

Wilson Macdonald

ORDER OF POEMS IN

"The Song of the Undertow"

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Foreword

THIS is more than a poem; it is a confessional of faith. From the first word to the last phrase, save for a word here and there and a transversion of words in conversation, for the sake of rhyme and rhythm, this narrative-poem is true. That I was divinely guided in three great crises, that confronted me in that first vagrant journey of my life, baffles any skepticism which Fate, with its multitudinous contradictions, has since forced upon me.

You may say that it was co-incidence that I met Rev. James T. Houssemayne du Boulay, Mr. and Mrs. S. R. Button, Mrs. Berryman and J. Philip Collins, who one and all received me in such Christ-like spirit. You may be right. There may be no Divinity Who shapes our ends. But I would be a poor gambler if I doubted the evidence given to my own soul in the year 1902.

If this confessional of faith had been published six years ago the critics would have received my evidence with contempt. Many will yet do so because the fad for unbelief is still strong in commercial and academic circles. But it is surely and slowly dying. The pendulum moves strangely. To one generation a man is not a true philosopher unless he has faith, to another he is not a real thinker if he is a believer. One attitude is as nonsensical as the other.

One New York writer advised me, in a paternal way, to avoid the word "God". If I were agnostic to the heart I would not avoid this word. I would use it for the poetic beauty that clings to it. I would use it for the majesty which its utterance brings. I would chant it because the very fibre of its sound is strength to the soul.

The radical of to-day is often more narrow and bigoted than was ever the worst fundamentalist. Many liberals have become fundamentalists in their radicalism. If a writer uses the word "God" they immediately force some church's conception of God

upon that scribe. I may use the word "God" to describe a glorious vision of my own soul which is utterly at variance with any deity of a church or a nation, or of any other individual on earth, and I shall use this majestic word, despite the skeptic's sneer, until my pen lies down beside its finished task.

W. M.

I have been, in my varied career,
view agent, seaman, cabin-boy, bartender
(one night), school-teacher, actor, investor,
producer, playwright, composer, advertisement-
writer, newspaper-reporter, editorial writer,
columnist, banker and poet. When my
poetry would not sell, circumstances forced
these other tasks upon me.

Prelude

OF learning's musty soul may these,
My lines, have not a trace.
For when pale art shall languish here
Red life will take its place;
Any every line will grow divine
From some gaunt human face.

To gain these songs I've bared my breast
To many a wind and rain;
I've walked a wilderness of graves
Wherein my loves lie slain;
I've pierced the core of black and cold,
And drunk the heart of pain.

My arms have felt the undertow
Grip like a serpent's coil.
My back is marked with many a blow
From stinging whips of toil;
And every word I write will show
The smear of grime and soil.

The bar was located on the
north side of Notre Dame Street,
not far west of McGill Street.

The Song of the Undertow

Being a true chronicle, with prelude and aftermath, of events that happened during a sea voyage taken by the author on a horse-boat (the name of which, for evident reasons, I will not divulge) in July of the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and two.

1.

A friendly place is Montreal
Within its charmed retreats.
But Montreal has a ghastly look
To men upon her streets—
To men who march on mocking stone;
The soldiers of defeats.

I marched with these defeated men
In nineteen-hundred-two.
From Champ de Mars to Sherbrooke Street
I wore the pavement through.
And all I drank was loneliness;
And all I ate was rue.

And folk I knew and things I loved
Seemed like pale ghosts afar.
And then I read, on Place Viger,
The "want ads" in the "Star".
And I worked that night on Notre Dame
In an evil-smelling bar.

The proprietor of the bar told me that
I had cleaned the saloon floor better
than anyone had ever cleaned it. I used
a knife to scrape the grime from places
which my predecessors had overlooked,
and the uncovering of the coin was the
result.

Whether writing poetry for The London
Mercury or scrubbing the floors of a
cheap saloon I have given ever my
best effort to the task.

I scrubbed the fevered bar-room floor:
I cleaned each foul spittoon.
I washed the midnight from the rails,
And made them shine like noon;
For the soul is dead that hungers bread,
And any hell's a boon.

Yea, there are times when Hell is sweet
If it can give us bread;
And so, across the mottled floor,
My weary fingers sped;
But all I hated lived that night,
And all I loved lay dead.

I thought of one of wistful face
Whose eyes peered up through time;
And scent of myrrh and flow of lace
Came to me like a rhyme.
And, through my hour of shame, one name
Burned in my heart like lime.

2.

In all the years no lad had groomed
So well this mildewed floor;
And under dirt in wax entombed
I found a coin that bore
The head of England's latest queen
And that gold crown she wore.

The summer previous to this fatal
one was spent in the inspiring
presence of the hills to the north of
Ottawa. The profruity of drunken
men was a poor exchange for
the laughter of moonlit waters at
lovely Kingsmere.

The pool of to-day becomes the
cloud of to-morrow, for moisture
is ever ascending or descending.
Thus a curtain of snow on a mount-
ain summit is often from the collapse
of some unlovely pool.

As wind, that rubs a cloudy moon,
This silver orb I shone.
I made it glow until the gleam
Was good to look upon;
And then I found the metal sound
Nor any value gone.

That night I prayed: "How long, O Lord,
Must I lie prone in dust?
My soul for beauty hath implored,
And lo, these haunts of lust:
In this foul place shall I not grow
Corrupt of moth and rust?"

The answer came in words of flame
That burned in a living scroll:
"Though Truth shall tread the hall of shame
Her coffers pay no toll.
Behold on this thy monarch's name:
Wear Mine upon your soul.

"I wash my stars in gloomy clouds
That they may brighter glow.
In twilight pools my weavers dream
Pale tapestries of snow—
Pale curtains that at dawn will hang
Where mountain breezes blow."

You will not recognize this
description in the Notre Dame
Street of to-day.

3.

Broken with toil that hideous night
I slept on a sullen bed;
And if I dreamed in my strange sleep
It was a dream of bread;
Or if I dreamed that night of God
I dreamed that He was dead.

Black are those days that yawn between
The Cross and Open Tomb;
For every soul who mounts to Christ
Sleepeth three days of doom;
And in this winter lies the seed
Of joy's eternal bloom.

4.

Notre Dame is a narrow street
Where petty commerce plays;
And there are haunts on Notre Dame
That match its narrow ways;
And in these haunts 'tis often hard
To find a man who prays.

In Nineteen-two the street was loud
With bacchanalian cries;
For here came men of every race
That roam beneath the skies—
Great men with hair like yellow dawn,
And men with midnight eyes.

Some drank to make remembrance clear;
And some drank to forget;
And some confessed, as to a priest,
Before each man they met;
For a bar is a strange confessional
In a priestless abbey set.

5.

I rose at dawn and once again
I scrubbed that bar-room floor.
If it could be I think the planks
Were fouler than before;
Or they but fouler seemed because
Light billowed through the door.

But what is golden light to men
In haunts of Notre Dame!
They only know the jaundiced glow
Of yellow miles of flame;
And all their windows hide the light
Lest it reveal their shame.

