

LINES WRITTEN ON THE OCCASION

OF READING A WORLD BANK FINANCIAL POLICY PAPER*

As I lay sleeping near the door
There came a voice from another floor
And with great power it led me
To write as Shelley - a parody.

I met the paper on its way
Printed in lines of ominous gray;
Very smooth it looked, yet grim
For what it said there within.

Pages were thick, and well it might
Be an admirable sight -
For one by one and two by two
It tossed forth numbers new
Which from its wide scope it drew.

Capital paid in was finessed
Along with interest coverage and the rest,
Shed not tears and weep not well
For debt to callable capital as it fell.

As flowers beneath May's footsteps waken
Or stars from Night's loose hair are shaken
Or waves arise when loud winds rail
Believe, believe our countries will not fail.

And when and if they do, we shall conserve
A light, we call reserve,
Small though it be and weak and frail
T'Will cushion thee through storms and gale.

Not only Spirit, patience, wisdom we have,
All that can adorn and bless
But more. Neither ratios nor numbers rash
Will overcome the value of our cash.

But you say from corners uttermost
Off the Bounds of Eastern Coast,
That it will disappear
If we but slightly falter for a year.

*With apology to Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Mask of Anarchy"

Let such talk not abound
With quick and startling sound;
Rather, let a vast assembly be
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Do not understand the inviolability
Of our Liquidity and Borrowing Capacity.

And so the brave young writers who
Round the table play to and fro
Thinking every line a gem
Had their spirit stripped from them.

The paper clothes with certainty the light,
As the frightening shadows of the night
Were banished from the story
For fear of marring allegory.

And many more destructions played
In this strangest masquerade
All disguised, even to the eyes
Like Prudence, Wisdom, and Judgement wise.

And came Moeen; he rode
On a white horse as he would - and should,
Pale even to the lips
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

But another wore the kingly crown
And in his grasp morality shone
On his brow this much I saw -
"Seek consensus, else we fall".

And a mighty staff around
With a trampling shook the ground
Waving each a discreet page
And thus received deserved praise.

And with glorious triumph they
Finished the paper, proud and gay
Drunk as with intoxication;
For the Board, it would be a revelation

O'er the Markets from sea to sea
Passed the word swift and free
Tearing up and tumbling down
Till they came to New York town.

And there each Pension Fund, panic stricken
Felt its heart with terror stricken
Hearing the tempestuous cry,
"From Part One Countries, capital ye need not pry."

But then with pomp to meet them came
The chroniclers with tongues aflame
Who were to sing with rapidity
The blessed joys of our liquidity.

And they replied:
"We are waiting not weak and lone
Not for thy coming Mighty One!
Our purses are full, our profit not cold
Give us glory and safety and gold."

Lawyers and writers, a motley crowd
To the earth their pale brows then bowed
Like a prayer, whispered in the Wall Street Glen
"Take our interest coverage one to one ten."

T'was thought they would cry with one accord
Though art King and Truth and Lord
Morality it is to thee we bow
Tis sufficient to satisfy us now.

But cynic, the Skeleton
Bowed and grinned to everyone
As if, he knew better, the risks
In every letter.

For he knew that kings and palaces subscribed
But little to those not circumscribed;
Those with scepter, crown and robe
Look for their own around the globe.

And cynicism, that ghastly birth
Was looked upon with undisguised mirth,
The bird of reason, tameless as the wind
Would educate the disbeliever to be aware
Of uncalled capital in the air.

A rushing light of clouds and splendor
A sense of awakening and yet tender
Was heard and felt -- and at its close
These words of certainty and truth arose,
As if indignant Earth
Which gave the paper its very birth
Had felt its reason upon her brow
And shuddering cried aloud,

"Men of Wealth, heirs of Money, Glory
Heroes of unwritten story
Children of one mighty mother
Pray for one another!"

"Rise like lions after slumber
Support the poor in unvanquishable number
Shake your doubts to earth like dew
Which in sleep hath fallen on you
Ye are rich; ye need not ratios of one to two."

"And, at length, if ye complain
With strength and seek to maim
Remember, remember when the wind roars
The poor find no home behind warm doors."

"From the workhouse and the prison
Where, pale as corpses newly risen
Women, Children, young and old
Groan for pain and weep for cold."

But alas with folded arms and steady eyes
Those with gold show little fear and less surprise.
Shall we risk their disinterest in us
All for sake of reasoned opus?

A Chance we take for all nations
As we rely on education,
Eloquent though, oracular
Like a volcano from Afar.

Come the words filling the room
Like Truth's thundered doom,
Ringing through each page
Heard again, again, again:

"Men of Wealth, heirs of money, Glory
Heroes of unwritten story
Children of one mighty mother
Pray for one another."

"Rise like lions after slumber
Support the poor in unvanquishable number
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