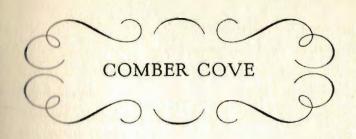




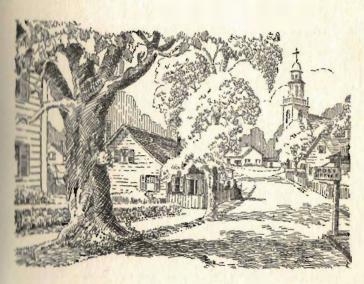
INTRODUCTION .	1			100					7
COMBER COVE .			(4)			1		*	9
DEACON ARNOLD .				4					15
THE RINK			1					V	19
REV. SILAS HUNTER	7			1.		×		H	25
THE SERVICE CLUB								ŀ	29
THE MEMBER OF PA	RLIAN	IENT	r .				٠.		35
MARGARET	1	16		W.					39
DAVID CRUMB .		1						3.	41
THE SCHOOL BOARD									45
JUDGE BILK'S DAUG	HTER				7				49
WIDOW DOOLITTLE								17	53



								PAGE		
WILLIAM WARD .				٠		7	2		57	
THE GARAGE MAN .		e .						ų.	59	
GEORGE FRANCIS .	٠		,					7	61	
AARON LOGG		4					×		65	
THE FUNDAMENTALI	ST								67	
теемотну натсн									71	
AMANDA							4		75	
THE VISITOR		ly i	1						79	
THE BLIND MEN OF T	HE	ROAD							81	
LITTLE ARLETTE .		A.							85	
THE RADICAL ROAD					1		٥.		89	



In Comber giant oaks abound:
They paw her gentle air,
And strew their acorns on the ground
Like jewels they will not wear.





The Cove has maples, straight and tall
To warm the fading year:
Great showers of crimson from them fall
When winter days are near.

The sunlight and the friendly rain Have both to her been kind; And yet they come to her in vain For she is deaf and blind.

On Sabbath days to church she goes; And all the other days She scorns the Temples of the Rose Wherein all nature prays.



The chapel organ's screech and grind
Is music to her ear;
But not the flutist of the wind
Upon the reedy mere.

The creeds, that hold like prison bars,
She loves them every one;
But not the sanscript of the stars,
The gospel of the sun.

Her God is spectral, cold, unkind, Intolerant, aloof. She hears not angels dance the wind Along the choric roof.



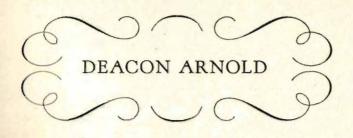
She grieves her Savior's wounded hands And bleeding side, and then Lifts up new crosses and demands The blood of mortal men.

The troubled wind upon her lawns Repairs its wounded feet. Her gardens in the dancing dawns With hollyhocks are sweet.

The cooling lake each summer night
Fans gently on her dreams.
All day she feels the golden light
In soft Elysian streams.



And yet at morn and eve she prays
For some far, amber shore,
While Heaven is on the path she strays,
And God is at her door!

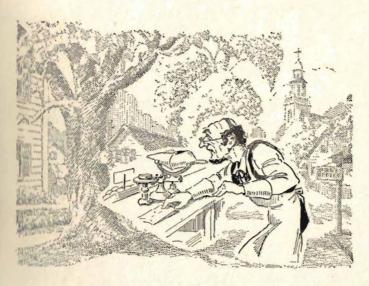


The "I love Jesus ers"

Are squawking at the church:

Deacon Arnold's leading them

From a high perch.





Deacon Arnold keeps a store: Sugar, dry-goods, nails. You should see him weighing coffee On his crooked scales.

Deacon Arnold never drinks, Never smokes nor swears; And every time he shortens weight He lengthens out his prayers.

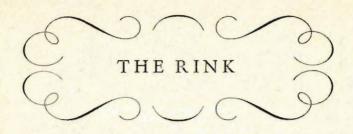
Deacon Arnold's love for Jesus So engrossed his life That he couldn't love his neighbour Or his gentle wife;



Hadn't time to love the stars
Or the drifting moon,
Or the white rain of the sun,
Dancing at high noon;

Or the singing green of water Down an aisle of stone, Or the wind on banks of roses Making lovely moan.