From water, mop and brush I rose
And made the tankards white;
With foaming ale I offered bail
From trouble's long despite;
With brown, Barbadoes rum I gave
A lethe-born delight.

This lovely June morning was
riotous with sunshine.

I walked and ran alternately
until I was in the heart of a wood
on the summit of Mount Royal.
On my way I passed that palatial
hotel, The Windsor, and my path
to the mountain-top was that
trail which skirts the western
boundary of The Hillar Estate,

The flash of the Lachine Rapids,
and the ever blue-misted mountain,
St Hilaire, can be seen in one grand
sweep of the eye from Mount Royal.
The battling spirit of the one and
the serenity of the other are in fine
contrast.

I was a barman for an hour,
And might have made it two,
Had not an open door revealed
The fenceless fields of blue;
And through that tavern's door I fled
To hills of burning dew.

6.

In twenty minutes one may stroll
From granite Notre Dame
To mountain roads that take at dawn
The sun's first holy flame.
And on these roads I drank of light
That from God's wine-press came.

And there, on galleons of the wind,
I shipped my bales of care;
And put a cargo on my soul
Which you, in song, now share:
The dancing silver of Lachine,
The blue of Saint Hilaire.

In one high moment love was born
For that great town below.
Her domes were beautiful with light,
And shone like burning snow;
And splendid seas of billowing green
Rolled over her haunts of woe.

Although I was perilous when these
noon bells rang I was supremely happy
for I had at least one loaf of which
Mahomet speaks — the loaf of beauty.
The exaltation of this hour is still,
and ever will be, a beatification of a
face of water-bleeding rock beside one
mountain road. And often in my later
and more prosperous hours have I
come here to worship.

The noon bells rang and I could feel
My pockets clean and bare.
It seemed an age of time to me
Since silver had been there.
But who had need of script or gold
Upon God's altar-stair?

I never bought a thing with gold
That made my pulses leap.
I never bought with gold a thing
That made me laugh or weep.
With yellow gold you cannot buy
What any man may keep.

7.

The sap of life, to gain her leaf,
Must pass through many gnarls;
And that same summer's afternoon
I peddled in St. Charles;
And took a hawker's slamming doors,
And all his jeers and snarls.

I made enough, twixt one and six,
To buy three meals or more.
But every time I rang the bell,
On some reluctant door,
An acid ate into my heart
And burned it to the core.

Sometimes these crews for horse
and cattle boats are recruited entirely
from college students and the advertise-
ment read: "Wanted college students
and others to work their way to England
on a horse-boat. Good pay and return fare."

I had attended college and university
and when I applied for the sea voyage
I mourned over the predominance of
tramps and uneducated men and the
scarcity of students. But when I was
well at sea my grief was reversed for
the four college students were well-equipped
with money and came with no intention of
working but rather to boast of their adventures.
My life-long hate has been snobbishness
and these students were snobs beyond
the painting of brush or pen. I hope this
tribute to them comes to their notice.

Many years later in this same city of
Montreal I spent several delightful hours
with His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales
a man as delightfully without snobbish-
ness as could be found in all the earth.

One year before my clothes were made
To fashion's last decree;
One year before I loved a girl
Who gave her love to me.
And I was glad she was not here
Her peddler-friend to see.

But He who knows a poet's path,
Ere the strong muse is won,
Must pass through caverns, cold with shade,
And vales bereft of sun,
Looked on a barman for an hour
And saw these lines begun.

8.

At ten o'clock a stout man toyed
With a dangling yellow chain,
As he signed up men to go to sea
With horses, hay and grain.
But none who ever signed his scroll
Will sign such script again.

I came to him as timidly
As a man about to wed.
The nineteenth man was I in line,
With eighteen tramps ahead.
And when the stout man scrawled my name
My heart was pumping lead.

The exporters of the horses or the
steamship company supplied no food
during our journey by train from
Montreal to St John. We, who had
no money, had a long, foodless ride.
At Sherbrooke we were ordered to
leave the caboose and ride on the
train's roof. I had neither vest nor
overcoat, so I had pawned almost
everything I possessed and in my
weakened state I would have fallen
from the train but for the sturdy arm
of Bill McCord. The name "McCord" I
have supplied for I do not remember
his other name. To me he was always
Bill and he had as fine a soul as any
king or seer or vagabond in the world.
His first words to me on that fateful
voyage were: "You'll need a friend
among these roughnecks and I am
going to be that friend. I liked you, lad,
the moment I saw you." And Bill
kept his word.

His pen caught up the twenty tramps
Without a smile or sigh;
But as he wrote my name I saw
The human in his eye.
"You're different lad," was all he said
When I went slowly by.

I saw my contract had me doomed
To twelve long days at sea—
A groom of horses, and my pay
A vagabond's poor fee.
But anywhere save Montreal
Seemed paradise to me.

9.

From Point St. Charles on an afternoon
Our horse-train pulled away.
And in a red caboose a score
Of sprawling hostlers lay.
And some had food, to ease their ride;
And some had none that day.

At Sherbrooke came a cold command
To ride the roofs 'till morn.
And we climbed up and watched the moon
Blowing her silver horn.
But like these bucking cars we rode
Was never broncho born.

As if to mock our piteous plight,
The night grew loud with rain.
And we had fingers red with blood,
That stained our plunging train.
Yet all the night, like cavalry-men
We rode the woods of Maine.

We moved between two dark-gowned choirs
Of softly crooning cones.
And where the banks were high we heard
The hollow cry of stones.
And all the while great raindrops played
A tattoo on my bones.

The engine leaped, the engine veered
Behind her tongue of light.
And each car echoed back her cry
Across the startled night.
And dripping trees rolled down the breeze
In sympathetic flight.

An aching smote my tongue and throat,
And knives were in my back.
My hands grew numb; and when the train
Would plunge upon her track
My body felt as if I lay
Upon a martyr's rack.

And then a daring star flew out,
Like a stone from David's sling,
And put those giant clouds to rout,
And all my woes awing;
And that Goliath of the storm
Lay, a defeated thing.

10.

Those hours are graved upon my soul
With Time's unfading stamp;
The rolling trees, the smoky breeze
And the brakeman with his lamp,
And mile by mile, the homely smile
Of Bill McCord, the tramp.

Bill sat between me and the wind,
And kept me from the cold;
For he who loves can understand,
Nor needs he to be told.
And Bill knew I was frail of flesh;
And I knew Bill was gold.

The horses, on that doleful ride,
In stalls were snug and warm;
And they were fed; while overhead,
Out in that blinding storm,
In rags arrayed, were men God made
After His own fair form.

These berries were my only food
during the entire journey from Sher-
brooke to St John — a long voyage
on a slow freight train.
I motored through Jackman in my
own car in July of the year 1933.
For the first time in thirty-one years
I saw the station platform along
which I walked in my vagabond
pilgrimage of 1900. I was on
my way to lecture in a great American
university — I, the tramp who was so
feared by a tourist maid in a friendless
hour of life.

We, sniveling mortals, weep great tears
At sight of a starving bitch;
But we never throw a swilling sow
In a prison black as pitch;
For dogs may sell for fifty pounds,
And hogs in lard are rich.

