall read is based on an incident in Devonshire, told to me by a native of Devonshire.

THE ADMIRAL'S GHOST.

I tell you a tale to-night
Which a seaman told to me,
With eyes that gleamed in the lanthorn light
And a voice as low as the sea.

You could almost hear the stars
Twinkling up in the sky,
And the old wind woke and moaned in the spars,
And the same old waves went by.

Singing the same old song
As ages and ages ago,

* Mr. Alfred Noyes has been described as the "most considerable" English poet since Tennyson. He was educated at Oxford, and was recently appointed lecturer of English Literature at Princeton University.

While he froze my blood in that deep-sea night
With the things that he seemed to know.

A bare foot pattered on deck;
Ropes creaked; then—all grew still,
And he pointed his finger straight in my face
And growled, as a sea-dog will.

"Do 'ee know who Nelson was?
That pore little shrivelled form
With the patch on his eye and the pinned-up sleeve
And a soul like a North Sea storm?"

"Ask of the Devonshire men!
They know, and they'll tell you true;
He wasn't the pore little chawed-up chap
That Hardy thought he knew.

"He wasn't the man you think!
His patch was a dern disguise!
For he knew that they'd find him out, d'you see,
If they looked him in both his eyes.

"He was twice as big as he seemed;
But his clothes were cunningly made.
He'd both of his hairy arms all right!
The sleeve was a trick of the trade.

"You've heard of sperrits, no doubt;
Well, there's more in the matter than that!
But he wasn't the patch and he wasn't the sleeve,
And he wasn't the laced cocked hat.

"Nelson was just—a Ghost!
You may laugh! But the Devonshire men
They knew that he'd come when England called,
And they know that he'll come again.

"I'll tell you the way it was
(For none of the landsmen know),
And to tell you it right, you must go a-starn
Two hundred years or so.

* * * * *

"The waves were lapping and slapping
The same as they are to-day;

And Drake lay dying aboard his ship
In Nombre Dios Bay.

"The scent of the foreign flowers
Came floating all around;
'But I'd give my soul for the smell o' the pitch,'
Says he, 'in Plymouth Sound.'

"'What shall I do,' he says,
'When the guns begin to roar,
An' England wants me, and me not there
To shatter 'er foes once more?'

"(You've heard what he said, may be
But I'll mark you the p'int's again;
For I want you to box your compass right
And get my story plain.)

"'You must take my drum,' he says,
'To the old sea-wall at home;
And if ever you strike that drum,' he says,
'Why, strike me blind, I'll come!

"'If England needs me, dead
Or living, I'll rise that day!
I'll rise from the darkness under the sea
Ten thousand miles away.'

"That's what he said; and he died;
An' his pirates, listenin' roun',
With their crimson doublets and jewelled swords
That flashed as the sun went down.

"They sewed him up in his shroud
With a round-shot top and toe,
To sink him under the salt, sharp sea
Where all good seamen go.

"They lowered him down in the deep,
And there in the sunset light
They boomed a broadside over his grave,
As meanin' to say 'Good-night.'

"They sailed away in the dark
To the dear little isle they knew;

And they hung his drum by the old sea-wall
The same as he told them to.

* * * * *

"Two hundred years went by,
And the guns began to roar,
And England was fighting hard for her life,
As ever she fought of yore.

"'It's only my dead that count,'
She said, as she says to-day:
'It isn't the ships and it isn't the guns
'Ull sweep Trafalgar's Bay.'

"D'you guess who Nelson was?
You may laugh, but it's true as true!
There was more in that pore little chawed-up chap
Than ever his best friend knew.'

"The foe was creepin' close,
In the dark, to our white-cliffed isle;
They were ready to leap at England's throat,
When—O, you may smile, you may smile;

"But—ask of the Devonshire men;
For they heard in the dead of night
The roll of a drum, and they saw *him* pass
On a ship all shining white.

"He stretched out his dead cold face
And he sailed in the grand old way!
The fishes had taken an eye and an arm,
But he swept Trafalgar's Bay. (Applause.)