Deacon Arnold sits to-night
On a lordly perch,
While all the "I love Jesus-ers"
Are squawking at the church.



Her roof, upheld by many an arch, Groaned under snow till late in March. And sometimes on a stormy day It crackled in a ghostly way.





At dawn the Rink, with no one there,
Looked like a cavern of despair;
And even in the clear daylight,
Save for one shining plot of white,
It was a dark and gloomy sight.
Long seats, with slivers for the clothes,
Around the slim, white sheet uprose.
And here the village moguls sat
And watched grim battles on the ice;
And here they cheered and swore and spat
Or gave the battlers fool advice.
No courtesy or sportsmanship
Was in a word on any lip;
And chivalry toward a foe
Was something which they did not know.



And, when some local hero scored,
The old rink-rafters ripped and roared.
But when, with lovely, changing pace,
And curving with a swallow's grace,
A visitor outwitted all
The village for his blood would bawl.
And often would they jump the boards
In savage, witless, cursing hordes,
And mob the boys, who came from far,
To show how brave Canadians are.
The visitors might number ten,
And six be lads and four be men;
And seven hundred of Comber Town
Would fight these lads and put them down.



II

On skating nights the room for boys
Was black with smoke and mad with noise.
Here, lacing shoes, the young lads sat
And god-damned this and god-damned that.
They smoked at twelve to stunt their growth
And few could talk without an oath.
And one would wave his hockey stick
And tell what fellows he could lick.
And loudly, that the girls might hear,
He spoke the foulest word he knew
And told a story that would smear
A brothel with a yellow hue.



Strong limbs and bodies hard and straight Had every youth within the room; And had their minds been made to mate They might have stayed a country's doom. But here each skating night they sat And god-damned this and god-damned that.

III

On Sunday mornings, should you choose To go to church, all in the pews You'll see the lads that laced their shoes, Who, as they sit there, quietly think The thoughts they spoke upon the Rink.



The shade of poor John Calvin weeps and moans
When Reverend Silas Hunter starts to speak;
And many an elder's theologic bones
Have spiritual lumbago for a week.





For Silas Hunter little knows or cares
About old creeds or ritualistic lore.
His eloquence is never in his prayers,
But in his deeds to mankind at his door.

His voice is like a living flame that wakes
The fires of love wherever he may go.
His bishop is a Carpenter, and he takes
His orders from none other, high or low.

The poor folk love to crowd his rentless pews: They feel a yearning haven in his eyes. He gives to errant sinners all their dues, And tells of heavens nearer than the skies.

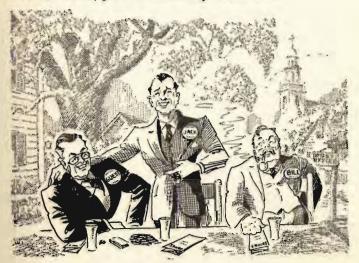


He once was tried for heresy because
His sermons put old, bloody creeds to rout:
He talked too much of loving, and it was
Old Deacon Arnold's vote that cast him out.



i

The Service Club, on Wednesday noons, Put on their tags, and shouted tunes— All songs of noble theme and style, As, "Pack your troubles up and smile."





These "angels" never sang hosannas
But chanted, "We have no bananas."
The air was thick with "Bill" and "Jack,"
And each man thumped the other's back.
A bowl of soup, a slab of beef
Went swiftly sliding down each throat:
Their mastication would bring grief
To ostrich, pelican or goat.
Then cigarettes came out to heal
All memories of their awful meal;
And some, to ease digestion's scars,
Smoked wheezy pipes and fat cigars;
For dinner at a service club
Is strong on smoke and short on grub.



2

The president then rapped a gong,
And chairs scraped back in raucous song;
And with a monumental boost
The speaker then was introduced.
And, when he started in to tell
Them only things they cared to hear,
Like blurring ghosts in cloudy hell
They gave him an attentive ear.
This famous orator was brought
Because he never disloged thought.
And if the interest seemed to lag
He praised the clergy and the flag,
He lauded surgeons and their knives,
He blessed all mothers and all wives.



His talk was like a soothing drug
That made men want to kiss and hug;
Or give one hundred thousand bucks
To under-privileged woodchucks,
Who got this way, now here's the rub,
Because the motto of this club
Was ever this—the thought quite missed 'em—
That no one must destroy the System.