11.

Maine is a land of lonely miles;
But in her savage hills
There is a cure the townsmen find
For all their griefs and ills;
The anodyne of spruce and pine
And the songs of whip-poor-wills.

At Jackman of the singing-lakes
We broke our foodless ride
On berries lovely as a gift
Of a bridegroom to his bride.
They hung like a rich tapestry
Against a warm hillside.

And I knew well that Bridegroom's name:
It was heard in Galilee;
And it is cool in a sailor's ears
When there are storms at sea;
And in the fragrant woods of Maine
Its sound was sweet to me.

This maid and her attentive
brother were on their way to
Moosehead Lake or to one of
the numerous lakes around
the water-fringed, French village
of Jackman.

I ate my meal like a sacrament:
And the place shall ever stand
To tell that hour when the Master came
And served me with His hand.
And it will be forever to me
A chancel in the land.

12.

After that feast I braved the town:
Ragged and weak I came;
And passed a maid whose winnowing hair
Played on her head like flame.
And she looked at me as if poverty
Were a badge of sin and shame.

Her brother stood—a watchful guard
Lest I should come too near.
His face was weak as coddled milk;
Yet he had travelled here
With knife and gun and silver rod
To fill the woods with fear.

This tailored boy was in this land
That living things should die;
And I, he feared, was but a lad
Who loved each woodland cry;
But he was garbed in Stirling tweeds
And sadly dressed was I.

Was it two years or ages past
 I pressed against my heart
 A lovely maid, who like the wind,
 Moved with unconscious art;
 And who, if she had seen me now,
 Might too have drawn apart.

With six day's beard upon my face,
 To mate these hours of woe,
 Yea, even she, who loved me once,
 To hate me now might grow.
 And then I felt a great, cold fear
 That this might still be so.

And it was true, in after years
 When home I, drifting, came,
 Without the beauty of my youth
 Or pot of gold or fame,
 That, with a lip as cold as snow,
 I heard her speak my name.

Some men have gold; and I have none,
 Some have a heart in fee;
 But I have neither maid to love
 Nor children at my knee.
 And still my heart is full of song,
 Even as the barren sea.

New Brunswick hath a centaur's soul:
 It is both tame and wild.
 A savage spirit haunts it here,
 And there it is a child.
 And by its thousand timid lakes
 The boldest rocks are piled.

I saw her lovely woods at dawn;
 And over all the land
 Legions of pine and cedar strode,
 As numberless as the sand:
 Great legions that will bow in death
 Some day at man's command.

At last the marching legions ceased;
 And the world with grain was gold;
 And spire and house and town appeared;
 And bells in the churches tolled.
 And then before my Balboan eyes
 The ancient sea unrolled.

The hoarse wheels groaned and stopped, and I
 Fled wildly to the shore;
 I fled from tongues, that raped sweet words,
 To the ocean's clean-voiced roar.
 And I heard a word that Enoch heard
 Through Heaven's opened door.

Theodore Harding Rand was born in Nova Scotia and the Atlantic sea-coast from St John to Halifax is redolent of his song. He was a fine poet, a profound scholar, and his purity of soul has been seldom matched in Canadian letters. His poem "The Dragonfly" is one of the great poems in the English Tradition of Song.

Blomidon is a mountain in the land of the Acadians.

And there I sang the rhymes of Rand,
The bard of Blomidon;
And all I loved had life again,
And all my woes were gone.
And all the suns that I had lost
In this high noonday shone.

15.

Each churchman has his little god;
And comic gods are they;
But in this Temple-by-the-Sea,
Where ceaseless organs play,
The Priest is that eternal Love
The creeds have cast away.

I've found three stairs that lead to God—
One at my mother's knee,
And one amid the silent hills,
With steps of porphyry,
And one, a spiral way of light
That rises from the sea.

The tang of salt is in my soul;
And, if you press your ear
Against my heart, the wash of long
Green billows you will hear.
And, inland though I dwell, that rune
Grows louder, year by year.

One of the seemingly trite lines in
my narrative is the second line of
this verse: "And thrice a day we ate."

By him alone who has hungered
will this line be understood. To him
these words will etch the pathos of
humanity's unfortunates. It had been
a long time since I and many of my
comrades had eaten thrice a day.
There is exultation in the line.

I hate a soul word at any
time or in any place but by the
sea or in a wood a lecherous
word or thought is like an
eclipse over the face of beauty.

In Europe or Asia you seldom
encounter any one who sneers
at beauty. In America there is
a great host with this color blindness
of the soul.

It is a slow, liturgic sound
That mocks our fevered times.
It flows within the artist's dyes
And in the poet's rhymes.
It calls the scattered hosts of love
With universal chimes.

16.

Three days we stayed in gray St. John,
And thrice a day we ate;
And while my comrades searched the town
I turned another gate;
But one great bully dogged my path
As though his steps were Fate.

He was a raucous termagant
Who hated man and beast.
His curse was for the Nazarene,
And the Roofless Temple's Priest;
And he came like an unbidden guest
To scoff at those who feast.

His sneer was on my feast of sea,
Drunk down with the wine of noon;
And he followed me when the tide was out
To meet a vanished moon;
And his boasts were timbrels that destroyed
The ocean's lonely croon.

I chose this bed rather than
sleep in a room with several men.

Carleton is across the bay
from St John. Our nomad company
were quartered in the gray, wind-
washed hostelry of this place. On
our arrival we were told that food
would not be supplied until we boarded
ship - three days hence. After two
foodless days this news was maddening
and the men, with one or two exceptions,
became violent. A riot was impending
and the ravenous company which employed
us became alarmed and provided meals
for all.

My faith in men grows less and
less every year, but my faith in
man grows stronger. Men are
destroyers: man is a redeemer.

But there was coming soon a day
When I that sneer would smite.
But here the winds were sweet and clean;
The sands were linen-white;
And on this sacramental cloth
What man would dare to fight.

17.

At night I slept on chairs arow
In Carleton's grim hotel.
And a harder bed was never spread
By the chamber-maids of Hell.
The place from rum and nicotine
Had a mausoleum's smell.

But every night, to dim my light,
A gray old seaman trod
That inn's dark stair, and he had hair
Like the white, milkweed's pod.
A friend of man was he, and thus
He was a friend of God.

He came to me with oaten cakes
And a goblet warm with cream;
And when he came the walls around
Another place did seem;
And many a time has he come back
In the beauty of a dream.

It is hard to describe the
elusive fascination of St John.
Situating on an almost barren
hill the city however has an
intriguing personality, and
about the city and far beyond lies
a wilderness of lakes, towns, farms
and forest of indescribable loveliness.

Perhaps to-night his bed is made
Under the lonely sky.
And if it is I'd know the place
From angels passing by;
Or where the winds of morning pause
And breathe a deeper sigh.

18.

St. John is built upon a rock,
And very few her trees.
But on her face the Sanskrit lies
Of many an ancient breeze.
And there is something in her eyes
Drawn from the seven seas.