"Nelson—was Francis Drake!
O, what matters the uniform,
Or the patch on your eye or your pinned-up sleeve,
If your soul's like a North Sea storm?" (Applause.)

"The next poem that I am going to read—I am not sure that there is any definite philosophy in, until one reads the last stanza; though, some time after it was written, I suspected there might be an allegory hidden in it somewhere. (Laughter.) It is based on a legend of Pope Prester John, in which the following words occur—

"In our lands be Beeres and Lyons of dyvers colors as ye redd, grene, black, and white—"Possibly Post-Impressionist animals," remarked Mr. Noyes, amid laughter). And in our land be also unicornes and these Unicornes slee many Lyons. . . . Also "this seemed rather a rash statement." interjected the poet)there dare no man make a lye in our land, for if he dyde he sholde incontynent be sleyn." (Laughter.)

"Incidentally, I may say in regard to my method of reading these poems, that I try to read them exactly as it occurred to me to write them, without any attempt at elocution. (Laughter.) It seems to me one of the worst enemies of Grail poetry during the last decade, has been a certain kind of elocutionist who makes it his business to destroy exactly what the poet has spent weeks, and sometimes, months, in the endeavor to perfect, namely, the metre and rhythm of the poem." (Applause.)

FORTY SINGING SEAMEN.

Across the seas of Wonderland to Magadore we plodded,
Forty singing seamen in an old black barque,
And we landed in the twilight where a Polyphemus nodded
With his battered moon-eye winking red and yellow through
the dark!

For his eye was growing mellow,
Rich and ripe and red and yellow,
As was time, since old Ulysses made him bellow in the dark!
Cho.—Since Ulysses bunged his eye up with a pine-torch in
the dark!

Were they mountains in the gloaming or the giant's ugly
shoulders
Just beneath the rolling eyeball, with its bleared and vinous
glow,

Red and yellow o'er the purple of the pines among the boulders
And the shaggy horror brooding on the sullen slopes below,
Were they pines among the boulders
Or the hair upon his shoulders?

We were only simple seamen, so of course we didn't know.
Cho.—We were simple singing seamen, so of course we
couldn't know.

But we crossed a plain of poppies, and we came upon a fountain
Not of water, but of jewels, like a spray of leaping fire;

And behind it, in an emerald glade, beneath a golden mountain
There stood a crystal palace, for a sailor to admire;
For a troop of ghosts came round us,
Which with leaves of bay they crowned us,
Then with grog they well-nigh drowned us, to the depth of
our desire!

Cho.—And 'twas very friendly of them, as a sailor can admire!

There was music all about us, we were growing quite forgetful

We were only singing seamen from the dirt of Londontown,

Though the nectar that we swallowed seemed to vanish half regretful

As if we wasn't good enough to take such vittles down,

When we saw a sudden figure,

Tall and black as any nigger,

Lik the devil—only bigger—drawing near us with a frown!

Cho.—Like the devil—but much bigger—and he wore a golden crown!

And "what's all this?" he growls at us! With dignity we
chaunted,

"Forty singing seamen, sir, as won't be put upon!"

"What? Englishmen?" he cries, "Well, if ye don't mind being
haunted,

Faith, you're welcome to my palace; I'm the famous Prester
John!

Will ye walk into my palace?

I don't bear 'ee any malice!

One and all ye shall be welcome in the halls of Prester
John!"

Cho.—So we walked into the palace and the halls of Prester
John!

Now the door was one great diamond and the hall a hollow
ruby—

Big as Beachy Head, my lads, nay bigger by a half!

And I sees the mate wi' mouth agape, a-staring like a booby,
And the skipper close behind him, with his tongue out like
a calf!

Now the way to take it rightly

Was to walk along politely

Just as if you didn't notice—so I couldn't help but laugh!
Cho.—For they both forgot their manners and the crew was
bound to laugh!

