

Classic Poetry Series

Leon Gellert
- poems -

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Leon Gellert(1892 - 1977)

Leon Maxwell Gellert was born in 1892 and educated in Adelaide, Grandparents were Hungarian immigrants. Leon was regularly beaten by his Father James, so at the age of 17 he began a course of self-defence lessons, which were to prove useful when, one day his father attacked him with a heavy piece of timber, James Gellert was thrown on his back. Leon, after leaving school worked for a time as a pupil-teacher until he enlisted as a private in 10th AIF. On October 22 1914, Gellert and the 10th Battalion set off for Egypt. Corporal Gellert became drunk for the first time in his life, on Melbourne Bitter whilst sailing on the Indian Ocean.

Gellert resumed writing poetry after arriving in Cairo; his output grew once the 10th set off for the Dardanelles. For seven weeks, his battalion was kept in reserve on their troop ship before being ordered to land at Ari Burnu beach at dawn on April 25.

Gellert survived nine weeks on Gallipoli before coming down with dysentery. He had to be evacuated to Malta, where he contracted typhoid and was sent to England to convalesce. This is where most of his poems were written, including *The Last to Leave*. After collapsing into a coma that doctors suspected was epileptic, Gellert was discharged as medically unfit on June 30, 1916. Amazingly, he re-enlisted in November, only to be discharged four days later when his medical record was uncovered.

After the death of his wife Kathleen in 1969 in Sydney he moved back to Adelaide where he died on 22nd August 1977.

A Book Of Wordsworth

Thy talks on God, and glories of His fields
Are woven into my unworthy past.
The fragments of thy thoughts my memory yields
Grow dim at times, and yet they seem to last.
This little book of verses, covered red,
A gift to me, a gift of quiet rest,
Is filled with soothing words that thou hast said;
Some chosen thoughts, the wisest and the best;-
Sweet songs and gleanings from that inward eye;
The noise of bees the wind in daffodils;
The splendour of the sea and of the sky;
And Nature standing on the silent hills.
They words, thy thoughts, for me can never cease
To have that flavour of eternal peace.

Leon Gellert

A Night Attack

Be still. The bleeding night is in suspense
Of watchful agony and coloured thought,
And every beating vein and trembling sense,
Long-tired with time, is pitched and overwrought.
And for the eye,
The darkness holds strange forms.
Soft movements in the leaves, and wicked glows
That wait and peer. The whole black landscape
swarms
With shapes of white and grey that no one knows;
And for the ear, a sound, a pause, a breath.
The hand has touched the slimy face of death.
The mind is raking at the ragged past.
.....A sound of rifles rattles from the south,
and startled orders move from mouth to mouth.

Leon Gellert

A Song

The night has come,, I feel the desert dew,
I lie in Afric's sands
And breath the night, for night like these are few
In other lands;
But where are you?

May sleep come soon. I see old shadows creep
Along the sleep stream,
The darkness 'mid the talking palms is deep.
I can but dream
Are you asleep?

Leon Gellert

Acceptance

Beside the doors of a keen-lighted hall
I paused, and quite by chance
I noticed Love
Smiling and tall;
And then I heard the whirling dance,
And saw the dismal skies above.

She called to me to know her yet again,
And know her pale sad friend,
Solemn with tears;
Her friend was Pain.
I moved away, but in the end
Returned, fearing the empty years.

And I, who thought to scoff, and had so planned,
I took Love's fevered arm,
And felt Pain's breath.
I took Love's hand,
And kissed its shining palm,
And saw beyond the silent face of Death.

Leon Gellert

Again The Clash Is East

Again the clash is East, the Gates are barred.
The rolling echoes of of Troy arise
With trebled sound: its weary threshold scarred
With scattered dead once more, and wild with cries.

The noise that dinned when siting Hellas reeled
Before the brave defence of Hector's horde,
The blows that burst on Agamemnon's shield,
Or echoed from Achilles' threshing sword
Were weak and small. Before this mighty blast
They seem the tinklings of a timid past.
To-day the Grecian arms are still and deep
Within the tomb: those heroes deep in dust;
The eyes of Attic honour closed with sleep,
And wise Ulysses' arrows red with rust.

Leon Gellert

Anzac Cove

There's a lonely stretch of hillocks:
There's a beach asleep and drear:
There's a battered broken fort beside the sea.
There are sunken trampled graves:
And a little rotting pier:
And winding paths that wind unceasingly.
There's a torn and silent valley:
There's a tiny rivulet
With some blood upon the stones beside its mouth.
There are lines of buried bones:
There's an unpaid waiting debt :
There's a sound of gentle sobbing in the South.

Leon Gellert

Armageddon

The world rolls wet with blood,
and the skinny hand of Death
gropes at the beating heart.
The salt tears well and flood
with strife the choking breath,
and nations sway and part.
The scythe of Time runs red,

red with the bleeding year.
Sound is but a knell,
and Sleep has a scarlet bed.
Dreams are wet with Fear,
and Honour sits in Hell.

Leon Gellert

Before Action

We always had to do our work at night.
I wondered why we had to be so sly.
I wondered why we couldn't have our fight
Under the open sky.

I wondered why I always felt so cold.
I wondered why the orders seemed so slow,
So slow to come, so whisperingly told,
So whisperingly low.

I wondered if my packing-straps were tight,
And wondered why I wondered.....Sound
went wild.....
and order came..... I ran into the night,
wondering why I smiled.

Leon Gellert

Blind!

A red-roofed house is shining to the skies;
A house red-roofed and brilliant in the wind:
A house of colour filled with wandering eyes;
And all the eyes are blind.

A gentle sound of moving fills each room:
A sound of hands, - dumb hands that touch and pry:
A sound of fingers feeling in a tomb
Before they close and die.

A hundred windows face long rows of flowers-
Long rows of flowers, and flowers that sway and dance
Where lidded eyes can gaze for hours and hours;
Blue eyes that shut in France.

Leon Gellert

Bluebeard's First Wife

I lie by the garden wall,
Buried and all alone;
The brown camellias fall
One by one on the stone.

Buried and all alone,
Because I had loved the sky!
One by one on the stone
The blossoms shudder and die.

Because I had loved the sky—
The dark blue face of the sea!
(The blossoms shudder and die)
He murdered me at his knee.

The dark, blue face of the sea.
Nothing so dark as the tomb!
He murdered me at his knee.
I knew the truth of the room!

Nothing so dark as the tomb
For the vile revenge of the vain.
I knew the truth of the room
And the price of his hidden stain.

For the vile revenge of the vain
I suffered the knife at my skin,
And the price of his hidden stain
Was two and eleven a tin!

I suffered the knife at my skin;
I knew the dye that he used
Was two and eleven a tin.
I confess I was somewhat amused.

I knew the dye that he used.
I heard the stitch of my shroud.
I confess I was somewhat amused
At the fury that burst like a cloud.

I heard the stitch of my shroud,
And all of the world disappeared
At the fury that burst like a cloud
From the heaven's blue of his beard.

And all of the world disappeared!
I lie by the garden wall.
From the heaven's blue of his beard
The brown camellias fall.

Leon Gellert

Cold!

Come not to me with loveliness
Across the crying hill;
For once I held thee pitiless
Hast thou no pity still?