Her harbor is a host of spires:
And, if you there should stray,
You'd think the woods of Restigouche
Had wandered down that way;
And lost their frocks beside the docks,
And so were forced to stay.

The morning breeze along her quays
Is keen with oil and tar,
And ropes that coil like yellow snakes
To leap at the morning star,
And resinoids, insured at Lloyds,
And spices from afar.

The horses in our care were bound
for South Africa and during the voyage
to England we took our commands
from an English army-officer.

In the government investigation
of this and sister ships of the company,
under whose command we sailed the
report was one of the most devastating
issued since the days of piracy. I
doubt whether fouler vessels ever rode
the seas.

I love to stroll and ease my soul
Along each brimming quay,
Where cargoes, like a crazy quilt,
Are spread around to see:
Lemons from Spain and bags of grain,
And nuts from a tall palm tree.

19.

We sailed away on a summer's day
With the horses all on board.
And it seemed to me the land I left
Was bound to me with a cord,
Which I must break for my belly's sake-
For my belly's sake, O Lord.

Over the rail of our grim ship
I watched the fading land.
And then I heard, like the hiss of steam,
An officer's hot command.
And I went down to a charnel-house
Which a devil's soul had planned.

But as I went in a dumb, cold way
The spirit within me sank,
As in a dream I often seem
To fall from an endless bank.
And a fox's gut has never smelled
As bad as our cabin stank.

Howe was one of Nova Scotia's
greatest politicians. He came
nearer to statesmanship than
any of his contemporaries

We passed the land of Howe and Rand,
And dipped in a great, gray fog.
And soon I knew why a vessel's crew
Is keen for a whiff of grog.
And I learned a bit of the things not writ
In a cautious seaman's log.

20.

A snob is bad, yo heave my lad,
But a college snob is worse.
And we had four, yo heave once more,
And each had a well-filled purse.
And one and all at night would bawl
For Jenny, the family nurse.

They bribed the cook and lived apart,
Each like a little lord;
A chancleer's grandiloquence
Within their small heads stored.
But when they puked they looked as meek
As any man on board.

I have no hatred in my heart;
I would do no man wrong,
But to see those scented snobs upheave
Was sweet to me as a song;
And the sight was like a holiday
To our uncultured throng.

I found a centipede under
the pillow on my bunk.

A family tree is a pretty thing
And ancestors are fine;
'Tis good to pose in genteel clothes;
But when the breezes whine
Both tramp and earl alike will hurl
Their breakfast in the brine.

21.

Our berths were narrow, hard and damp,
And six were to a wall.
And we would waken when some rat
Along our limbs would crawl.
And darkness lay against our throats
And choked us like a shawl.

The breath of seamen dead and gone
Was in that cabin's air.
And on our beds were deathless lice
That once were in their hair.
And bloated spiders, venom-ripe,
And centipedes were there.

Old vomit, hard with time, was caked
Upon the walls and floor;
So foul was it the horses' dung
Seemed perfume through the door.
And, day by day, that vile ship lay
On the ocean like a sore.

22.

A sorry face had Bill McCord,
The scare-crow of that crew;
And yet, when he would smile, it seemed
The dawn was breaking through;
And seven day's beard upon his cheeks
Could not that smile undo.

As dismal earthen pots, that hide
The hue of crimson wine,
Prove outward forms do oft deride
The temple's inner shrine,
His visage grim and laggard limb
Belied his soul's design.

He wore a cap of woolen gray
And tawdry overalls;
Yet all the horses at his step
Would whinny in their stalls.
His way was rough and his manner bluff;
But his mark was Tattersalls.

23.

I was a lad of lonely ways,
Nor was I stout of limb;
And so the bullies hurled at me
Their jestings coarse and grim;
But through their taunts the voice of Bill
Consoled me like a hymn.

On the day of this encounter I
weighed less than 120 pounds.
I felt however, with Terzysor:
"My strength is as the strength
of ten because my cause is just."
At the conclusion of the fight
I was covered with blood from a
hemorrhage of the lungs.

There were three braggarts on our boat—
Two large ones and a small;
And though a fever burned my throat,
And my walk was like a crawl,
I knew that, ere the ship should land,
I'd fight them one or all.

A healthy man three times may fight
And go to church next day;
But when a cough wails in the breast,
Like a gloomy roundelay,
A man will fight but once, for that
Will be a bloody fray.

One braggart had a sturdy frame
And pasty skin, like rice;
And he would taunt me like a fiend
Or mock me with advice.
And every time he passed, my heart
Grew like a block of ice.

And once his fist came crashing out,
And I went down, and rose;
And all the pity in my heart
In one cold moment froze.
And like a tropic storm came down
The fury of my blows.

In the year 1900 I knew as
little about a horse as possibly
anyone on earth. I could handle
a canoe with a voyageur's hand,
but I was no more competent
to feed a horse than would our
batchelor premiers King or Bennett
be competent to feed the quirtuplets.
The horse seemed to surmise my
equine ignorance and I fancied
they looked on me in disdain.

My strength in that wild moment broke
The spirit of his brawn,
And when I touched him I was glad
The evil bout was on;
And I fought like a wounded thing
Until his boasts were gone.

And then I heard the victor's cheers
For clay had conquered clay.
And this was music in my ears
On such a friendless day.
But in my triumph there were tears
That I must win this way.

24.

But there was work upon that ship
Both sick and well must do;
And ten great mares to feed, who ate
Until their snouts were blue.
Since then I've seen nor horse nor man
That ate the whole day through.

A year before my feet had done
A century in ten.
But there was no place now to run;
And so, before all men,
I swore I would never a valet be
To any horse again.

Seasick, and weak from loss of blood,
I stole away from that hell-centre of
horse and man, and lay, for one
divine moment, in a dark refuge near
the ship's boilers.

They handed me a curry-comb,
And I was in despair
Whether to brush the horse's teeth
Or comb and braid its hair.
But when my breakfast left my throat
Damn little did I care.

25.

The foreman cursed me in that hour
For he was made of stone;
And every word was like a dirk
That stabbed me to the bone.
Yet I dared his wrath for the anodyne
Of a healing hour, alone.

I hid beside the engine room
And drowsed upon the floor,
Where I could hear a throbbing heart
Over the sea's wild roar;
And I dreamed my pillow was the sand
On a white Ontario shore.

O peace of Christ to be alone!
But brief that peace I knew;
For near me, in the swaying dark,
A giant stoker drew.
And I pulled up my legs to let
His hulk of carcass through.

I have heard the choicest prophanity
of archers, soldiers and seamen, but
this stoker so far surpassed them
all, that, could I remember his words,
they would undoubtedly be preserved as
classic utterances to confound the
blasphemers for all ages to be.

But he tripped hard upon my feet
And in the darkness sprawled;
And when he rose I felt his words,
Like molten metal, scald;
And back to vomit, rats and lice
Like a lost soul I crawled.

And there I lay and heard the sea
Leap at this choking vault.
And though I called like Joshua,
Yet not a wave would halt;
But rose to blot the port-holes out
And leave them oozing salt.