3

The speaker paused; he knew his speech Had not disturbed a soul in reach; And so he brought his gifts to rally In one magnificent finale, Wherein he spake, with raised hand:



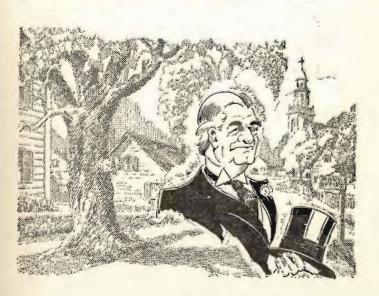
"We live in God's anointed land,
The world is fine, the weather's grand!"
And at this most amazing truth
He took his chair and picked his tooth.
And all the ghosts in cloudy hell
Cried, "Bravo, bravo; all is well."
And when their wild applause had died
Men rushed in torrents to his side
And told how they were edified.

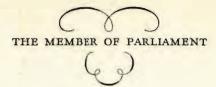
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Next Wednesday noon, at half-past twelve, These men to Barnum's Inn will go To keep the vacuum of their days In one sublime, perpetual flow.



In years he hadn't read a book
And boasted this at every chance,
But he possessed a knowing look
And silver jingled in his pants.





And when bright silver jingles there
Election is a simple thing;
But you must love the Lord and swear
You will be true to England's king.

And honorable Josiah Boyd
Could wave a flag and all of that
And this made up for any void
Beneath the honored member's hat.

Sometimes he squirmed when cultured men Revealed his grossness with intent; But he felt quite at home again When he sat down in parliament.



He banged his desk as any lad,
And loved to make the page-boys run;
And hoped the galleries would be glad
To look at him—their favorite son.

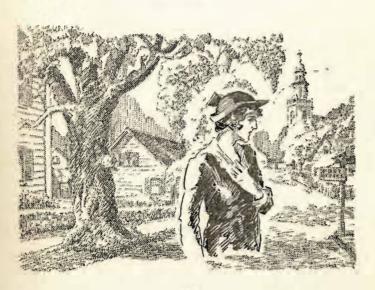
He stole, and boasted of his swag.

And, when his victims would rebel,
He wrapped himself in England's flag

And sang, "God Save the King," like Hell.



Margaret of Comber Cove
Wrote strange sea-tales;
Wrote them on the white sand
For devouring gales.





Margaret loved to watch, Floating shoreward fast, Carvings of frail caravels Whittled by the blast.

No two things that drifted in, From the outer gale, Told this lass of Comber Cove The very same tale.

That was many a year ago;
('Tis a sorry case):
Nothing now drifts in from sea
Save her lover's face.

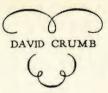
David Crumb

Was full of questions

That so disturbed

They spoiled digestions.

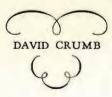




He asked why mothers
Were all such wonders
While mothers-in-law
Were nature's blunders.

He asked why preachers,
If they loved men,
Couldn't shorten sermons
Now and again.

He asked if the doctors
Would feel good will
If no one in Comber Cove
Ever took ill.



He asked, could an undertaker
Be of good cheer
If no person died
In the town that year.

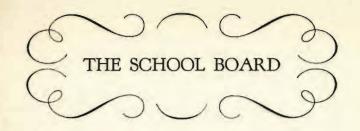
He asked why judges
Didn't all get hot
When you mentioned a man
Who said, "Judge not;"

Or why, when an ass
Carried Jesus, our Lord,
Do Christians complain
Of their last year's Ford?



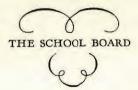
But his one question, Which all men abhor, Is, "If you are Christian Can you make war?"

When David Crumb
Propounds a question
Comber-Cove people
Have soul indigestion.



Each New Year's Day the Cove bestirred
And re-elected to the Board
A group of rusty men and dames
Who all could read and write their names,
And who would swear that they had heard
Of both Napoleon and the Lord.





These antiquarians thought it sin To let a new idea in: And all they ever talked about Was how to keep improvements out; For each one deemed as all his ilk, That learning must be lapped like milk; And those who lapped the largest glasses Were made the prizemen of the classes. Their motto for the school was "Cram," And no one ever was rebuked For plugging till his belly puked The morning after the exam; Though all he learned at such a cost In one upheaval then was lost. It didn't matter what you knew As long as you were safely through. All learning was to them in books And not in skies and running brooks.