Come not to me with hot delight,
And touch this moveless clay,
Lest my poor heart that knows the night
Awake and feel the day.

Come not to me and kiss this head,
And heat me with thy fire;
For I am dead, and thou art dead;
And dead is my desire.

Leon Gellert

Dejection

Point thy battered prow to the dark shore
Thou hoary son of Erebus, and dip thy blades
In the slow-moving marge, for I am of the
shades,
And I would see the mocking earth no more.
Welcome is to me that starless dome
That echoes of the dead, and the black Stygian
flood
That laps upon its strand like drowsy blood.
Oh, bear me slow to my Avernian home!
Oh, bear me with slow-metered melody,

And wield thine oars in tune to some Plutonian lay;
For I would be with shadows and forget the day
To roam the dark aisles with Persephone.
Guide me to the banks of some still stream
To pluck the frail narcissus buds where'er I may;
Or let me muse along some cypress-shaded way,
And ponder on the glories of a dream.
Then would I wander in those murky glades,
Where great neglected Pan doth hide his once-
sought horns,
And sleeps all poppy-decked among his slum-
bering fauns,
or creeps with shut eyes through the sombre
shades
With opiate blooms all fashioned garland-wise,
Would I, with solemn face and meekly bended
head,
Go forth alone to meet the world-forgotten dead
With twilight in my soul, and sleep within my eyes.

Leon Gellert

Dreamlight

Oh, I am lonely by a desert palm,
And dreaming, dreaming on the sands of thought
Oh, come to me from out the voiceless calm,
And teach me what the Nile has left untaught.

Bring to me a draught of Southern wine,
The perfume of the near-forgotten rose.
Then let me drink beside some ancient shrine,
And drinking, let my tired eyelids close.

Come near to me. The fast night-hours are few,
For every hour is fast when moons are clear.
Scatter from my hair the desert dew,
And lilt sweet Arab love-songs in my ear.

Unloose the twilight hair about thy head,
And listen to the waters deep and slow
For we are dreaming with the dreaming dead,
Dreaming where the flowers of Isis blow.

Look not to where those eagles fiercely fight,
Let peace alone be on the ancient bed.
Unbare thy beauty to the Egypt night,
And stay with me till Egypt's dawn in red.

Then leave me when the bird of night has flown,
And touch my lips before the night-moon sinks.
I'll ponder by these pyramids of stone,
And sit within the shadow of the Sphinx.

Leon Gellert

Dreams Of France

Oh, dreams of France! Oh, faded dreams of France!
Ohm France, that I had ever dreamed of thee!
I thought to help thee bear thy brandished lance,
But, lo, I sail the blue Aegean sea!
Sweet thought of thee sill stand before mine eyes
While I lie fettered in this stagnant cage;
Unseen by me the golden Grecian skies,
Forgotten is the Grecian Golden Age.
Drear and dank this stale Ionian bark,
That plods its path alone Aegean ways.
Could I but see old Homer, tall and dark,
And hear the battle-laughter of his lays!
Farewell, oh France! Farewell, thou tortured West!
Bear strong thy shield above thine outraged breast.

Leon Gellert

Ease. 1914

The iron is hidden in forgetfulness.
A smoothness comes to men and lies on lands.
Women of peace arise in lusted dress,
and hold aloft their sleek and perfect hands.
the birds are in the morn, the bees in the noon.
The eve has song and sleep and slow repose.
A lazy Ease treads soft on feathered shoon
that leaves no sign to show the way she goes.
Soft cheeks there are; and Guile with coiling hair
smiles at the earth and croons within her chair.
The slow leaves fall, and rustling Night begins
Her reign of furriness. the slinking feet
Of half-seen things and thoughts bring brushing sins
and warmths of fog that touch a smouldering heat.

Leon Gellert

Fever!

Everything seems lost and gone.
The world seems void; and I alone
To mourn its emptiness, that am too weak to
mourn:
To mope a hermit in a broken cave
Imprisoned and forlorn.
The youthful wave that dashes on the outside
shore,
And splits youth's passions on the moveless stones,
Has failed to stir the blood that fills
The warrior heart. I only see the bleaching bones,
The narrow graves upon the gouged hills,
And mope the more.
How can the 'prisoned bird surmise
The passages on outer air?
Or sing of Freedom to the lonely skies
When Freedom is not there?
What use is it to try high Fancy's flight
Above the upper blue?
The dark soul is darker than the night,
And Fancy's caged too.
To introspect, look inward on the mind,
Is gazing on a thing all bloody and unclean:
'Twere better that the soul were bright, the gazer
blind:
The beauty there, and yet no beauty seen.
The haunting questions of the bruised brain
Tease at the tired heart:
'Do tattered hills still bear unburied slain?
And the far-off tear-drops start?
Is blood still wet upon the trees?
Upon the grass?
Do dead grey eyes dim-glazing in the breeze
Still stare upon the stumblers as they pass?
The long, long dreams that loiter in the stay
Of sleep, and hold the mind clutched fast,
Have left it trembling at the day
With trailing memories of the cruel past.
'How may the weary day be spent?-The weary

week?
Choose thoughts! Choose dreams! What choice?
The long mute inward voice
Forgets to speak!
The ears are deaf; the eyes to beauty blind.
Unheeded are the laughing fields afar;
The glory of the wheeling western wind;
The shivering star.
The fault! Lies that with fate? Or with age?
The singing poet within his Isles of Peace
Is glad! The sage
Upon his mountain height! But running blood
can't cease
For him who fights-till death;
Til smiling lips, besmeared and red with foam,
Move faintly with a feeble breath
In words of home.
'Tis sad! But still 'tis rest!
And what to show?
-A small black wound upon a dauntless breast;
True heart, and conscience as the snow.
And he knows-has fought-has seen,
And now is caged without, yet hears the fight,
He wonders what is done, and thinks of what
has been;
He bears the burden of the dark, and cries for
light.
But he who prone with wounds and slow disease,
Too weak to grapple with the bars-
The bars that bind-encaged by the surrounding
seas
Can only gaze upon his scars.

Leon Gellert

Goodbye

Waft on, thou upward breeze
From the warm south!
And on her wayward mouth
Imprint my far farewells
From these thy seas
And calm her fears
By whispering in her ears
The sweetest tales that youthful summer tells.

Rush on, thou wintry wind,
From the high north!
Thy mightiness put forth,
And hurl the feathered foam
Afar behind.
Then, with the cries
Of birds in windy skies,
Oh bear me blithely to my southern home.

Leon Gellert

Lemnos Harbour

The island sleeps,-but it has no delight
For em, to whom that sleep has been unkind.
My thoughts are long of what seems long ago,
And long, too, are my dreams. I do not know
These trailing glories of the star-strewn night
Or the slow sough of the wind.

I hear the rattle of the moving car;
The children crying in the lighted street,
I walk along the same old asphalt way.
I see the church,-I hear the organ play.
I see the hills I wandered on afar,
And spots of rain at my feet.

I see the dust-strewn hedge,-the latched gate;
The gravelled path with roses either side;
The cedar tree,-my mother's window pane.
I see the place where I sat long and late
By the trellis deep and wide.