A hundred devils banged my head
And both my lungs were sore,
As I lay counting bottle-flies
Upon the creaking door,
While ten sick men from lousy beds
Heaved slime across the floor.

You who have sailed on polished decks,
In cabins sweet and clean,
Where all the horrors of a ship
Are hidden by a screen,
Will never understand my woe
Nor know what it can mean.

A table about six feet in length,
occupied the centre of our cabin.
A space of two feet separated this
festive board from our couches of
vermiz. At the end of the table
stood a tank of marmalade which
was never covered and which
remained in this place during the
entire voyage. Spoons dripping
with saliva were thrust into this
jellied mass, and the spray from
vomiting men found lodgement on
its surface.

For when things crawl along the wall,
Like vermin in a hearse,
That endless sea of heaving green
Swells skyward like a curse;
And drops as though no stable thing
Were in the universe.

One sick man in a room is bad,
And two is damner still,
But ten sick men, in loathsome beds,
Like farmers throwing swill,
Will make, with none to clean the mess,
The bravest stomach spill.

26.

Upon a table sheathed with grime,
Where bluish flies did wade,
There stood within this cabin of Hell
A tank of marmalade;
And round it knives and forks of tin
And pewter plates were laid.

The doors were smeared with marmalade:
Its mark was everywhere.
We slid in it along the floor,
And combed it from our hair;
And even now an orange peel
Can give my soul despair.

The warden of West Virginia's
penitentiary once showed me
around his College of Crime. In
the prison dining-room bread was
tossed to the convicts as one
might toss food to beasts in a
Zoo. But on this vessel bread
was tossed to us as callously as
it was ever thrown in any prison.

Sometimes they poured us greasy soup
Out of a high, tin pail;
Or threw us bread as I have seen
Them throwing bread in gaol.
And this is truth, and not, my friends,
An ugly fairy tale.

Since then I've never wondered why
The winds so sadly croon;
Or why that rising curve of sea
Sinks downward in a swoon;
Or why there's such a bloodless look
Upon the staring moon.

27.

When I was but a little lad
I loved to swing me high.
And when I felt an inward qualm
I'd "let the old cat die."
But he who swings the heaving waves
To stop in vain will cry.

So high these swelling waters rose
They blurred the light of Mars;
And swept the lesser charioteers
Out of their silver cars.
And, when the storm was past, the sea
Was filled with fallen stars.

Not all the bards of deathless song,
In one tremendous blast,
Could hymn that glory of the sea
After the storm hath passed.
God grant the wind-tossed souls of men
Know such a peace at last.

On land the flowers have single souls;
But here the flowers are one.
On land the trees have each a song
To chant the march of sun;
But here the song is communal,
Nor finished nor begun.

The wise man mirrors like the deep
All beauty that he sees;
His face is lighted up with stars;
His soul reflects the trees;
And there's a song within his heart
For every bitter breeze.

28.

Three days I lay in that foul room
And breathed its lifeless breath.
Three days I heard the wild winds taunt
The ocean's shibboleth.
And for three long days I raved at life
And praised the face of death.

Four suns went down and I arose
With all my fever gone.
And though each chamber of my soul
Warmed with a flooding dawn,
Yet England seemed a blessed word
As the grim ship sailed on.

That night I took a shadowy way
Past the keen watchman's eyes,
And crept on the forbidden deck,
And wrapped the healing skies
About me like a jewelled cloak
Still warm with crimson dyes.

The stars were bright in Heaven's bowl,
Like bubbles in a cup;
For the great Master of the House
Had drunk the Sun's wine up.
And I said "Lord, what Thou hast left
Is good for me to sup."

That doleful cabin down below
Seemed now a dream to me.
Beneath this sky it was not true
That such a hell could be;
Or, after lousy men, the gods
Would toss me Heaven's key.

I fell in utter exhaustion as I was working and when threatened with irons I told the officer that I preferred prison to my hellish cabin. So upon my signing my release from pay I was allowed to lie under a life-boat upon the deck. This was only granted because it was feared I might succumb, and this would mean an investigation of conditions on the vessel.

But as I washed in space my cares,
Or hurled them overboard,
I heard the whisper of my name
Drive through me like a sword;
And, looking round, I met the grin
Of faithful Bill McCord.

Bill's mouth was full of broken teeth,
And he had grass-like hair,
And, when he grinned, his flapping ears
Drove beauty to despair.
And yet no maiden's smile to me
Seemed ever half so fair.

When on your ears the woes of life
Sound like the crash of doom,
Some humble soul, like Bill McCord
Will wander through the gloom,
And straightway mend your broken faith
Upon a golden loom.

29.

Two days from land I went on strike,
For a fever burned my breast;
Nor oath nor threat was able to get
Me down to that vermin-nest.
And the wage to come at my journey's end
I gave for a lease to rest.

I covered my flesh with a shawl of air,
As clean as the dawn is clean;
And pillowed my head on a drift of light,
And feasted on blue and green.
And the sun came up and the sun went down
Like a giant tangerine.

My food was served on a silver plate;
My cup had a golden band;
And I slept on deck, through Olympian hours,
By the lotus breezes fanned;
And at seven bells of the second morn
I heard the cry of land.

From a cabin's ease you hear this cry
With a calm and mild delight;
But when you look from a tramp-boat's deck
There is holiness in the sight.
So I bared my head and I felt ashamed
That my garments were not white.

Then Ireland grew from a shadowy form;
And the strength of hills uprose;
And I beheld as lovely a green
As a leaf in April knows;
And it grew in beauty as a bud,
In the golden summer, grows.

The green of Ireland marks the soul
 With a never-dying stain.
 It is the child of wistful suns
 And slow, caressing rain.
 And none who love this living green
 Can love so well again.

The storied tale of this land of song
 Can never be told in years.
 It is the tale of a bacchanal
 With a thirst for smiles and tears.
 And a beating heart is the only throb
 Of the timepiece Ireland hears.

O land where knaves are rare, and fools
 On every hand abound:
 Strange fools who love a poet's song
 More than the guinea's sound.
 God grant we all become such fools
 As those in Erin found.

The wit of Ireland is the bead
 On the wine of mortal man;
 And it winks and purrs in every glass
 From Limerick to Soudan.
 It is quick and sharp as an Arab's sword,
 And soft as a Persian fan.

David Copperfield
Lorna Doone and
Wuthering Heights
are my three favorite
English novels.

Henry Vaughan's elegy, "Friends
in Paradise," is, in my opinion, one
of the noblest utterances of all time.
When I wandered along country
roads, in these vagabondian days
of life, this poem lay often like a
sweet morsel on my lips.

Fair is the poplar's silver green,
And the green of pine on frost;
And lovely the green of a meadowland,
And the green of rocks when mossed;
But Ireland's green came out of a tube
Which the Lord of Colors lost.

31.

We crossed that sea whose lusty breath
Has ruined many a sail.
And at the cool of dawn I leaned
Against the ship's cold rail,
And saw the cliffs of England rise,
Austere, serene and pale.