But he took us through his palace and, my lads, as I'm a sinner,

We walked into an opal like a sunset-coloured cloud—
"My dining-room," he says, and, quick as light we saw a dinner

Spread before us by the fingers of a hidden fairy crowd;
And the skipper, swaying gently

After dinner, murmurs faintly,

"T looks to-wards you, Prester John, you've done us very proud!"

Cho.—And we drank his health with honours, for he *done* us very proud!

Then he walks us to his garden where we sees a feathered demon

Very splendid and important on a sort of spicy tree!

"That's the Phoenix," whispers Prester, "which all eddicated seamen

Knows the only one existent, and *he's* waiting for to flee!
When his hundred years expire

Then he'll set hisself a-fire

And another from his ashes rise most beautiful to see!"

Cho.—With wings of rose and emerald most beautiful to see!

Then he says, "In yonder forest there's a little silver river,
And whosoever drinks of it, his youth shall never die!

The centuries go by, but Prester John endures for ever
With his music in the mountains and his magic on the sky!

While *your* hearts are growing colder,

While your world is growing older,
There's a magic in the distance, where the sea-line meets the sky."

Cho.—It shall call to singing seamen till the fount o' song is dry!

So we thought we'd up and seek it, but that forest fair defied us,—

First a crimson leopard laughs at us most horrible to see,
Then a sea-green lion came and sniffed and licked his chops and eyed us,

While a red and yellow unicorn was dancing round a tree!
We was trying to look thinner,

Which was hard, because our dinner

Must ha' made us very tempting to a cat o' high degree!

Cho.—Must ha' made us very tempting to the whole menar-jeree!

So we scuttled from that forest and across the poppy meadows
Where the awful shaggy horror brooded o'er us in the dark!
And we pushes out from shore again a-jumping at our shadows

And pulls away most joyful to the old black barque!

And home again we plodded

While the Polyphemus nodded

With his battered moon-eye winking red and yellow through the dark.

Cho.—Oh, the moon above the mountains, red and yellow through the dark!

"This," remarked Mr. Noyes, "is where I think the philosophy comes in"—

Across the seas of Wonderland to London-town we blundered,

Forty singing seamen as was puzzled for to know

If the visions that we saw was caused by—here again we pondered—

A tippie in a vision forty thousand years ago.

Could the grog we *dreamt* we swallowed

Make us *dream* of all that followed? (Laughter.)

We were only simple seamen, so of course we didn't know!

Cho.—We were simple singing seamen, so of course we could not know! (Laughter.)

"Agnostics to the very end, you observe," said the poet. (Laughter, and applause.)

"I may say it is with a great sense of relief that I read that poem, with an expert on Greek mythology on my right (Principal Maurice Hutton, of University College). Because when I read it recently before a Women's Club in the United States a woman came to me afterwards, and asked me, 'Oh, Mr. Noyes, will you please tell me where I can read some more about that delightful Irish woman Polly Famus?'" (Laughter.)

"The next is 'The Highwayman.'"

THE HIGHWAYMAN.

PART ONE.

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,
The moon was a ghastly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
And the highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,
 A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin;
 They fitted with never a wrinkle: his boots were up to the thigh!
 And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
 His pistol-butts a-twinkle,
 His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard,
 And he tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred;
 He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
 But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
 Bess, the landlord's daughter,
 Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked
 Where Tim the ostler listened; his face was white and peaked;
 His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,
 But he loved the landlord's daughter,
 The landlord's red-lipped daughter,
 Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,
 But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;
 Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,
 Then look for me by moonlight,
 Watch for me by moonlight,
 I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

He rose upright in the stirrups; he scarce could reach her hand.
 But she loosened her hair i' the casement! His face burnt like a brand
 As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;
 And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,
 (Oh, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)
 Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the West.

PART TWO.