The red Virginia crumbles at the wall.
The bed is bare where winter's snow-drops grew.
I feel my dog come licking at my hand.
I pause awhile beside the door, I stand.
And hear the well-known footsteps softly fall
And the voices that I knew.

I slowly creep and peep beneath the blind.
-My father reads his book within his chair.
Some children play their game of dominoes.
My mother sits beside the fire and sews;
Her head is bowed. I know her eyes are kind
By the grey lines in her hair.

I tap the pane to see those tears unshed.
I see all turn, and watch them sadly stirred
By the sound, and peer to see my face without.
They see, and smile, I hear no welcome shout.
They sit and gaze as they that see the dead,

But no one says a word.

The island sleeps. May sleep come soon to me,
And lull these dreams within my shaken mind;
-These dreams that tell me I have seen the last
of those I left so,-loved so in the past.

* * *

I hear the murmur of the moving sea,
And the murmur of the wind.

Leon Gellert

Lemnos Revisited

Lemnos! Lemnos! Thine enfolding arms
Have held too much, they patterned hills are over shorn
Of all their one-time freshness. Loud alarms
And trampling tread have left thee stained and torn,
Oh, gone those bleating lambs! Those grinding mills!
Those smiles of peace that were thy constant joy.
Hast gathered to thyself too much those ills
And pains smoke-fouled from off the plain of Troy.
Which, bruised and bloody in its modernness,
And wet with tears, as those Achilles shed
For Patroclus, has spoiled thy loveliness.
And housed thy bosom with its wear dead.
Lemnos! There are those who still can trace
Soft lines of beauty on thy dusty face.

Leon Gellert

Lemnos Visited

Oh Peace! The Peace I knew. I thought thee dead!
And had not hoped again to see thy smile.
I deemed thee dead, but thou hadst only fled,
And his they face within a Grecian isle.
The sun that rises in the early morn
Now gilds these purple hills with golden light.
The land of Lemnos hath not felt the thorn
Of thoughtless war.. It hath a calm delight
In waving fields, a lazy grinding mill,
In winding shores, a drowsy lapping sea;
A humble church upon a dreaming hill;
A sleeping silence and a home for thee.
But let us not molest the bloodless reign,
Lest fields of flowers change to fields of pain.

Leon Gellert

Lost!

A moon upon a moonlit sea
To me thou art;
And every shining part
Of heaven belong to thee;
And in my deepest dreams
Those little timid beams
Come down to me.

Art as a faintly perfumed flower
In perfumed glades;
And in the sombre shades
At every falling shower
Of rain, or shroud of dew,
Each broken, blistered willow knew
A fragrant power.

And yet thou art a woman too
No less than these;
Thou art by lands and seas
A woman that I knew.
And I would know the more;
But now the lovely shore
Is lost to view.

Leon Gellert

Memories

I see wild waves that break, and breaking-run;
And the wild sea-birds wheeling round the ships;
But at the dawn, the coming of the sun,
I see your red, red lips.

I see the cold moon now with fresh delight;
And the stars arise anew, and yet arise;
But in the night, the blackness of the night
I see your sad, sad eyes.

I hear the engines throbbing as we ride;
And the men's songs. I hear great throats
Rejoice.
But in the silence, when all the songs have died,
I hear your soft, soft voice.

Leon Gellert

Memory

The tangled twilight of your hair
Blew soft against my face,
Ah! We were young and you were fair,
This was the time
And this the place.

The river wound its way along
Beside yon almond tree;
And ever its evening song
It sang to you;
It sang to me.

To-night they told me you were dead,
And watched for me to weep.
'I'll sit beside this stream.' I said
'I'll dream awhile,
and then – I'll sleep.'

Leon Gellert

Mockery

I met my love a-weeping,
Weeping in the night-tide pale;
Her head among the lily bloom,
Weeping by an empty tomb—
An unshut tomb.
I gently stroked her golden hair
That shone so
With the moon-glow
In the sad-sweet air.
Like playful breezes from the south
Came soft smile-dimples to her mouth;
And when again she seemed to weep
I kissed her wild-wide eyes to sleep;
While there beyond the lily bloom
I saw the watching, waiting tomb.

I left my love a-sleeping,
Sleeping in the cypress vale;
Smiling sadly in the gloom;
Sleeping in the fastened tomb—
The tight-shut tomb.
How round the tomb the moving mists
Will twirl so
When the wind blows,
That the ivy twists
And shudders round the cold grey stone:
A serpent on a crumbling throne.
While I, upon a nearby mound
Hear salt tears soaking in the ground;
But there, when'er the lilies bloom,
I hear low laughter in the tomb.

Leon Gellert

Murder

Upon the threshold, red-eyed Murder stands,
Fresh from his slaughter-house of human meat,
Blood on his broken teeth and on his hands,
Blood on his nails and on his purple feet.
With hollow voice he speaks, and sick'ning breath,
'A way there is, that only way is death!....
The dead will rise no more,-the dead are dead!
The spared will creep behind the sparer's back,
And breathe their plots and stab. The dead are dead!
And lie along the safe triumphal track.
The young-eyed babe, will lisp it's little tales.
The loving girl will slay her main in bed
Kissing his savage mouth, the victor fails
At Mercy's seat. The dead are safely dead'.

Leon Gellert

Now 'neath The Cool Stars

Now 'neath the cool stars
I know thee more.
Here where the world wars
By the winding shore.

Here by the whirling shell
I know thee most;
Here where a thousand fell
On a battered coast.

Strong 'mid the battle-smoke
I hold more dear
Those soft words you spoke
To a foolish ear.

Dead, where the hill dips
I lie more wise,
Dreaming of red lips,
And crying eyes.

Leon Gellert

One Who Died: In Memory Of E.W.T.S.

I mind they told me on a noisy hill
I sat and disbelieved, and shook my head:
"Impossible! Impossible! but still
these other men have died, and others bled".
Knees clasped, I sat and thought, unheeding war.
The trees, the winds, the streets came back to me;
The laughter of his eyes, his home afar,
The memory of his hopes, his buoyancy,
His dreams, his jests, his moods of wistfulness,
The quaintness of his speech, his favourite song;
And this, -and this the end so pitiless!
The man we knew! The man we knew so long!
- To die-be dead-not move, and this was he!
I rose and oiled my rifle musingly.

Leon Gellert

Patience

Red! Red! Red!
Is there no black?
Red like the bloody earth, this pack!
Knives! Kings! Queens!- all red!
Where are the black?
Shuffle again!
Will not the other cards come back?
The only cards to clear the brain!
Dear God, 'twill crack!
Shuffle again!
Red! Red! Red!

Black! Black! Black!
Is there no red?
Has all the blood on earth been shed?
Each Queen! Each King! and every Jack!
Where are the red?
Shuffle again!
Has blood within the world all bled?
The millions mourning for the slain?
The million dead?
Shuffle again!
Black! Black! Black!

Leon Gellert

Poppies

Some scarlet poppies lay upon our right.
He watched them through his periscope all day.
He watched them all the day; but in the night
They seemed to pass away.

They came again much redder with the morn'
And still he gazed, and strangely longed to roam
Among their savage splendour in the corn,
And ponder on his home.

