

**PROSE  
AND POETRY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649016082

Prose and poetry by Henry John Newbolt

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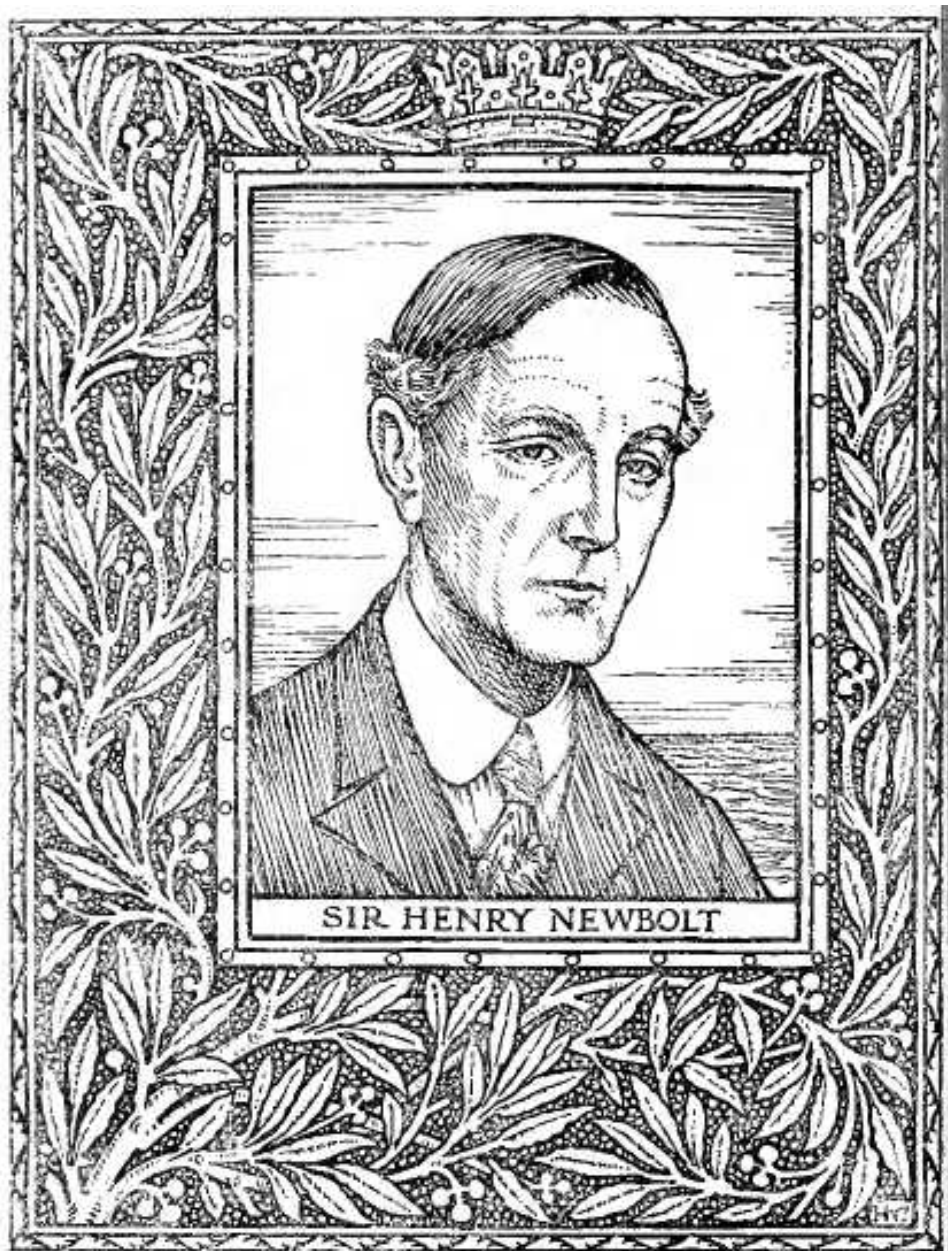
**PROSE  
AND POETRY**



