

'England'

by A S J Tessimond

Autumn 1938

(Dad wrote it out & sent it to Mum with his 15 April 1941 letter)

Plush bees above a bed of dahlias,
Leisurely, timely garden teas;
Brown bread and honey; scent of mowing;
The still green light below tall trees.

The ancient custom of deception;
A Press that seldom stoops to lies -
Merely suppresses truth and twists it,
Blindly corrupt and slyly wise.

The Common Man; his mask of laughter;
His back-chat while the roof falls in;
Minorities' long losing battles
Fought that sons of sons may win.

The Politician's inward snigger
(Big Business on the private phone);
The knack of sitting snug on fences
The double face of flesh & stone.

Grape-bloom of distant woods at dusk;
Storm-crown on Glanamara's head;
The fire-rose over London night;
An old plough rusting autumn-red.

The 'incorruptible policeman'
Gaoling the whore whose btibe's run out;
Guarding the rich against the poor man;
Guarding the Settled Gods from doubt.

The generous smile of music-halls,
Bars and bank-holidays & queues;
The private peace of public foes;
The truce of pipe and football news.

The smile of privilege exultant;
Smile at the 'bloody Red' defeats;
Smile at the strikers stormed & broken;
Smile at the 'dirty nigger' chant.

The old hereditary craftsmen;
The incommunicable skill;
The pride in long-loved tools, refusal
To do the set job quick or ill.

The greater artist mocked, misflattered;
The lesser forming clique & team
Or crouching on his narrow corner,
Narcissus with his secret dream.

England of rebels - Blake & Shelley;
England where freedom's sometimes won,
Where Jew & Negro needn't fear yet
Lynch-law & pogrom, whip & gun.

England of cant and smug discretion;
England of wage cut-sweatshop-knight;
Of sportsman-churchman-slum-exploiter,
Of puritan grown sour with spite.

England of clever fools, mad genius
Timorous lion and arrogant sheep,
Half-hearted snob & shamefaced bully,
Of hands that wake & eyes that sleep....
England the snail that's shod with lightning
Shall we laugh or shall we weep?