But when the charge was done, they found him
there
Deep in the redness, where he'd made his stand,
With withered poppies in his twisted hair,
And poppies in his hand.

Leon Gellert

Rapine

She came from some still mossiness
Of quiet ways; and stood with modest hands;
A warmth of body in a shy distress;
A white shell on the sands.
A slender shell she seemed;
And he, the sea
That rose and gathered, beat and dreamed
And longed so restlessly.
She saw him not this imminent, nor moved
Nor spoke. The hot sea swept;
And smothering her fears
It loosed and loved
And left her as she wept,
Wet with his clasp, and wet with all her tears.

Leon Gellert

Red

Place that bayonet in my hand,
And fill this pouch with lead;
Show me the blood and leave me, and let me
Stand
By my dead.

Cover those staring eyes and go
And stab in the red, red rain.
Show me that blood and leave me. They groan
In the snow.
With the pain.

Cover his head with a scarlet cloak,
And run to your scarlet strife,
Show me that blood and leave me, where white
Snows choke
Out the life.

Turn his face to the sanguine skies,
The skies where the red stars move.
Show me that blood and leave me; a dead man lies
With his love.

Leon Gellert

Rendezvous

Long before the dawn breaks

With a bird's cry,

I'll be hustling on the wind

Out where you lie -

Hurrying to our rendezvous

Under the April sky.

I'll step from out the sea again

To the shoulder of the land,

And pass the dead boy where he lies

Prone on the tideless strand,

Treading lightly lest I move

His fingers in the sand.

Do you remember how you stopped

After the sudden climb,

Sniffing the air as one who comes

On a holy thing sublime?

I'll meet you where the breeze brought

The first sent of thyme.

I'll meet you where we yearned that morn.

Under the April sky,

Waiting on our bellies there

For the battle cry.

I'll meet you where I left you there

Lying all awry.

You said, "We will continue the

Discussion by and by."

.....

If I could but remember what

We spoke of, you and I!

Leon Gellert

Sights

I saw a singer singing to a crowd,-
Singing of laughing life,- and all the while
He sang in tones so shrilly loud,
Not one man had a smile.

I saw a fiddler from a broken plain
Playing his weeping fiddle,- sweet and clear.
He sang of Death and Cries and Pain,-
But no one shed a tear.

I saw a whistling soldier, still and wan,
Firing his rifle from a fearful place,-
But all the time a dying man
Looked long upon his face.

Leon Gellert

The Christmas Beetle

When Christmas comes the Christmas heat'll
bring once more the Christmas Beetle
The first inflammatory breeze'll
set him buzzing like a diesel.
Hear him open up his throttle
as he hums above the wattle!
Hear him zoom, and snarl and rattle
Like a fighter plane in battle!
Watch him dive to sink and settle-
Folding up his wings of metal -
Cutting off the engines sound
as quietly as he comes to ground.
Then watch some sparrows, frail and lowly,
Strike him swiftly, rend him wholly.

Leon Gellert

The Advice Of Treachery

This well-feigned trance, this still and
stupored sleep
is aptly timed, and nobly fits the scheme.
The cloud-encircled Sword with Night may creep
Beside the gates, and catch the world adream,
Snatching as life before the sluggish breath
Awakes to morning and to vultured death,
Till Craft appeared, the blunted Grecian spears
That scratched at Troy, and all the blistered
Hands
That tore at stones and prayed upon the sands
Were weak and vain, and vain the bloody years.
Oh, let the winds take up the heavy tones
Of sleeping. Move within a mist! Shun light!
Then swing the hidden weapon once, and smite,
And gaze with laughter on the slaughtered throne.

Leon Gellert

The Attack At Dawn

'At every cost,' they said, 'it must be done.'
They told us in the early afternoon.
We sit and wait the coming of the sun
We sit in groups, — grey groups that watch the moon.
We stretch our legs and murmur half in sleep
And touch the tips of bayonets and yarn.
Our hands are cold. They strangely grope and creep,
Tugging at ends of straps. We wait the dawn!
Some men come stumbling past in single file.
And scrape the trench's side and scatter sand.
They trip and curse and go. Perhaps we smile.
We wait the dawn! ... The dawn is close at hand!
A gentle rustling runs along the line.
'At every cost,' they said, 'it must be done.'
A hundred eyes are staring for the sign.
It's coming! Look! ... Our God's own laughing sun!

Leon Gellert

The Australian Muse

Uplift thy lyre, and touch the tender strings;
But leave unsung the epics of thy land
Til thou and time have made a song both grand
And mellow with thy long imaginings.
Breathe forth the secret whisperings of thy birth,
And play the soft tunes of thine infancy;
Nor sing the dull oft-told reality
Of worldly ways; but rather let the earth
Grow old; then sing the great songs of its youth.
Then thou, whilst ageing in the pass of time,
Add fame to fame, and rhyme to gloried rhyme
Till fit thy lyre is for song of Truth.
But now, a child-song sweet with laughs and
Tears,
And let the unripe ripen with the years.

Leon Gellert

The Blind Man

Within a corner of this windowed room
He sits, and seldom speaks, and seldom
moves.

Forever left within eternal gloom,
He thinks of those he left, and those he loves.
The clouds were his, the colours of the day,
The purple mists, the deepest shades of blue,
The yellow flames, the stars, the milky way,
And smiles and frowns, and stretching moon-
light too.

He knew the sun upon the eastern sea,
And watched it set behind a western hill.
He saw the depth of waters, - space, - the free
Ascent of birds. All these he knew until
The bursting shell. And now, as life is long,
He sits alone, and whistles some old song.

Leon Gellert

The Brothers

Do you remember how we crept
Across out bedroom to our bed,
Fearing the dark! And how you wept?
And on a sudden lay like lead?
And how I feared that you were dead,
But heard you breathing as you slept?

And now we're buried, buried deep,
And lie in silence head by head.
I neither hear you breathe nor weep.
We lie together in our bed.
I do not fear that you are dead.
I know that you are fast asleep.

Leon Gellert

The Burial: In Memory Of W.L.E.

What task is this that so unnerves me now?
When pity should be dead, and has been dead.
Unloose that sheet from round the pierced brow;
What matter blood is seen, for blood is red,
And red's the colour of the clammy earth.
Be not so solemn, - There's no need to pray;
But, rather smile, - yea, laugh! If pure, thy mirth
Is right. He laughed himself but yesterday.
That pay-book? Take it from him. Ours a debt
No gold can ever pay. That cross of wood
About his neck? That must remain, and yet
He needs it no, because his heart was good.
We'll house him 'neath those broken shrubs; dig deep.
He's tired. God knows, and needs a little sleep.

Leon Gellert

The Bush Lover

He lingers in the lazy grass
And talks of loneliness with trees,
The clouds pass, and the hours pass;
And far afield he hears the bees.

He sees the wistful moon arise;
He sits and stares, and clasps his knees.
The town cries and the crowd cries,
'I'll stay with theses, he says 'and these.'

Leon Gellert

The Change

Last year I heard the songs of birds,
And heard the trumpets of the bees.
I caught the winding river's words,
And clutched at leaves of trees.

I heard the gales upon the height;
And heard each frightened windy rush,
I lay within the sultry night,
Eaves-dropping in the bush.