And then one came, who gave the youth A thirst for knowledge and for truth;
But scarcely had he sown the germ
When he was warned and then retired,
And someone finished out his term
Who wasn't by the gods inspired.

Each New Year's Day the Cove bestirred And re-elected to the Board A group of rusty men and dames Who all could read and write their names, And who would swear that they had heard Of both Napoleon and the Lord.



Judge Bilk's daughter

Has warm, soft flesh;

It looks like pink rose-leaves

Through her silk mesh.





She wears red garters
With little gold bells;
But Judge Bilk's daughter
In a great house dwells.

If she wore red garters,
That jingled to her walk,
And lived in a small house
How the world would talk!

Judge Bilk's daughter

Is a tempting sight

When she leaves her slip at home

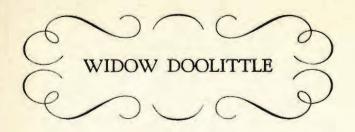
And stands against the light.



Out come telescopes When she walks the beach; Her transparent bathing-suit Grips her like a leech.

Judge Bilk's daughter
Six nights a week
Dances with the gay boys,
Cheek against cheek.

Judge Bilk comes to court
In his great, black cape,
And thunders at a shabby form:
"Twenty years for rape."



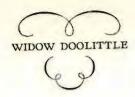
Fair widow Doolittle owned a small store
And by good hard toil kept the wolf from the door.
Her profits just paid for her board and bed
And flowers for the grave of her man who was dead.



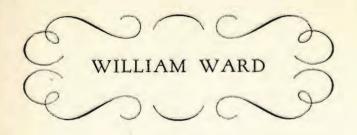


She didn't go here and she didn't go there
For she never had anything fit to wear.
And if she made two-pence on a piece of cloth
She bought good barley and made it into broth;
And she put in the broth her best soup-bone
And sent it around to her neighbor, Mrs. Stone.

Mrs. Stone's husband had rheumatic knees
And only could work when the weather would please
And she had six children to put into bed,
And she seldom had butter to put on their bread.
And fair widow Doolittle, sitting all alone,
Couldn't enjoy her best soup-bone
Or her Sunday roast, as it turned rich brown,
When anyone hungered in the whole wide town.

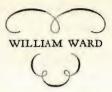


Young Farmer Blackburn, on the Fourth Line Road, Offered to help the fair widow with her load. And she looked with tears at her shabby old hat, But she loved her dead man too much for that. So she went on keeping her trim little store, And her whole life's music is the bell at her door; And if brave Dan Doolittle sees her from the skies He'll have a hard time keeping tears from his eyes.



William Ward
Will not teach again;
The trustees declared
He had too large a brain.





He tried the bank
And failed in this art;
The directors complained
He had too large a heart.

He tried theology,

But couldn't make the goal;

The archbishop decided

He had too large a soul.

But I'm a believer
That our good Lord
Has twenty jobs in Heaven
For William Ward.

He scorns the lovely things that are;
But year by year will gloat
Above the vitals of a car,
The bowels of a boat.

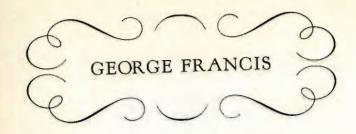




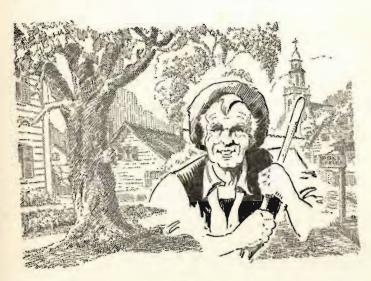
His Heaven and his universe
Are in a cold machine.
All day and night his wits immerse
In oil and gasoline.

The chanting of the marching spheres, Before which angels kneel, Are drowned forever to his ears By gossip of a wheel.

Barabbas—there is hope for him; He was a knave who stole; But this poor dullard black and grim Has slain his living soul.



"Are you a Christian? Do you love Jesus?"
Said an anaemic souled parson of Comber Cove
To old George Francis whose garden wall
Is heavy with roses from May to November,





And whose lawn is so fine a weave of green That but to touch it is to worship God; To old George Francis whose skin is brown As a hazel-nut, and whose eyes are like Clear noondays, and who finds a comradeship In the morning star and the evening star, And in a great pine singing at his door And in the songs of whip-poor-wills at night.