Like some white forehead, hiding thought
These splendid cliffs uprose;
High symbols of a nation's strength,
A people's fine repose;
And changeless as the English heart
Through every wind that blows.

Here was the land of "Wuthering Heights",
And Shelley, Keats and Vaughan;
And here came Browning with a song
That wakened men like dawn;
And here the Gypsy Scholar walked
In England's Avalon.

So long have I loved Lycidas it
now seems to be a very part of my
own soul.

The elusive loveliness and
wistfulness of the "Lucy" poems
of Wordsworth make them to me
more satisfying than any other
love poems in our language.

I first read "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"
as I walked a country roadside just above
Harrowsmith, Canada, and my ecstasy
was so great that I wept. One of the
loveliest "arcs" in literature is in this poem
"and her eyes were wild. And 'palely lolling'"
is a veritable bugle-cry to my soul.

My favorite English poems at this
time of my life were, "Imitations
or Immortality", Wordsworth; "Friends
in Paradise", Vaughan; "In the Downhill
of Life", Collins; "Ode to a Nightingale"
and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Keats;
"The Dragonfly" and "Song Waves",
Rand; "Lycidas", Milton; "The Elegy",
Gray; and the "Lucy" poems of
Wordsworth. In the passing of
the years I have added greatly to
this treasure house, nor have I
forsaken any of my early loves.

And here — the moors of Lorna Doone;
And here was Hardy's coast;
And from a distant English town
I heard Micawber's boast;
And Shakespeare's glory welcomed me,
And Dickens was my host.

I saw fair Lucy far afield —
"A violet by a stone."
It seemed to me she long had been
A sweetheart of my own.
And then I wept for Lycidas,
And heard La Belle "make moan."

"Is Barkis willin' yet?" I asked,
"Yea willin' as of old."
"Who lights the fires in Chelsea, now;
Or is the hearthstone cold?"
"My lad, the Sage has gone to lands
Where women never scold."

32.

A gentle wind came up behind
And blessed us in our flight.
And I never knew a sky so blue
Or a sea of such delight.
And then that port of gentle winds,
Southampton, hove in sight.

At fall of dark our weary barque
Crawled up along a pier.
And ropes leaped out and hawsers groaned
Sweet discord on the ear.
But time dragged slow as a logger's chain,
And each minute seemed a year.

And while I stood, as a bird that sees
The doors of his cage flung wide,
There came command we were not to land
'Till the Monday morning tide.
And forty hours seemed as forty years
After our ghastly ride.

'Twas Saturday night; but now it was
For me the grave of hope;
And crazed for fragrant grass and leaf,
As fiends are crazed for dope,
With rebel hands I climbed to shore
On a valiant strand of rope.

Swiftly I ran the salted boards
Until I found sweet earth:
And at its touch I learned again
What life and love were worth.
And things I thought forever dead
Had now a second birth.

I do not know where Bill "McCord"
now dwells but I am saving for him
a deluxe edition of this poem. May
he claim it soon.

33.

Along that rope once more I crawled,
And fooled the watchman's eye.
And all night long the lazy hours
With feet of lead went by.
But dawn came up with a lighter foot
And the wind with a sweeter cry.

My hair was long; my eyes were red;
My clothes to rags were torn;
My toes came through each rotting shoe;
I was a thing outworn,
When my discharge from that devil's barge
I got that Monday morn.

They gave us scripts to take us back
From England home again.
And in a hopeless hour, I sold
My pass for two and ten;
And said farewell to Bill McCord,
One of God's noblemen.

Adieu, dear Bill; some day, perchance,
In life's less fevered climes,
You'll know the vagabond you loved,
In those most evil times,
Had made that love a deathless thing
Within a book of rhymes.

In 1902 the low-priced English barbers used none of those embellishments which an American barber bestows upon you. This tonsorial artist cut my hair so closely that I resembled a convict headed for Devil's Island. However I noted that many respectable citizens had their heads thus cropped.

The most brutal man I had encountered up to this time of my life was this Southampton physician.

34.

I shed my rags and bought new clothes;
A barber trimmed my hair;
And shaved me as you mow the grass;
And turned me then and there
From a vagabond to a jaunty youth
With a manner debonair.

And then I searched for work, nor cared
What fee this work might bring:
Dishwasher, scrubman, scavenger —
I pled for anything.
But of my worth, I had no script
From scholar, knave or king.

A reference is England's food,
And scoundrels know this well;
For only a man who comes referred
Can labor or buy or sell.
And lucky is he with a reference
From the lowest imp in Hell.

I walked all day Southampton's stone,
Till heart and feet were sore,
When on a surgeon's card I read:
"Wanted, a lad to chore."
I rang the bell and faced a man
With manners of a whore.

The braggart saw my curling lips:
The savage west was there —
The land where kings and coronets
Are less than the desert air.
"Your grace" said I, with mocking bow
And the devil in my stare.

35.

A poet knows one awful dread;
It meets him at each door;
It is a ghost that calls for bread,
And calls for evermore.
And it walks at night about his bed
And creaks upon the floor.

I've sung an hundred songs for men,
But still that ghost is here
To freeze the current of my pen
And frost my songs with fear.
At dawn's cold light and deep at night
Its form is ever near.

Three days I searched in vain for work;
And then the ghost came back;
And night and morn, with looks forlorn,
It hung upon my track;
And it held a shroud before my eyes,
And a suit of deepest black.

I pawned my cuff links and
bought a pint of milk and a box
of shredded wheat biscuits and
no seven-course meal at a
Riccadilly restaurant ever tasted
so good as did this simple repast.
After the meal I had two pennies
left.

And one dark night I battled it:
It was a hideous wraith.
It wrapped its arms my soul about
And wrestled with my faith.
It choked in me the joyful shout
Of what the spirit saith.

It dragged me down a lonely street;
And over me did gloat;
And I could see it had my eyes
And wore my shoes and coat,
Whereon, in rage, my fingers closed
Like coils about its throat.

I left the wraith, and back to town
I tramped on stone and board;
And pawned a trinket, and knelt down
In thanks unto the Lord.
And then I fed on milk and bread
Until I was restored.

36.

I rose next morn to meet the sun
And tossed two pennies down;
And both came head, and so I said:
"I'll walk to London town,
And meet the king and greet the earls
And statesmen of renown."

This is an age of doubt—not the
beautiful doubt of Hardy but the
slippart doubt of shallow reasoning.
The summit of this peak of agnosticism
was reached in 1929.
To-day the enduring litterateurs are
groping for a new faith—something
infinitely lovelier than the blind faith
of many of our ancestors. That some
great force did direct me in three
great moments of distress, as I wan-
dered alone through England in my boy-
hood, I believe with an unshakeable faith.

With twopence in my hand I plunged
In England's gloom of trees;
And multitudinous delights
Were on the scented breeze.
The world was like a treasure house
And I had all the keys.

At noon I gave my last poor coin
For water, cheese and bread;
And wondered where I'd eat at night
And where I'd find a bed.
But when I rose to go I felt
My hand by Someone led.

And then I turned my pockets out;
And they were clean and bare;
But I had slain my wraith of doubt,
And throttled my despair;
And I was rich, for all about
Was England's fragrant air.

