

The Poems of
Bernard O'Dowd .

DAWNWARD?

“WITHOUT EDIFICES OR RULES OR ANY ARGUMENT
THE INSTITUTION OF THE DEAR LOVE OF COMRADES.”

To
YOUNG DEMOCRACY

AUSTRALIA

*Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?*

*The cenotaphs of species dead elsewhere
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,
Or trail uncanny harp-strings from your trees,
Mix omens with the auguries that dare
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.*

DAWNWARD?

THAT reddish veil which o'er the face
Of night-hag East is drawn
Flames new disaster for the race?
Or can it be the Dawn?

Those mutterings horizonward
What destinies are there?
Do organed Hopes triumphant chord,
Or thunders roar "Despair"?

What gifts are those the clouds release
As far ahead they scud?
Are they the genial rains of Peace,
Or deluges of blood?

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Our motley masses struggle slow
'Mid wilderness, through sands;
Our flags with fetish watchwords glow
Above the gloomy bands.

Three watchwords! Will they glorify,
Or weave us fates more stark?
Lead downward from this lowering sky,
Or downward to the dark?

Will "Freedom!" over Athens' scrolls
Our greater glory carve?
Or prove mere choice to sell our souls
To Mammon or—to starve?

Content with Freedom's forms, shall we
Real tyranny caress,
Through sybaritic apathy
Or mad forgetfulness?

"Equality!" Will each a king
Become, a seer, a sage?
Or will it ruthless all men fling
In cosmic helotage?

Will crucibles, wherein, tho' great
With primal vice, we pour
Equalities, precipitate
Napoleons—as before?

"Fraternity!" Will black and white
As brothers mingle, or,
Surcharged with lust of carnage, plight
The bloody troths of war?

While prudent churches neutral watch
The conflict of the twain,
Will Wealth his brother Want despatch,
An everlasting Cain?

* * *

While heedless on our masses move,
Their sad-eyed mystics see
On rushing Cloudland's stage above
Dark hints of what may be.

Palladium and Shibboleth
Pose on each misty dome:
Red Crisis' tableaux blotch with death
Smug Order's monochrome.

Race-ogres here on vulture-cloud,
And there race-fathers hie;
And Then and Now and Will-Be crowd
The pantomimic sky.

Prophetic 'mid the whirlwind flow
These cryptic figures steal:
Are they to be for further woe,
Or may they be for weal?

Will turbaned Shem, revived, through sweet
White women filtered long,
With sober scowl triumphant meet
The drunken Western throng?

Will Ham, acquit of servile strain,
Of art and craft compact,
A loathing Europe's pallor stain—
Democracy in fact?

Will Japhet still his brothers lead
Unto the shambled tryst,
With tentacles of trading greed
And drivel of his Christ?

Will Gog, awaked, his Huns outpour
At empire-breaking time,
To sluice away our fame and lore,
Our features and—our crime?

* * *

Scrolls, written "Debt", and "Wanton War",
And "Sterile Love", flare high;
Are these our *Mene! Mene!* or
Illusions of the sky?

"Majority!" Divorced from wise,
Sad Conscience, will he prowl
Through tender, human heresies
With Torquemadan scowl?

And "Comfort!" Will her siren song
To narcotizing shades
Seduce our veterans, while Wrong
Our weaker frontiers raids?

Will "Sport" educe a virile pith?
Our pulses teach to throb?
Or weary earth re-saddle with
A Nika-riot mob?

Will centre-seeking "Culture" hold
Tangential Passion's bolt?
Yield orbits of an Age of Gold,
Or comets of Revolt?

* * *

Yet, foodless oft and homeless we
Not hopeless, loveless, plod—
Whither? To Failure's midnight sea
Or downward? Ay, to God?

THE CAMP-FIRES OF THE LOST

Who will may see, on plains around,
By scanty rivers crossed,
Where only weedy growths abound,
The camp-fires of the Lost.

To feed the flame, the twigs and cones
From dying Hopes we tear;
And wolfish Angers gnaw the bones
Of dead Ideals there.

To drown your glory in the dark,
O children of the Light!
The frail, the crushed, the fell, the stark
Deploy their hosts to-night.

Anon a stern-lipped watcher flings
Remorseless to the flame
The effigies of sacred things
Or bric-a-brac of Fame.

Grim scouts o'erleap your city's walls,
Cast potions in your wells,
With leprous patches taint your halls,
And mine your citadels.

Your timid treasurers await
The onset of our need:
The myriad tramp his lonely hate
Is whetting on his greed.

Your serfs grimacing flout your cries
Of "honour", "law", and "trust",
Your lily women recognize
The prowling lips of lust.

Your veil of Art, by free winds tossed,
Is rending as you look—
Your Art—which claimed to love the Lost,
And jeered them, and forsook.

Your brutal Science sends a corps
Of derelicts to train
With formulas of lethal lore
Our nascent rebel brain:

And scavengers of learning there,
And outcast lords of rhyme,
Compose us anthems of despair
And polyglots of crime:

And godless phalanxes assist
Our priesthood celebrate
A diabolic eucharist
With chalices of hate.

Your system's ripened fruits appear
In psychopath and sot:
The tiger women wait you here
You soiled and left to rot.