George Francis has red lips and bronze cheeks,
And his laughter is as musical as poplar leaves;
And yet a thin, sallow parson of Comber Cove
Who preached sermons even more sallow than himself,

Said unto him, "Are you a Christian?"



And he of the bronze face answered:
"I am not Christian, nor will ever be;
For Christians are men of war and men of hate;
Christians pass judgments upon other men;
Christians build prisons that destroy the soul;
Christians amass wealth while men hunger;
Christians wear rich apparel while men go naked;
Christians are intolerant, loveless, bigoted.
Therefore I am not Christian, nor ever will be."

And the bronze face smiled in a kindly way
At the sallow parson with the anaemic soul,
Whose blood had been watered by the theology
On the curriculum of his university;



And he continued: "I am not Christian
Because of a Man named Jesus of Nazareth
Who did not hate, who did not believe
In prisons or war or intolerance or bigotry,
Or wealth or rich apparel. He is not Christian,
Nor has been since the fouling of that word;
And if He came to Comber Cove today
He would seek out a place where no Christian
dwelt."

And old George Francis, with his cloudless eyes
And his untroubled mind, leaned on his garden wall.
And when he rested there it was the shoulder of God
He leaned upon; and the reddest rose in his garden
Was not more fragrant than his fragrant soul.

His head was small and strangely formed;
His hands were fat yet cold;
The blood within them never warmed
Till they were touched with gold.

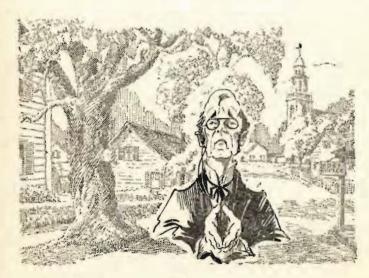


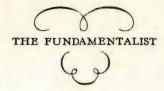


The men and women in his debt
Were sure his heart was stone.
He owned near half the village, yet
His soul he did not own.

And when his death seemed very near His relatives came round And shed great, gushy tears, in fear That he would cheat the ground.

And when at last his soul took wing, And in a grave he slid, All said it was the finest thing The old man ever did. You say it's this or that,
That nothing lies between:
Here is all black and foul;
There is all white and clean.





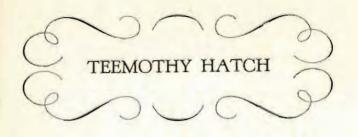
Quick are your tongue's decrees; Your judgments swiftly given: This unto outer darkness, That unto inner Heaven.

Hail to you, masters wise, Who can so well adjust The problems of the skies With your amazing dust.

You say it's this or that,
And measure by one rule
The pathway of the seer,
The roadway of the fool.



And, while your holy host
A faultless record makes,
The snail-like gods move on
Through their divine mistakes.



On the itching back
Of Teemothy Hatch
There was one place
That he couldna scratch.



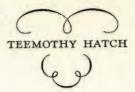


At nicht poor Teem
Would rise and screech
For that itching place
That he couldna reach.

For years the prayers
Of Teemothy Hatch
Were that he might itch
Where he could scratch.

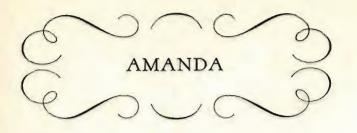
Then he told a Scot,

By the name of Breese,
"Buried in ma back
Is a sheeling piece."

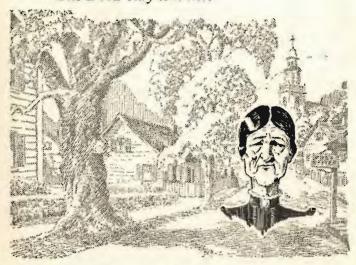


That was lang ago;
Noo his roof's unthatched:
But for forty years
Was his back weel scratched.

73



A wart was on her ugly cheek,
With three hairs in its center.
Her chin went up, her chin went down;
God gave good women to Comber Town
But He didn't give Amanda Brown:
The Devil only lent her.





Her chin went up, her chin went down
As fast as any shuttle.
Her gossip had a cunning art
That always left a broken heart;
There never flew a poisoned dart
So venomous and subtle.