But now I walk within a town,
And hear the slyness of its feet.
Great cruel things stride up and down
Within a shady street.

I see quick things with ugly nails,
And hear their low half-smothered cries.
I hear men tell strange trembling tales
With big beseeching eyes.

I do not hear the singing bough.
I hear soft murders in a lane,
I do not feel the bush-call, now
I feel my brother's pain.

Leon Gellert

The Christmas Beetle

When Christmas comes the Christmas heat'll
bring once more the Christmas Beetle
The first inflammatory breeze'll
set him buzzing like a diesel.
Hear him open up his throttle
as he hums above the wattle!
Hear him zoom, and snarl and rattle
Like a fighter plane in battle!
Watch him dive to sink and settle-
Folding up his wings of metal -
Cutting off the engines sound
as quietly as he comes to ground.
Then watch some sparrows, frail and lowly,
Strike him swiftly, rend him wholly.

Leon Gellert

The Coming Of War

Strong from the hills it comes, and flowing
rivers;
Swift from the waters of the rising seas;
Swift on the chilling heart that waits and quivers
With a terror of hideousies.
Behind grey mist it comes, and creeping cloud
That licks the fading earth with foetid breath.
From plains it comes, and silent lakes – a shroud
That holds unloosed the damned brigades of
death.
It sweeps and passes. Everything is dead-
Broken with foulness-ravished as it bled!
A blow, a weeping! Then a silence lies.
Faint bells low-tinkling from the bloody sod
Rise from the depths of heart, and touch the skies,
And murmur at the very stairs of God.

Leon Gellert

The Consumptive

The stars, the fields, will know him never-
more;
his friends, his trees, the restless swerving sea.
'Three days to live,' they said – the kind gave four.
They glide about his bed silently.
'Twas not the lead of battle nor the shell
the spitting of Maxim's basiliskine breath –
'Twas through the falseness of the winds he fell;
the snow's mock-warmth – a chill. His humble
death
will ne'er be sung in elegy and rhyme,
his passage bloodless was, unstained and still.
It brought no stir; and smiling all the time
He waved his last farewell behind the Hill.
I saw him die with my half-closed eyes,
And closing them I thought of Paradise.

Leon Gellert

The Cripple

He totters round and dangles those odd shapes
That were his legs. His eyes are never dim.
He brags about his fame between the tapes,
And laughs the loudest when they laugh at him.
Amid the fights of snow he takes a hand;
Accepts his small defeats, and with a smile
He rises from the ground, and makes his stand
With clumsiness, but battles hard the while.
So quick to see the pain in fellow men,
He chides them; yea.-and laughs them into
youth:
and yet, when death was near to one, 'twas then
about his kindly heart we learnt the truth,
since nowadays of cheer there is a dearth,
'Twas smiles or tears, and he chose the mirth.

Leon Gellert

The Cross

'I wear a cross of bronze,' he said,
'and men have told me I was brave.'
He turned his head,
And pointing to a grave,
'they told me that my work of war was done.'
His fierce mouth set.
'and yet, and yet.....'
he trembled where he stood,
'and yet, and yet'.....
I have not won
That broken cross of wood.

Leon Gellert

The Cry Of Mammon

The dazzling earth is rich with easy thrones.
The corn is golden in the golden sun.
The amber day is set with blazing stones,
And yellow kingdoms waiting to be won.
The ruby cries, ' My Lord, my lord return!'
The emerald is greener than the trees
Of Proserpine. The bursting sapphires burn
In searching brilliance on the burnished seas.
The hall is empty of its rightful lord,
That lord that sleeps, and hugs his rusty sword.
Could he but step upon these coral lands,
And hurl his polished spear but once, and hold
The shining realm, - within his jewelled hands
Would lie the jewelled stars, and gold , and gold!

Leon Gellert

The Dead

These there were, who lost their everything.
Gave all! And left the earth a vaster sphere
In memories: a song or two to sing,
Some takes to tell, some thoughts to think,
more near
To humanness by death, and blood of death
Than life itself, which in the passing hence
Enriched the world with an awakened breath,
And fled no longer nameless from the sense.
'Twas not the shed of blood, but fearless mirth
that set a wondrous pattern to the earth.
And these,, - within a corner that is theirs,
Are laid in smiling peace – a rich content.
The pain has been – the glory is. Old cares
Have dropped, and left no drooping wonder –
ment.

Leon Gellert

The Death

I'm hit. It's come at last, I feel a smart
Of needles inMy God I'm hit again!
No pain this time.....no pain..... and yet.....
my heart.....
Where is my heart? 'Tis strange I feel no pain.
The night is still, the night is very still
I feel the April rain upon my hair.
I see the lights upon yonder hill
Agleam and shining in the silent air.
How soft the grasses seem-how soft and cool!
How long the valley looks-how long and deep!
How warm the rain! I feel a little pool
Beside my hand. I feel.....Can this be sleep?
Can this be sleep.... This buzzing in my head?....
Good God! A light! A light! The pool! I'm ***

Leon Gellert

The Diggers

The diggers are digging, and digging deep,
They're digging and singing,
And I'm asleep.
They're digging and singing and swiftly they're swinging
The flying earth as it falls in a heap.
And some of it scatters and falls on my head;
But the diggers dig on. They can only dig.
They can only sing and their eyes are big,
Their eyes are big and heavy as lead.
They dig and they sing and they think I'm dead

The diggers are digging, and filling the hole.
They're sighing and singing.
They pray for my soul.
I hear what they say, and from where I am lying,
I hear a new corporal calling the roll.
But the diggers dig on and fill in my bed,
They diggers dig on, and they sweat and they sweat.
They sigh and they sign, and their wyes are wet.
The brown earth clatters and covers my head;
Then I laugh and I laugh, for they think that I'm dead.

Leon Gellert

The Dreamer

He lay within a neat white-sheeted bed,
And stared at distance with his wide young eyes:-
Eyes that held space, had dreams, and saw the spread
Of the huge seas, and saw the stretch of skies;
Watched streets and roofs,, and clouds, and quiet rains:-
Eyes that knew the way each slow wind flies
Through long green lengths of winding country lanes:-
Eyes that held time, and saw all unafraid
Each passing hour
Fall like a sleeping flowers
Against a narrow blade.

Leon Gellert

The Epileptic

His splendid heart is set within a frame
Of manly massiveness, and giant limbs.
And strong to move, he helps the maimed and the lame,
While his pride of strength the laughter brims
His eyes and spreads. He heaves his might chest
In mirth at every feeble joke and jest.
But sometimes in the height of joy he'll start
Pale-cheeked, as though within his ear he heard
Some shocking whisper calling at this heart,
And knew the call, and trembled at its word.
And so he passes into horridness,
Within the claw of some hot fiend of prey,
And fights with blinded hands and pitiless,
Till back again he lisps his dreary way.