*The* KINGS TREASURIES  
OF LITERATURE

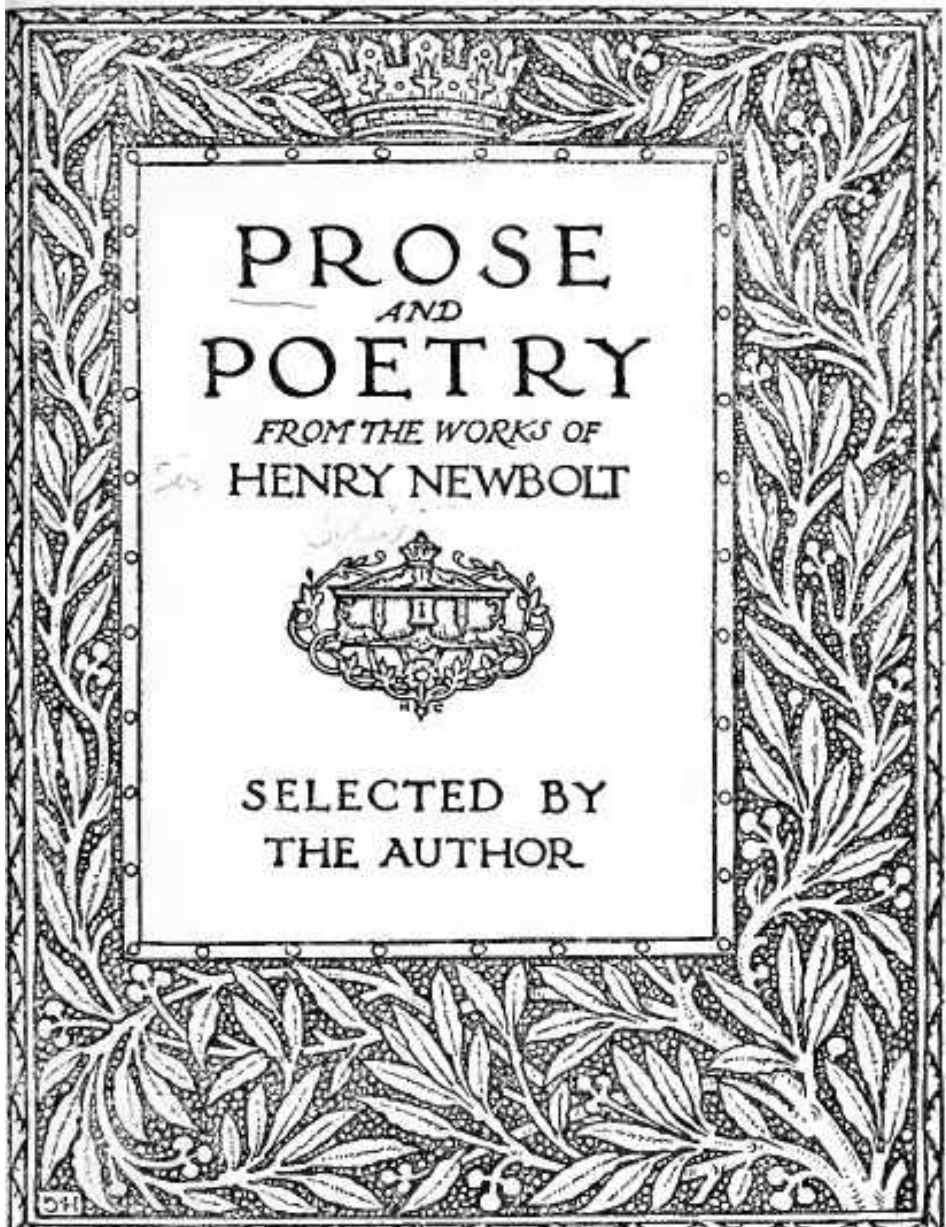


GENERAL EDITOR  
SIR A·T·QUILLER COUCH



SIR HENRY NEWBOLT

NEW YORK E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY



PROSE  
*AND*  
POETRY  
*FROM THE WORKS OF*  
HENRY NEWBOLT

SELECTED BY  
THE AUTHOR

J·M·DENT & SONS · LTD · LONDON & TORONTO

## CONTENTS

### POETRY

	PAGE
POETRY AND POLITICS . . . . .	7
SONG OF THE CHILDREN IN PALADORE . . . . .	36
MARRIAGE AND POETRY . . . . .	37
THE INVISIBLE COUNTRY . . . . .	41
THE PILGRIM'S VISION . . . . .	42
THE ETERNAL CITY . . . . .	44
THE BALLADS. . . . .	48

### TIME

SONG FROM "DREAM MARKET" . . . . .	55
HISTORY AND TIME . . . . .	56
TIME AND THE LAND . . . . .	58
TIME AND MUSIC . . . . .	59
A MEDIEVAL FUNERAL . . . . .	61
THE SECRET OF OXFORD . . . . .	65