She guzzled tea by cup and pot
And lived on pork and pickles.
Her nose was red and raw and sore;
She scratched her back against the door,
Because the year around she wore
Thick underwear that tickles.



All day she sat and watched the street
From a rocking chair of wicker:
And, after seven pots of tea
Had stained her guts to ebony,
She'd damn to Hell both you and me
For drinking decent liquor.

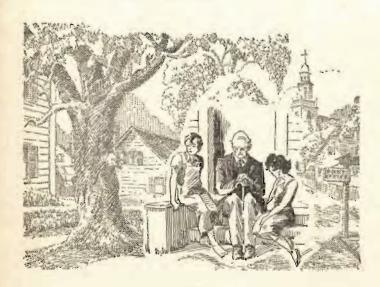
The parson and the deacons too
All praised her good behavior.
She always came to weekly prayer,
With beacon nose and plastered hair,
And forty years she told them there
How well she loved her Savior.



"Amanda Brown of Comber Cove"
The girls in fear would stammer.
And one night ('twas in March, I think)
Her husband took a fiery drink
And led her to the kitchen sink
And killed her with a hammer.



A visitor came to Comber Cove; He was most strangely drest; His coat was smeared so oft it looked Like any palimpsest.



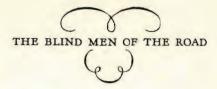


He went into the market place When many were around; And there he told to all how love Could be most fully found.

He bade the village knave forsake
His evil friends and ways,
And go into the synagogue
And pray with him who prays.

And then he bade the village saint To sit at his open door: The village bastard at his right And at his left a whore. After the motor's burning heart,
And wild air screaming by,
I love the sound of a creaking cart
And a horse's whinnying cry.

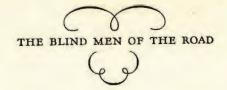




Once travellers moved with thoughtful pace; They saw all things and heard; The script upon the roadway's face, The crying of tree and bird.

Now eyes are glued to white cement, While choric motors sing The goal becomes the whole intent, And speed is lord and king.

The taxies roar, the buses swerve,
The shields are wet with rain;
The blinding lights leap 'round a curve
And deaden eye and brain.



The birches roar, the maples reel, The pines are blurring black; The road is like a crawling eel, With oily, shining back.

Once men had time to note the moon—
A lantern in the trees—
And when their wagons slouched at noon
They heard the drone of bees.

But now, with speed of falling stars, They seek each night's abode: Strange, prisoned men, in flaming cars, And blind men of the road.



Little Arlette

Has most marvelous eyes;

Their blue is the blue

Of the tropical skies.





Little Arlette
Is a girl without guile;
But sometimes one eyelid
Slips down in this style.

It isn't her fault
If the muscles are weak,
In one little eye
And one little cheek.

Nor did it much matter
When young lads in town
Saw pretty Arlette's
Little eyelid slip down.



But one day this maid

Met an old Baptist deacon,

And, to her dismay,

Felt her eye muscles weaken.

"Good day, Deacon Jones,"
The pretty maid cried;
And the deacon lay down
On the sidewalk and died.

Yet pretty Arlette
Is most awfully shy;
And how can she help
That one slip of the eye?



So lads, if a maid
Should wink as you pass,
Don't judge her too harshly,
The poor little lass.

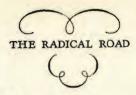
It isn't her fault

If the muscles are weak
In one little eye
And one little cheek.

The reader should wink when the underlined words are spoken.

The Gravel Road is smooth as glass,
And good for sulky, gig or car,
But the Radical Road is thick with grass,
And every road's a jolt and jar.

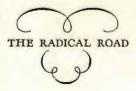




And yet I go the Radical way,
For where it leads is sweet and cool;
And none come ever there to stray
Save some delightful knave or fool:

Some knave who steals the goldenrod And yellow daisies tipped with red; Some fool who spends an hour with God And finds his spirit comforted.

The oak is there in russet gown,
And poplars silver as you pass;
And there the spruce is tinged with brown
That shines at noon like burnished brass.



The Gravel Road is spic and span,
And groomed the lawns along its way;
But the Radical Road is made for man
And not alone for horse and shay.

Along the Great Road, white as chalk, Blind bats are racing after sorrow; But few the Radical Road now walk, And fewer still may come tomorrow.