Leon Gellert

The Gecko

The Gecko lying on his stone
Is always very much alone,
Nor is the reason hard to trace
By those who've seen its form and face
It's hard to realise a mite
Can be so venomous a sight,
Or in its little frame compress
Such concentrated ugliness.
Now wonder other creatures fly
Each time a Gecko ambles by.
No wonder that its chosen mate
Recoils from the connubial state.
Yet underneath its skin, we're told,
There beats a heart of purest gold.
Its children do not know neglect;
It treats its mother with respect.
It never, ever beats its wife,
And lives a most unblemished life.
Its aspect is its sole defence
Against the world's malevolence.
So when you see a Gecko stay
Uncharitable thoughts and say:-
'The gruesome are not always gross-
even a reptile bears its cross!'

Leon Gellert

The Grey World

Grey nights in the wind,
And the grey-faced dead.
Grey hairs in my head,
And grey eyes in my mind.

Grey mists in the morn,
And grey waves that rave,
Grey mould on my grave,
And grey eyes forlorn.

Grey clouds in the sky,
And the grey world asleep,
Grey ghosts that sigh,
And grey eyes that weep.

Leon Gellert

The Hawk

Swoop! Swoop!
From dizzy skies thou singest
To the shining earth.
To where unseen
Amid the green
Untimely death thou bringest
To unseeing mirth.

Upon a dark crag peering
Through half-eclipsed eye,
An eye unkind,
Dost meet the wind
With lifted head all-hearing
In the algid sky.

What awful thought is sitting
In thy brain and breast,
That beats thy blood
With throbbing flood,
When linnets come night-flitting
To their night-tide nest?

'Neath wind-torn skies fast speeding
As the clouds above
Dost skim and sail
With wedge-wrought tail
'Mid fledglings sweetly pleading,
to departed love.

Where is that love low-lying
In a God-made thing
Of feathered form?
Is thy blood warm,
Thou bloody thing, swift-flying,
That canst never sing?

Swoop! Swoop!
From dizzy skies thou swingest
To the singing earth.

To where unseen
Amid the green
Untimely death though bringest
To unseeing mirth.

Leon Gellert

The House Delirious

Come in and tread thou quietly
Within the duskiness.
This twilight thou dost see
Is but the moment passing. Make no guess
Upon these ragged tapestries
Horrid with time
And stained with memories.
The undisturbed grime
Of cryptic years
Conceals those happenings,
Unbrushed by recollection and unwashed by tears.
The music moans, It is the past that sings!

These corridors! These corridors and halls!
This change of light and gathered mystery:
These whisperings; this silent dust that palls
The buried gone are mine-a solemn property.

Here with padded feet
Within the night
I move with muffled beat;
Head-bowed in shame at some foul sight;
Forever raking in some dim recess,
Peering at deeds and thoughts;
Grey things and dead;- a dreadfulness:
An ignorance; a bittered passage fraught
With dampness and sin
From some vile soakage, All alone
I pause at tombs where none must enter in,
And see my name deep-carved upon the stone.
Come in! Come in! If thou hast half a will
To stay and learn
This wilderness, bestill
Thine asking tongue and follow me, nor turn
Upon thy track.
My rooms! My rooms!
My darling, hated rooms, so still, so sad!
How in my dreams the tall wall looms
And rises in threat! Mad! Mad!

Bestir thy limbs, and follow noiselessly,
This way! This way!
I hear the murmur of the outside sea,
And the coming of the day.

The yonder arches with their feeble strength
Have been my pride;
And when the length
Of this main hall has died
Within forgetfulness, will yet live long;
And those ambitious stairs in ruined disarray
May still be worthy of a song
At Judgement Day.
These avenues of searching youth
Wind on, and wind again.
They brought no treasure-just a truth,-
A knowing,-and with knowledge, pain.

Come though with me!
Look not on here, and here!
But loiter now on this, my fondest memory,
My sweetest tear.
My ferns! My fountains! And my singing birds!
And this? Aye, this was love.
Oh, what a place! Here rang those ardent words
Of youth to the wild sky above.
No roof impeded
The calling of her name.
No roof was needed
No indiscretion here, no shame.
Often, often in the summer-still
Of night, I creep within the star-domed space,
And stand upon these stone until
She comes,-she always comes,-a smile upon
her face.
A smile-and yet-and yet-
I sometimes wish the soothing dust
Would sprinkle here, and I forget,
And all theses golden railings mould in rust.
But still the playing waters rise and purl
A plaintive song, - singing to stars.
And all because a girl

Has come within the bars
Of an existence, painting all therein
With coloured melodies;
And quieting that sordid din
With witcheries.
These perfumed flowers here may never fade;
This passioned orchid, and that rose's folds;
Yon nodding violet within the shade;-
All bear eternal blossoming that memory holds.
Pass on, though pleasant youth, thou canst not
linger long.
The tune has passed with time, and left an
echoed song.

But now away, and keep apace with me!
Within this sorry vault, in slow decay.,
My earthly store of learning lies all rottingly-
Disused and dusty-dustier every day.
This chest-unloose the lid-contains
The robes of life, the masks of mind,
Veneers and cloaks, asmeared with wanton stains
That Vice has left behind.
Uplift that shirt of mail that saved the soul
And guarded well the tender bud that grew,
And kept unsoiled the under-roll
Of white from crime it never knew.
I wore it constantly awhile;
But in a youthful rashness put it by,
And wore this undervest, and with a smile
Of doubtful bravery, stood naked to the sky.
Uphold the garment, once so white, that failed
To 'fend me from those evil things
That tore these holes with claws long-nailed,
And left it yellow with imaginings.
Gaze on the purple garment of conceit
Adorned with tattered trappings of a cheap
Display!
'Tis meet! 'Tis meet!
The folly still outlives the fool's decay!

These rooms I know not! They are full of sleep,
And haunting shapes of dreams

That flicker silently, and creep
Within the darkness from the beams
Of our perception; time long-lost;
Dreams long-dreamed and never known;
Deeds of unthought cost;
Seeds, long sown;
Rooms of cloud and mistiness
Where lurking shadows wait;
Rooms of sorrowed shiftiness
Breathing opiate.

And so the structure stands, time-built of brain-
wrought stone,
Where I have wandered, and will wander yet
Until each bone
Of this frail body rots, the ruin falls and I
forget.
But still I build each stone on rocking stone.
I have my plans-sometimes they fail. A Greater
Mind
Than mine has other plans, his Will be done
Until the last lone brick is lined
Upon the finished whole,
And through the trembling ether comes the calling
Of the soul.

But go! 'Tis time! Within the tired mind
I feel the dawn.-and feel the morning wind.

Leon Gellert

The Husband

Yes, I have slain, and taken moving life
From bodies. Yea! And laughed upon the taking;
And, having slain, have whetted still the knife
For more and more, and heeded not the making
Of things that I was killing. Such 'twas then!
But now the thirst so hideous has left me.
I live within a coolness, among calm men,
And yet am strange. A something has bereft me
Of a seeing, and strangely love returns;
And old desires half-known, and hanging sorrows.
I seem agaze with wonder. Memory burns.
I see a thousand vague and sad tomorrows.
None sees my sadness. No one understands
How I must touch her hair with bloody hands.