I never bought a thing with gold
That made my pulses leap.
I never bought with gold a thing
That made me laugh or weep.
With yellow gold you cannot buy
Song of sea, or the blue of sky;
With yellow gold you cannot buy
What any man may keep.

This girl, with English eyes,
dwelt in a cottage on the right-
hand side of the road to
London, midway between
Southampton and Winchester.

You cannot buy the poet's song
Or the wisdom of the wise;
You cannot bribe those hosts that throng
The roadways of the skies;
Nor can you buy that holy light
Within a lover's eyes.

37.

In shadows of a devil's house
Is often found a saint;
And so, upon the London road,
When I was weak and faint,
With angels black and angels white
My soul became acquaint.

I asked for water at one door
Where humble folk abode;
And thanked a girl with English eyes.
And, when far down the road,
I heard her call from her garden-wall,
And quickly back I strode.

No Indian Prince to England's king
Has ever given aught
That looked so lovely as the gift
This kindly maiden brought —
A bag of cakes that was neatly tied
With a woman's holy thought.

I have made no attempt here to
be humorous. I merely relate
exactly what happened. After
all real humor is life.

Their flavour still is on my tongue.
And after all these years
Sometimes, upon some dreary road,
That deed of love appears;
And when my faith is weak in man,
The memory of it cheers.

O nameless, yet immortal maid,
Who gave one minstrel bread,
May you, as I, this summer's day
To doors of saints be led.
And may they give you wine to drink
And rose leaves for your bed.

38.

A bag of spiced and sugary cakes
Was snug upon my arm
As I walked down the London road
By peaceful wood and farm;
Nor dreamed I in the world about
Was aught that could alarm.

But two stout renegades sprang out
A darksome bit of wood.
And I, to save a bloody bout,
As any wise man should,
Gave each a bun and then did run
As swiftly as I could.

Lord Pauncefoot the British
Ambassador to the United States,
died at Washington during the
early summer of 1900. His
American battleship conveyed the
envoy's body over that long and
cold funeral road of the Atlantic
and the great ship had anchored
for a few days at Southampton.
Shore-leave was given and most
of the sailors went to London. This
tar had ventured into dangerous
haunts and he had been robbed
and thus was forced to return on
foot to Southampton.

I would not run that fast again
To save a pot of gold.
But those good cakes were treasure-troves
Which I had sworn to hold;
And who would steal my slender meal
Must be a robber bold.

39.

When afternoon was high I stopped
To find a resting place;
And there I met a Yankee tar
With hunger on his face.
He had walked down from Ludgate Hill,
And looked a sorry case.

'Twas good to see a western man;
And so I learned his tale;
How Mile-End-Road had, a-la-mode,
Put knock-out in his ale;
And how the Brooklyn he must reach
Before her hour to sail.

I split with him my bag of cakes;
And he went on his way;
But in the handshake of the lad
I took my joyous pay.
And this was coin to make me glad
On many a coming day.

The name of this saintly man
is Rev James T. Houssemayne du
Boulary. He lived on the right
hand side of the London Road, not
many miles from Winchester.
I paid back his loan with interest,
a few years later

I slept this night at the Y.M.C.A. at
Winchester. I visited Jane Fluster's
tomb immediately upon my arrival
in the ancient city, and then climbed
a hill and watched a game of cricket
on a college green. I was the only
spectator and when a dispute arose
I was asked to be arbiter. I gave my
decision which was immediately
accepted by all, for sportsmanship is
tradition on the athletic fields of England.
I was accepted as referee and my
decision could not be disputed by these
English school boys. In America some
disappointed party might have heaved
a pop bottle at me.

At eventide my flesh implored
For a bed to ease my pain.
And my feet were led where roses poured
In a fount of crimson rain,
Where I met a sentinel of the Lord
To whom none pled in vain.

I asked for work and not for gold;
But this good man plunged down
His fingers in a slender purse
And brought out half a crown.
He was a clergyman, but not
The kind they breed in town.

I took his card, and, when my Fate
Looked with a kindlier eye,
I paid his loan; and here it is —
That man of love's reply;
And every word is like a rose
Whose fragrance will not die.

40.

At night I came to Winchester
Where stands the shrine of Jane,
Who took me as boy with her
Down many an English lane.
And by her tomb I heard the stir
Of footsteps soft as rain.

I have not found a shyer place
Than this cathedral town.
She sometimes dares the hills around;
And then comes quickly down.
And you must guess her lovely form
Through her ancestral gown.

Her customs make the stars look young.
And with her ancient eyes,
Like some old woman, when a child
Hugs to her friendly thighs,
She sees with joy a new moon hung
Against her aged skies.

41.

I paid that night sixpence for bed,
And sixpence for a meal;
And when dawn broke to Basing-stoke
I danced with toe and heel;
And, at my side, in a mist of green,
Fair Hampshire stepped a reel.

I've seen a stream in the Kicking Horse
Dance fifty leagues of stone;
I've watched the savage dance of the sea
Where Labrador makes moan;
But here was a lovely minuet
That moved like a scarf wind-blown.

I quoted favorite passages
from Gray's Elegy as I walked
in this acre of sleeping Britons.
And when I left the churchyard
I said: "How eternal is England."

42.

At Basing-stoke I found a church
More solemn than its dead.
Its belfry seemed to know by heart
The tale above each bed,
Which that gray pilgrim of the wind
A thousand years has read.

On Judgment Day from England's clay
Will rise a stalwart crew.
And in this churchyard I could feel
The strength our fathers knew;
It seemed to rise above these tombs
In mighty muscled Yew.

I read the legends, brown with years,
And droned the words of Gray.
And all the prayers denied the dead
Impelled my lips to pray.
And, as I mused "the curfew tolled
The knell of parting day."

43.

The moon is like some blushing bride
Who slowly bares her charms;
At first her slim white curve of throat,
And then her marble arms.
And night by night, against the west,
I saw her gown slip down her breast
Above those English farms.

The loveliest crop of England
is that invisible crop which hath
neither form nor feature and which
neither fades nor decays.

Skepticism is a natural thing
in artificial places but who
could doubt God as he walked
down an English lane.

An English farm has many crops;
And some of them were sown
When Alfred gave a brighter crown
To England's youthful throne.
And these great crops, the harvesters
Have wisely left alone.

My flesh grew weak, and yet my soul
At every step grew strong,
And every scented lane I passed
Impelled my lips to song.
"Surely the God of English lanes,"
I cried, "can do no wrong."

Then hour by hour that friendly look,
Which country roadways wear,
Grew less and less, until at last
It showed but here and there;
And everything, that God had made,
Dwindled, or grew less fair.

And here the flowers along the road
Grew darker in their stalk;
And none had time to sit with me
And have a friendly talk;
For every man who passed me by
Was quicker in his walk.

These were his very words and
I thought he would die of apoplexy
as he uttered them. He was a
tall, red-faced Englishman and he
wore a monocle which fell from
his eye at my question.