He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon;
 And out o' the tawny sunset, before the rise o' the moon,
 When the road was a gipsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,
 A red-coat troop came marching—
 Marching—marching—
 King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord, they drank his ale instead,
 But they gagged his daughter and bound her to the foot of her narrow bed;
 Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!
 There was death at every window;
 And hell at one dark window;
 For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that *he* would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest;
 They had bound a musket beside her, with barrel beneath her breast!
 "Now keep good watch!" and they kissed her.
 She heard the dead man say—
Look for me by moonlight;
Watch for me by moonlight;
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!
 She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!
 They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years,
 Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,
 Cold, on the stroke of midnight,
 The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it; she strove no more for the rest!
 Up, she stood up to attention, with the barrel beneath her breast,
 She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;
 For the road lay bare in the moonlight;

Blank and bare in the moonlight;
And the blood of her veins in the moonlight throbbled to her
love's refrain.

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs
ringing clear;
Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf that they
did not hear?

Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,
The highwayman came riding,
Riding, riding!
The red-coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight
and still!

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing
night!

Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like a light!
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep
breath,

Then her finger moved in the moonlight,
Her musket shattered the moonlight,
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with
her death.

He turned; he spurred to the Westward; he did not know who
stood
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own
red blood!

Not till the dawn he heard it, and slowly blanched to hear
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
The landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the
darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,
With the white road smoking behind him, and his rapier
brandished high!
Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden noon; wine-red was
his velvet coat;

When they shot him down on the highway,
Down like a dog on the highway,
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of
lace at his throat.

* * * * *

*And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the
trees,
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
A highwayman comes riding—
Riding—riding—
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.*

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard;
And he taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked
and barred;
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting
there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Bess, the landlord's daughter,
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

"The next, and probably, I think, the last, as it may take
nearly ten minutes to read, is entitled 'The Barrel Organ.'
The reference is to a celebrated operetta, an elaboration of
songs really sung by children in some parts of London on
May Day. Interspersed through the poem are attempts to re-
produce the cries of London streets, not the actual cries, but
the effects of them,—an attempt, you might say, at a *London
symphony.*" (Laughter.)

THE BARREL-ORGAN.

There's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the city as the sun sinks low;
And the music's not immortal; but the world has made it
sweet
And fulfilled it with the sunset glow;
And it pulses through the pleasures of the city and the pain
That surround the singing organ like a large eternal light;
And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And now it's marching onward through the realms of old
romance,
And trolling out a fond familiar tune,
And now it's roaring cannon down to fight the King of
France,
And now it's prattling softly to the moon,

And all around the organ there's a sea without a shore
 Of human joys and wonders and regrets;
 To remember and to recompense the music evermore
 For what the cold machinery forgets. . . .

Yes; as the music changes,
 Like a prismatic glass,
 It takes the light and ranges
 Through all the moods that pass;
 Dissects the common carnival
 Of passions and regrets,
 And gives the world a glimpse of all
 The colours it forgets.

And there *La Traviata* sighs
 Another sadder song;
 And there *Il Trovatore* cries
 A tale of deeper wrong;
 And bolder knights to battle go
 With sword and shield and lance,
 Than ever here on earth below
 Have whirled into—a *dance!*

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
 Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
 And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's
 wonderland;
 Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and soft perfume and
 sweet perfume,
 The cherry-trees are seas of bloom (and oh, so near to
 London!)
 And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's
 a blaze of sky
 The cuckoo, though he's very shy, will sing a song for
 London.

The nightingale is rather rare and yet they say you'll hear
 him there
 At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)
 The linnet and the throstle, too, and after dark the long hal-
 loo
 And golden-eyed *tu-whit, tu-whoo* of owls that ogle Lon-
 don.

For Noah hardly knew a bird of any kind that isn't heard
 At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)
 And when the rose begins to pout and all the chestnut spires
 are out
 You'll hear the rest without a doubt, all chorusing for
 London:—

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
 Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
 And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's
 wonderland;
 Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from
 London!).*

And then the troubadour begins to thrill the golden street,
 In the City as the sun sinks low;
 And in all the gaudy busses there are scores of weary feet
 Marking time, sweet time, with a dull mechanic beat,
 And a thousand hearts are plunging to a love they'll never
 meet,
 Through the meadows of the sunset, through the poppies and
 the wheat,
 In the land where the dead dreams go.

