

EPPS

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1913

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EPPS.

Asks anyone — "Where's a tag for *steps*?"
 I answer — "Waiting its time
 Till somebody versed in the English tongue
 Shall start at the challenge, cry 'unsung
 Till now, and all for want of a rhyme,
 Is the prowess of Kentish Epps?'"

Two hundred and eighty years ago
 Befell the seige of Ostend;
 Epps soldiered it there: and, hew or hack
 10 At his breast as the enemy might, his back
 Got never a scratch: yet life must end
 Somehow, — Epps ended — so!

He had lost an eye on the walls, look out
 No longer could Epps: said he —
 "Give me Saint George's cross — our flag
 To carry: I can't see them — foes brag:
 At all events they shall soon see me,
 Knight and knave, lord and lout!"

"Epps got loose again!" yelled the curs:
 20 "At him — the blind side best!
 Together as one — in a rush, on a heap,
 Buffet the old maiméd bull! Fame's
 cheap

This morn for whoso has mind to wrest
 Yon flag from his hold, win spurs!"

As a big wave bursts on a rock, broke they
 On bannerman Epps: as staunch
 The drowned rock stands, but emerging
 feels

Weeds late on its head lie loose at its heels,
 So left bare, swirl — stript; root and
 branch,

30 Of his { band } stood — Epps laughed
 { company }

"I with my flag — that's well, no fear
 The colours stick to the staff:
 But the staff 'tis a mere hand holds — lets
 fall
 If there stab me or shoot one knave of
 them all:

To him ler which game — "I hear Epps
 laugh —
 'Stick, flag, to a new staff — here!"

And off in a trice from the staff that's wood,
 And on to a staff that's flesh,

Tears Epps and { ties } me { round }
 { binds } { tight }

about his breast
 The flag in a red swathe. "Here's the vest 40
 For my lifelong wear; at the foe afresh!
 Flagstaff show your hardihood!"

Whereat, in a twinkling, man and horse
 Went down — one, two and three,
 And how many more? But they shot and
 slashed.

Two { bullets } have riddled, two sword-
 { balls } blades gashed

The staff through the flag, — { leave }
 free { left }
 To despoilers, — you think, — a corse?

No! Back from his slayers, staggeringly 50
 But, staff-like stout to the last,
 Up to his mates — of the checked ad-
 vance —

Reels Epps, his soul in his countenance,
 As he falters "See! Flag to the staff
 sticks fast,
 And, flag saved, staff may die!"

And die did Epps, with his English round
 Not so the fame of the feat:
 For Donne and Dekker, brave pacts and
 rare,

Gave it honour and praise: and I join the
 pair
 With heart that's loud though my voice 60
 compete
 As a pipe with their trumpet-sound!
 R. B.

Jan. 6, 1886.





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