

## Thirty Bob a Week

By John Davidson

I COULDN'T touch a stop and turn a screw,  
And set the blooming world a-work for me,  
Like such as cut their teeth—I hope, like you—  
On the handle of a skeleton gold key.  
I cut mine on leek, which I eat it every week :  
I'm a clerk at thirty bob, as you can see.

But I don't allow it's luck and all a toss ;  
There's no such thing as being starred and crossed ;  
It's just the power of some to be a boss,  
And the bally power of others to be bossed :  
I face the music, sir ; you bet I ain't a cur !  
Strike me lucky if I don't believe I'm lost !

For like a mole I journey in the dark,  
A-travelling along the underground  
From my Pillar'd Halls and broad suburban Park  
To come the daily dull official round ;  
And home again at night with my pipe all alight  
A-scheming how to count ten bob a pound.

And

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And it's often very cold and very wet ;  
 And my missis stitches towels for a hunks ;  
 And the Pillar'd Halls is half of it to let—  
 Three rooms about the size of travelling trunks.  
 And we cough, the wife and I, to dislocate a sigh,  
 When the noisy little kids are in their bunks.

But you'll never hear *her* do a growl, or whine,  
 For she's made of flint and roses very odd ;  
 And I've got to cut my meaning rather fine  
 Or I'd blubber, for *I'm* made of greens and sod :  
 So p'rhaps we are in hell for all that I can tell,  
 And lost and damned and served up hot to God.

I ain't blaspheming, Mr. Silvertongue ;  
 I'm saying things a bit beyond your art :  
 Of all the rummy starts you ever sprung  
 Thirty bob a week's the rummiest start !  
 With your science and your books and your the'ries about  
 spooks,  
 Did you ever hear of looking in your heart ?

I didn't mean your pocket, Mr. ; no !  
 I mean that having children and a wife  
 With thirty bob on which to come and go  
 Isn't dancing to the tabor and the fife ;  
 When it doesn't make you drink, by Heaven, it makes you  
 think,  
 And notice curious items about life !

I step into my heart and there I meet  
 A god-almighty devil singing small,

Who

Who would like to shout and whistle in the street,  
And squelch the passers flat against the wall ;  
If the whole world was a cake he had the power to take,  
He would take it, ask for more, and eat it all.

And I meet a sort of simpleton beside—  
The kind that life is always giving beans ;  
With thirty bob a week to keep a bride  
He fell in love and married in his teens ;  
At thirty bob he stuck, but he knows it isn't luck ;  
He knows the seas are deeper than tureens.

And the god-almighty devil and the fool  
That meet me in the High Street on the strike,  
When I walk about my heart a-gathering wool,  
Are my good and evil angels if you like ;  
And both of them together in every kind of weather  
Ride me like a double-seated "bike."

That's rough a bit and needs its meaning curled ;  
But I have a high old hot un in my mind,  
A most engrugious notion of the world  
That leaves your lightning 'rithmetic behind :  
I give it at a glance when I say "There ain't no chance,  
Nor nothing of the lucky-lottery kind."

And it's this way that I make it out to be :  
No fathers, mothers, countries, climates—none !—  
Not Adam was responsible for me ;  
Nor society, nor systems, nary one !  
A little sleeping seed, I woke—I did indeed—  
A million years before the blooming sun.

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I woke because I thought the time had come ;  
    Beyond my will there was no other cause :  
And everywhere I found myself at home  
    Because I chose to be the thing I was ;  
And in whatever shape, of mollusc, or of ape,  
    I always went according to the laws.

*I* was the love that chose my mother out ;  
    *I* joined two lives and from the union burst ;  
My weakness and my strength without a doubt  
    Are mine alone for ever from the first.  
It's just the very same with a difference in the name  
    As "Thy will be done." You say it if you durst !

They say it daily up and down the land  
    As easy as you take a drink, it's true ;  
But the difficultest go to understand,  
    And the difficultest job a man can do,  
Is to come it brave and meek with thirty bob a week,  
    And feel that that's the proper thing for you.

It's a naked child against a hungry wolf ;  
    It's playing bowls upon a splitting wreck ;  
It's walking on a string across a gulf  
    With millstones fore-and-aft about your neck :  
But the thing is daily done by many and many a one. . . .  
    And we fall, face forward, fighting, on the deck.