### LOVE

THE OXFORD BROWNING SOCIETY . . . . .	66
AMORE ALTIERO . . . . .	74
TRUE THOMAS . . . . .	75

### ENGLAND

WILLIAM THE SINGER . . . . .	76
GERUSALEMME IRREDENTA . . . . .	85
FROISSART—THE FIRST PHASE . . . . .	94



ENGLAND—*continued*

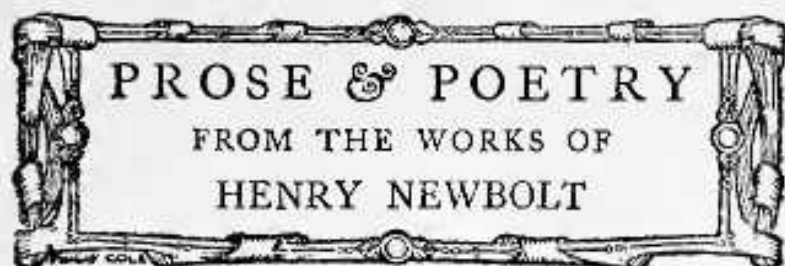
	PAGE
FROISSART—THE LAST PHASE . . . . .	103
NOTHING NEW . . . . .	106
THE CHURCH OF SCIENCE . . . . .	114
THE BODY OF PATRIOTISM . . . . .	117
AN ENGLISH LANDSCAPE . . . . .	123

## EDUCATION

A THEORY OF SCHOOL . . . . .	125
THE SCHOOLBOY IN LUCK . . . . .	130
CLIFTON CHAPEL . . . . .	136
COMMEMORATION . . . . .	137
ART AND EDUCATION . . . . .	139
SCIENCE AND LITERATURE . . . . .	142
THE OLD ENGLISH SCHOOL . . . . .	146

## WAR

CHIVALRY OF TO-DAY . . . . .	165
SAN STEFANO . . . . .	179
CRAVEN . . . . .	189
STONEWALL JACKSON . . . . .	190
SAVING AN ARMY . . . . .	198
SACRAMENTUM SUPREMUM . . . . .	216
NONNEBOSCHEN WOOD . . . . .	217
ST. GEORGE'S DAY . . . . .	223
THE SPIRIT OF SUBMARINE WAR . . . . .	224
Q-BOATS . . . . .	228
THE DRIFTERS' BATTLE . . . . .	239
THE KRAKEN'S DEATH GRAPPLE . . . . .	242
SONGS OF THE FLEET . . . . .	244
WAR AND POETRY . . . . .	249
THE WAR FILMS . . . . .	251
UNLIMITED WAR . . . . .	252



## POETRY AND POLITICS

THE relation of Poetry to social life—to Politics in the wider sense of the word—is not a very profound or difficult subject: but it is a little profounder, a little more difficult than it is sometimes thought to be. We have only to read or listen to what is being daily said around us to become aware that the common opinion divides poetry off from other human activities—regards it as an intruder in ordinary affairs. In the Ship of State, Poetry must not speak to the man at the wheel, or indeed to any member of the crew when engaged on any kind of duty: if she does speak she must not be listened to seriously. Common sense tells us that Poetry is idealism, and that idealism has nothing to do with the practical.<sup>1</sup> For that you need reality, truth, knowledge of things as they are in themselves: and only Science, which

<sup>1</sup> "As to the plaintiff's verses that had been quoted, the jury could not judge the verses of poets from the standpoint of business men such as the jury and himself. Poets dealt with these matters in extravagant strain, as was shown by their knowledge of the poets.

"The learned counsel then recited a poem by Swinburne and Shakespeare's Sonnet No. 20. These poets were to be congratulated that they had not to be cross-examined by Mr. Campbell."—*The Times*, April 22, 1913.

is the antithesis of Poetry, can give you these. Science then must be in supreme command, Science must steer and work the ship, while Poetry, if she is allowed any active place at all, must be restricted to such employment as decorating the saloon and playing in the band.

Now it can hardly be necessary for me to insist on the vital importance of this view. Its results are visible in every department of our social system, and they are always disastrous. Our public life is before all things chaotic and quarrelsome—the crew are busying themselves not so much in working the ship as in disputing about every detail of the voyage, and particularly about its course. In Government, our method is to move by alternate efforts in almost opposite directions:

You have, perchance, observed the inebriate's track  
At night when he has quitted the inn-sign:  
He plays diversions on the homeward line,  
Still that way bent, albeit his legs are slack.<sup>1</sup>

Then on questions of public morality there is a direct and bitter conflict always going on: in matters of religion the common ideal of brotherhood is forgotten in the universal ardour for faction-fighting. Yet the nation thus distracted is a collection of men and women perhaps as homogeneous as any in the world, and certainly in no way unusually deficient in political, moral, or religious sense. They are merely confused, and their confusion is, I believe,

<sup>1</sup> George Meredith, *The World's Advance*.