Verdi, Verdi, when you wrote *Il Trovatore* did you dream
 Of the City when the sun sinks low,
 Of the organ and the monkey and the many-coloured stream
 On the Piccadilly pavement, of the myriad eyes that seem
 To be litten for a moment with a wild Italian gleam
 As *A che la morte* parodies the world's eternal theme
 And pulses with the sunset-glow?

There's a thief, perhaps, that listens with a face of frozen
 stone
 In the City as the sun sinks low;
 There's a portly man of business with a balance of his own,
 There's a clerk and there's a butcher of a soft reposeful tone,
 And they're all of them returning to the heavens they have
 known:
 They are crammed and jammed in busses and—they're each
 of them alone
 In the land where the dead dreams go.

There's a very modish woman and her smile is very bland
 In the City as the sun sinks low;

And her hansom jingles onward, but her little jewelled hand
Is clenched a little tighter and she cannot understand
What she wants or why she wanders to that undiscovered
land,
For the parties there are not at all the sort of thing she planned,
In the land where the dead dreams go.

There's an Oxford man that listens and his heart is crying out
In the City as the sun sinks low;
For the barge, the eight, the Isis, and the coach's whoop and shout;
For the minute-gun, the counting and the long dishevelled rout,
For the howl along the tow-path and a fate that's still in doubt,
For a roughened oar to handle and a race to think about
In the land where the dead dreams go.

There's a labourer that listens to the voices of the dead
In the City as the sun sinks low;
And his hand begins to tremble and his face is rather red
As he sees a loafer watching him and—there he turns his head
And stares into the sunset where his April love is fled,
For he hears her softly singing and his lonely soul is led
Through the land where the dead dreams go.

There's an old and haggard demi-rep, it's ringing in her ears,
In the City as the sun sinks low;
With the wild and empty sorrow of the love that blights and sears,
Oh, and if she hurries onward, then be sure, be sure she hears,
Hears and bears the bitter burden of the unforgotten years,
And her laugh's a little harsher and her eyes are brimmed
with tears
For the land where the dead dreams go.

There's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks low;
Though the music's only Verdi there's a world to make it sweet
Just as yonder yellow sunset where the earth and heaven meet
Mellows all the sooty City! Hark, a hundred thousand feet

Are marching on to glory through the poppies and the wheat
In the land where the dead dreams go.

So it's Jeremiah, Jeremiah,
What have you to say
When you meet the garland girls
Tripping on their way?

All around my gala hat
I wear a wreath of roses
(A long and lonely year it is
I've waited for the May!)
If any one should ask you,
The reason why I wear it is—
My own love, my true love is coming home to-day.

And it's buy a bunch of violets for the lady
(*It's lilac-time in London; it's lilac-time in London!*)
Buy a bunch of violets for the lady;
While the sky burns blue above:

On the other side the street you'll find it shady
(*It's lilac-time in London; it's lilac-time in London!*)
But buy a bunch of violets for the lady,
And tell her she's your own true love.

There's a barrel organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks glittering and slow;
And the music's not immortal; but the world has made it
sweet
And enriched it with the harmonies that make a song complete
In the deeper heavens of music where the night and morning
meet,
As it dies into the sunset glow;

And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the pain
That surround the singing organ like a large eternal light,
And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And there, as the music changes,
The song runs round again;
Once more it turns and ranges
Through all its joy and pain:

Dissects the common carnival
Of passions and regrets;
And the wheeling world remembers all
The wheeling song forgets.

Once more *La Traviata* sighs
Another sadder song:
Once more *Il Trovatore* cries
A tale of deeper wrong;
Once more the knights to battle go
With sword and shield and lance
Till once, once more, the shattered foe
Has whirled into—a dance!

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
And you shall wander hand in hand with Love in summer's
wonderland,
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from Lon-
don!) (Applause.)*