Leon Gellert

The Influence Of Lust

With padded feet from out his own dark den
Comes smiling Lust, once fair and hard to
please,
But now long overworked with dabbling men,
Who cry, 'We've tasted this and tired of these.'
Pausing in doubt, suspecting some defence,
He stares with eyes blue-lidded, at the Shape,
Then stooping, whispers low of innocence,
Of waiting chastity and sweetest rape.
With hairless hands awake, lips reeking tales
'Mid smothered sighs, acquivering the while
he sees a horrified frown and fears he fails,
But smiling much whene'er he sees a smile.
Then pressing, 'Flesh is this, they needed food,'
And, 'Flesh is warmest in its stolen blood.'

Leon Gellert

The Invocation Of Jealousy

The conquered world is bowed and worshipful,
And lovely Peace smooth-gowned in lightest grey
Cries, 'War is Dead' and treads upon it's skull.
While silken women walk their rosy way
Sneering at swords, and tittering at deeds,
And kicking relics with their pearl-shod feet,
Saying with mirth, 'The body never bleeds.
Old Mars is corpsed beneath great Bacchus'
seat.'

Young Mothers tell their babies of rusted spears
Of timid wolves, long fled to northern skies,
Of priests that sang of March in olden years,
And died in May with vain, despairing eyes,
The world is soothed with olive-juice and wine,
And spits upon the Quirinalian* shrine.

Leon Gellert

The Jester In The Trench

"That just reminds me of a yarn," he said;

And look for the body of Lofty Lane

He had a thousand yarns inside his head.

They waited for him, ready with their mirth

And creeping smiles, - then suddenly turned pale,

Grew still, and gazed upon the earth.

They heard no tale. No further word was said.

And with his untold fun,

Half leaning on his gun,

They left him - dead.

Leon Gellert

The Last To Leave

The guns were silent, and the silent hills
had bowed their grasses to a gentle breeze
I gazed upon the vales and on the rills,
And whispered, "What of these?" and "What of these?"
These long forgotten dead with sunken graves,
Some crossless, with unwritten memories
Their only mourners are the moaning waves,
Their only minstrels are the singing trees
And thus I mused and sorrowed wistfully

I watched the place where they had scaled the height,
The height whereon they bled so bitterly
Throughout each day and through each blistered night
I sat there long, and listened - all things listened too
I heard the epics of a thousand trees,
A thousand waves I heard; and then I knew
The waves were very old, the trees were wise:
The dead would be remembered evermore-
The valiant dead that gazed upon the skies,
And slept in great battalions by the shore.

Leon Gellert

The Moving Of The Shades

The black revolving depths have moved and stirred
with news. their Lord has cried. 'Send these, and these.'
Swift feet awake. Shapes speed. The dreadful word
resounds along the tunnels of the seas.
Sly Falsehood comes, with Sin and Flattery,
and long toothed Fear runs shrieking by the wall.
Face-hidden Sorrow follows Cruelty,
and peering Jealousy grown over-tall
Slobbering Lust is there, as smear with slime,
and Vice's ushers from the Uttermost;
Comes painted Pleasure, somewhat fat with time;
and Murder takes his place amid the host.
thronewardds they stand and gazzee, the Foull Voice screams.
'Invoke this God! Go hand in hand with dreams?'

Leon Gellert

The Old And The New

Mars! Mars!

Thy clashing sword was keen

And glittering with stars.

Thine armour sheen

Shone to the terrored sky,

And o'er the bodies of thy foes

With open blows

Didst step to victory.

War! War!

They hidden horrors sound

And echo from afar.

Upon the ground

Thou liest now in fear

To wait the cunning chance

To thrust thy lance,

And hurl thy poisoned spear.

Leon Gellert

The Retirement Of Mars

He pauses on his way, and gazing back
across the desert ways of splintered steel
recalls the noon, and sees his weary track,
and sees the bloody imprint of his heel.
A Mars long tired he stands-a noble Mars!
Stiff with the staggering day, and fields hard won.
His bruised helm is glittering with scars
that gleam afar and spy the setting sun.
With red plumes doffed and foe-revering face
he moves adroop, to seek the sea, the waves,
to seek the sighing winds, the shades of space,
and rest his heart within Twilight Caves.
The dazzling axe is deep, its lord abed.
The dead are lying with the friendly dead!

Leon Gellert

The Return

I have come home again!
Dawn is a dream to me
Lying here, soon to be
Clinging, awaking;
See where 'tis breaking
Mockingly, mistily!
I have come home again!

I have come home again!
Blithe is the day, and clear.
All of my youth is near.
Here with the sun above;
Here with my boyhood, love
Joy, and a tear.
I have come home again!

I have come home again!
Grand is the night to-night.
Stars shed their brightest light;
Shine all their brightest fire;
Shine with their old desire;
Wild with delight!
I have come home again!

I must away again!
Since I have lived this day
Here, now I cannot stay.
Back, with the changing sky,
I must away to die;
Die in the proper way
I must away again!

Leon Gellert

The Riddle Of The Sphinx

Thou gazing face above the shifting sands!
Oh, turn thy tearless eyes and answer me!
Will honour come to thee and to thy land.
That this should be?

Those swarthy adamantine breasts of stone
Are now matured beneath thine Egypt sun.
Wilt profit by this brood of iron bone
That this be done?

Oh answer me, thou silent gazing face,
All-gifted with the wisdom of the years,
These teeth of Jason, - will they bring thee grace,
Or bring thee tears?

Leon Gellert

The River

Swift with the dawn she rises, quick and cold,
Rattling the pebbles with her silver shoon,
Chasing a thousand fish of instant gold,
And racing into noon.

But in the night so tired at having tracked
Her great sea-lover to his sounding lair;
Down from the shoulders of her cataract,
She loosens all her hair.

Leon Gellert

The Soldier

Here in the noisy night
Is his delight.
Where maxims pour
Their thudding lead
Upon the ground
And on the shore.
He revels in the sound,
And lies among the dead.
Here where the sniper lies
Beneath the skies
In hungry wait;
And gasping shells
Disgorge red death.
This is his fate:
To love war's rhythmic breath,
And war's discordant knells.
Here on the parapet
His foes he met.
See where they sleep
In battered lines.
Here lies his bed
So long and deep,
And on his broken head
A shaft from Heaven shines.

Leon Gellert

The Song's End

Where will the song end? Here?
Here by the stretching arc
Red-rimmed and clear>
Or there in the dark?
Where will the song end?
Here, where the lizard sticks its tongue
Into the wide air?
Or there with a friend?
Where will the last note be sung?
Here, or there?

How will the song end? High?
Hight with a fighting ring
Through the wild sky
Re-echoing?
How will the tune cease?
Slow-droned beneath a quiet heaven?
With a dead foe?
Or 'mid bells of peace?
How will the last note be given?
High, or low?

Leon Gellert

The Soul Forsaken

Head-bowed I stood before the Gates of
God,
And pleaded starvingly;
The Great Eye would not see;
And cold with hopeless tears again I trod
The dreaded vast.
I felt the souls immortal moving past
All singingly.
Oh, pity me! Oh, pity me!
Wandering eternally!

I moved among Olympic ways amoan,
And looked with searching eye
Upon the mournful sky.
I lay and wept before the crumbled throne
Of Jove the dead.
I heard the soundless twilight, and I fled
With hopeless sign.
Oh, pity me! Oh, pity me!
Wandering eternally!

