

# '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?