

**THE SIEGE OF
CALAIS AND
OTHER POEMS**

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The Siege of Calais and Other Poems by Rev. A. L. Frisbie

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REV. A. L. FRISBIE

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AND OTHER POEMS.

BY
REV. A. L. FRISBIE.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE SIEGE OF CALAIS,	5
DEACON KENT IN POLITICS,	49
THE PILGRIM FATHERS AND CHILDREN,	80
ECHOES OF WAR,	92
MY FRIENDS,	105
VIGINTENNIAL POEM,	123
SIGHT THROUGH TEARS,	142
THE MOTHER'S SONG,	145
TEMPTATION,	149
THE RIVER TO THE NIGHT,	153
OUTLOOK,	160



THE SIEGE OF CALAIS.

A WHOLE year long besiegers pressed
The town of Calais and distressed
The city folk with war's alarms.
Through days and nights the men-at-arms
Watched from the walls the English host—
The rough invaders of their coast—
Who followed Edward's plume and lance
To spoil and sack and slay in France.

Now came the sally from the gates—
The desperate struggle with the Fates—
Which madly strove to thrust away
The ruin which before them lay.

Then in return came swift attack,
Hurling the beaten squadrons back
Upon the town. Quick to the wall

Clomb archers, slingers, lancers; all
In whose thin arms the pith remained
To wield a weapon battle stained—
For wife and child and native town,
To strike the hated English down.

So back and forth the strife had rolled
Through summer's green and autumn's gold,
And winter's chill and spring's soft breath—
A year of weariness and death.
No ships, full freighted over seas,
Brought sustenance to bustling quays.
No produce-laden wagon trains
Rolled in to swell the farmer's gains
And satisfy hard hunger's pains.

The harried fields, the driven kine,
The fat of France, the cheering wine,
All that the land in peace had stored,
Gave comfort then to England's lord;
And at his feet the white-winged ships,
Obedient to his haughty lips,

In sight of famished townsmen's eyes
Laid down the coveted supplies.

The weary watchmen on the towers
Wore out the tedious, torturing hours,
Peering through storm and shadows dim
To see, across the southern rim
Of the horizon, Philip come;
Sifted the gales for sound of drum
Telling of succor just at hand;
Or turned from the unfriendly land
To scan the sea, if haply thence
The cloud of God's deliverance
Might rise and blacken with His wrath,
To sweep, resistless in its path,
Through Edward's camp.

Nor eye nor ear
Caught sight or sound of Philip near;
And from the sea no rising cloud
Gave token that Jehovah bowed
The heavens to come to their defense,

With fully roused Omnipotence.

And famine came—grim, greedy, gaunt,
To reign in Calais. Spectral want
Spread his black wings above the town,
And ever glared more fiercely down
On all alike—on soldier, priest,
On prince and beggar. At the breast,
The babe whose birth the mother blest,
Puny and starving asked again
For one poor drop, and asked in vain!
The mother's heart within her died;
The fountain of her tears was dried—
And she beheld, with stony gaze,
The childish flock of happier days,
With sharpened face and wolfish greed
Go mad with hunger's horrid need.

On soldier forms, enfeebled, frail,
Sat loosely now the coats of mail.
The swords, oft drawn in battles gained,
Their edge and temper yet retained;

The battle-ax and massive mace
Lay ready in accustomed place,
But where, alas! were brawny thews
The sword and battle-ax to use?
The archer's hand, a shrunken thing,
Scarce able more to strain the string
And bend the bow, hung useless down—
So sore was famine in the town.

The end was near. Not English skill
Nor valor had o'ercome the will
To fight, but famine, dread ally
Of Edward, won the victory.

But first, ere yet upon the wall
The white flag floated, one and all,
Led by the voice of faithful priest,
A last appeal to Heaven addressed.
To Him who breaks no bruised reed,
Nor coldly looks on hearts that bleed,
Arose the agonizing prayer
Of faith, just sinking in despair.