I strayed from peak to peak; from star to star:
And roamed in search of grace
Amid the field of space;
I craved at barren pagan shrines of far
Antiquity:
But mouths were mute, and eyes refused to see
The asking face.
Oh, pity me! Oh, pity me!
Wandering eternally!

I lay abreast above the chasm of Hell,
And claimed my destiny
Amid it demonry.
In vain I shrieked for entrance at the well
Of Sin.
I heard the Sobs and Sorrows rushing in
All moaningly.
Oh, pity me! Oh, pity me!

Wandering eternally.

Leon Gellert

The Speech Of Flattery

See how he lies, still mighty in his ease,
The fields' huge fear, the terrifying saint;
And nothing needed but his straightened knees,
A polished helm,-perhaps a little paint.
His breast is broad, as when behind the shield
He thrust its front across the clanging line,
And stood with Gore, as trembling armies kneeled
To lay their carven trophies at his shrine.
And now the very gates would yield at sight,
The earth cry 'Welcome' and the maidens sing
'The day has come, at last, lat last, the light!
Sick Peace is slain, and slaying War is king!
Oh, even yet will Beauty yield to Might,
And deck his couch while Numa's temples ring.'

Leon Gellert

The Teacher

A Cross is slanting 'tween two withered trees -

I saw him first in peace, amid a crowd
Of streets, nor dreamed him ever one of these,
So wistfully he mused, so shyly proud,
So chalk-besmeared he walked his weary pace.
A space went, - and on an early day
Within the trench, I saw a half-known face
Awake with wonder; a child-lived heart at play
With dreamed romance: a Drake-keen eye ashine
For newer worlds.....A thunder tore the line!.....
A shell burst!..... He smiled as Sidney smiled-
And fell.....There came the crying of a child,
.....A wave of little hands.....a soft breeze

The cross is slanting 'tween two withered trees.

Leon Gellert

The Three Concerned

The Man

He lies forgotten 'neath the watching skies,
the blood upon his bayonet scarlet bright;
the red moon shining in his glazed eyes,
the 'Last Post' crying, crying in the night.

The Woman

She proudly sits within her home of gloom,
and reads and reads his lines with wistful smile,
then, eyes aglisten, seeks the empty room
(and he within his bloody grave the while.)

The Child

His wooden war-horse stands beside his bed,
his tiny pillow holds a head of gold.
He dreams of all the things his father said,
he dreams of all the tales his father told.

Leon Gellert

The True Dawn

Go, false dawn, that cometh as a child
With yellow curls!
Hast never known the wild
Unhallowed cry of night!
Go hence!
I did not wish for pearls
Of dimpled innocence
Upon this floor.
Go! They blinding light
But leaves the darkness deeper than before.

Go, false dawn, that cometh as a bride
In virgin white
And brimming eyes so wide
With trust, and void of fears!
Depart!
Thou hast not known the night!
Repose thy willing heart
At whiter stairs.
Go! Before thy tears
Bestain they veil, and deepen these my cares.

Come, true dawn, that creepeth from the foul
Unclean abyss
With weary arms! The cowl
Is as the cowl of night.
Art here!
I feel thy tired kiss.
And feel each falling tear
Upon these sands.
Come! Thy glimmered light
Shall guide my eyes, and guide my trembling
hands.

Leon Gellert

The Trumpets Of Heaven

A silver cry is calling from a height
Leaving the awful pause that follows song,
And through the silence shines a stretching light-
A stretching light that quietly runs along
The path of stars, and pierces cloud on cloud.
Pure things in space across the guiltless sky
Rustle with wings that bear in flight the proud
Revenge of God, with God's intensity.
Among the lighted ways-to move unheard,-
A great-unseen assembly seems to shine
To gather silently in line on line,
And wait and wait for some expected word,
A call on the height! And from the blinding skies
Come white battalions with their blinding eyes.

Leon Gellert

The Veteran

Here must I sit and stare,
Withered and wrinkled;
Knowing the spaces there
With blood are sprinkled.
Why in the smoky sky
Missed I the sad truth?
Why did I not die
Young with the blood of youth?
Why did I not die
Hot in the heat of noon?
Here must I sleep and lie
Under a cool moon.
Here must I die aage,
Pale in the pale light.
Cold in my icy age,
Cold in the icy night.

Leon Gellert

The Wrecked Aeroplane

Unhappy craft of Daedalus reborn,
That liest prone with white wings torn,
And, like some giant prehistoric bird, with throbbing sound
Doest beat they wings on unresponsive ground.
Forlorn! Forlorn!

This very morn didst set out with thy plume
Yet damp from thine Icarian tomb,
To plough in mirth again the Stygian wave. With
launching cry
And sails outset didst dive the unattempted sky
To doom! To doom!

The early reaper at the start of day
Pauses `mid the falling hay,
And stands in wond'ring gaze, with eyes upturned
to watch they flight;
To him dost seem some goblin that the lifting nigh
Hath gone astray.

About thee in they meteor flight along
The shore, the shrieking sea birds throng
In clustered clouds of angry rivalry, and skim the
sea
To rise and dip again, and follow with their free
Wild tuneless song.

Unfledged, untimely birdling of a breath!
No useless shroud hast thou, nor wreath.
They flight was brief, yet wert thou eagle-hearted
as of yore.
When fearlessly didst flee that alien Cretan shore
To sink in death.

And now the furrowed earth holds fast they wings,
While far afield the ox-bell rings
A strange, soft dirge. Thy blood is dropping on
the frightened grass;

The night is hushed. A sad, scarce-moving breeze
doth pass,
And passing sings.

Leon Gellert

These Men

Men moving in a trench, in the clear noon,
Whetting their steel within the crumbling earth;
Men, moving in a trench `neath a new moon
That smiles with a slit mouth and has no mirth;
Men moving in a trench in the grey morn,
Lifting bodies on their clotted frames:
Men with narrow mouths thin-carved in scorn
That twist and fumble strangely at dead names.

These men know life – know death a little more.
These men see paths and ends, and see
Beyond some swinging open door
Into eternity.

Leon Gellert

Through A Porthole

If you could lie upon this berth, this berth
whereon I lie,
If you could see a tiny peak uplift its
tingled tusk,
If you could see the purple hills against
the changing sky,
And see a shadowed pinnacle lying in the dusk;
If you could see the sabre-moon shining
on the deep;
You'd say the world was not unkind, but just
a sleeping child,
You'd say the world has gone to sleep.
And while it slept
it smiled.

Leon Gellert

To A Man Who Wished To Die

And now that you are dead, - If I should die
Upon this ground,
And open my new eye,
I'd leave my body dead,
Just like a garment shed
Without a sound;

And go to you within that dingy room
Above the stair,
To find you in the gloom,
As though you sadly dozed,
With dead eyes partly closed,
Within your chair.

Then would I find you sad, who used to weep
At death's delay;
And I would notice creep
Upon your cheek a tear
At finding Heaven so near,
And Earth so far away.

Leon Gellert

War!

When my poor body died,-Alas!
I watched it topple down a hill
And sink beside a tuft of grass.
I laughed like mad,
and laughing still
I bowed and thanked the bit of shell
That set me free and made me glad.
Then quietly,
I strolled to Hell.

Leon Gellert