A few months before this incident
I had dipped my paddle in the St
Lawrence - a river which is fifty
miles wide in places, so I had my
own ideas of a river.

Canadians call a very small
stream "a creek". In England
the word has a different meaning

Fewer and fewer grew the trees,
The air less pure and sweet;
And gently did that country road
Become a city street:
Thus, ere my soul was quite aware,
Great London caught my feet.

44.

At sleepy Staines I asked a man,
Who wore a bally glass,
What was the name of that small stream
Which there I chanced to pass.
And with a withering look he said:
"The Thames, you bloody ass."

"The Thames!" said I; "the Thames!" said I;
For, though my flesh was weak,
The western fire was in my blood,
And I was far from meek.
And so I cried: "I am an ass,
A bloomin', blithering, bloody ass
If that is not a creek."

And then and there I dealt his calm
With these kind words a blow:
"If that's your Thames, my jolly man,
I must take care, you know,
For, if I chanced to sneeze in it,
Your creek might overflow."

I've walked in deserts far from men,
 And heard the sage-brush moan;
 But never heard so grim a word
 As that dull cry of stone,
 When I walked down through London town,
 Cold, friendless and alone.

But in that city's leagues of light
 New gods were born to me;
 For there's a womb in every woe
 That sets a new life free;
 And every travail of that womb
 Is crowned with joys to be.

The evening bells spoke through the dark
 To comfort my dismay —
 The bells of Richard Whittington —
 And I could hear them say:
 "Three times Lord Mayor of London Town,"
 As on that ancient day.

And then those bells a new song sang,
 A song for me alone:
 "The path of poverty is cold,
 And hard the alien's tone;
 But some fine day you come this way
 When flags of joy are flown."

This Holy Inn was the bake-shop
and home of S. R. Button, Esq, an
alderman of Hounslow and a man
of artistic presence and inclination.

As I entered his living-room I said:
"That looks like a Frank Brangwyn?"
I referred to a vigorous painting on
the wall which faced me.

Mr Button was greatly surprised
that a lad from far-away Canada
should be so well acquainted with
European art and my words were
an entrée into his immediate esteem.
When I played one of my own compos-
itions on the piano and talked to him
about that amazing genius Stephen
Phillips his ideas of Canadian provin-
cialism were sadly disturbed.

That evening I had a supper whose
"piece de resistance" was new potatoes
and new green peas and I am con-
vinced some chef from the summit of
Olympus must have influenced that meal.

I came to Hounslow with the dark,
And High Street's shops were gay
With men and women buying food
To bridge the Sabbath Day.
And, mad with hunger at the sight,
I stopped a while to pray.

And One who notes the sparrow's fall
Walked High Street at my side.
He put His ring upon my hand
As though I were a bride;
And led me to a holy inn
Where angels oft abide.

That refuge was a baker's shop
That bathed in cheerful light;
And here I flung two pennies down
With fingers cold and white.
And she who served me seemed to guess
How sorry was my plight.

She asked my name and where I dwelt,
And why my vagrant quest;
And called her husband, and he came
And bade me stay and rest,
Yea, bade me stay the Sabbath day
And be his honored guest.

His eyes were like a peaceful Inn;
His voice a cool retreat
That put eternities between
His garden and the street.
And quickly did our spirits join,
As when two rivers meet.

His lady was as calm as stars
Above a grove of pine;
And something like a starry light
Within her eyes did shine;
And even now I see those eyes
Before me, like a shrine.

"My son had been your age," she said,
"Had he been left to me."
And then she looked across some void
As men look out toward sea
For sails that nevermore will come
Back to the sheltering quay.

'Twas paradise to feel once more
A pillow's drowsy swoon;
To slide in linen white and cool
Was like a lovely rune.
And it was sweet to dream of storms
From some secure lagoon.

Despite my protest these
children of God insisted on
loaning me three shillings.

I did not ask this family's creed;
Nor did I care to know;
For they were good Samaritans
Who, when the tides were low,
Renewed my soul, and left me strong
For the battling undertow.

Good men and women are to me
Thy dearest words, O Lord.
Wiser are they than learning's core,
Stronger than Egypt's sword.
They are the founts where faith and love
And beauty are restored.

47.

I left that fine retreat from strife
Upon a Monday morn;
And gave back God His rose of life,
And took again His thorn;
And wounds, so lately healed, again
By the briars of Fate were torn.

On Monday morning life is low;
And hope and purpose wane;
But with three shillings in my hand
I was a prince again.
And I found a room on Elric Street,
Which hides by Great-Church-Lane.

Number 13 Elric was the house
and Mr and Mrs Berryman were
the occupants of the place. I
was given a room without advance
pay.

These good people were very poor
but sometimes they would give me
bread and cheese or bread and
gravy, and on a Sunday I would
help with the housework and earn
a scrap of beef. For two months I
averaged only one good meal a week

Mrs Berryman had just returned
from Canada where she told me she
had been very kindly treated. Who
can convince me I was not divinely
guided to her door.

Ten thousand doors had spurned my knock,
Or driven me off with wrath,
So can I doubt that to this door
Some Comrade led my path?
And to meet a friend at your journey's end
Is a pleasant aftermath.

48.

The dame of 13 Elric Street
Gave me her choicest bed.
For she had dwelt in Canada
One joyous year, she said,
She had a young and wistful face,
But her hands with toil were red.

Her husband crawled to work at dawn
Like a half-frozen fly.
And once a week he went to seek
A bit of sunlit sky.
And once a week he ate plum-duff
And laid a shilling by.

My room was small and cold and dark,
But it was clean and neat.
And it was like a blessed ark
After the friendless street
Where, day by day, I took my way
With weights upon my feet.

Who lives with London's poor, alone
Their greatness may apprise;
For, when the folk on Regent Street
Scorned hunger in my eyes,
Some hand, scarce stronger than my own,
With bread would bid me rise.

49.

The tourist comes to London town
And rides the busses' backs;
Or takes an hour to see the Tower
And feel its bloody axe.
And then the show, and Rotten Row
And Madame Tussaud's wax.

He takes a bedroom at the Ritz,
A box at Drury Lane,
He strolls about the Serpentine
And damns the English rain.
But he does not know great London's woe
Nor hear her cry of pain.

Sometimes he goes down Mile-End-Road,
Where rows of hawkers yell.
But he doesn't stray a block away,
Where London's outcasts dwell;
Where heads are hit and throats are slit,
And bodies tossed to Hell.

For days I haunted the windows of
bakeshops. I was emaciated and
my blood was impoverished to an
alarming degree, for I did not eat on
the average three meals a week.

Vainly I tried to sell my poems and
stones; vainly I sought work. But the
Underflow of life refused to let me rise.

Mrs Berryman carried this
precious gift to my room, for
she knew I was near collapse
from hunger. Then she
showed me a picture of Rat
Portage (now Kenora) and I
wept for my beloved wilderness
of Canada.

I have written Mrs Berryman
but have had no answer. It is
difficult to get in touch with
one of London's humbler citizens
when they change address.

50.

One human cry in London's air
Is like one wave at sea;
So is it strange men could not hear
The cry of pain in me
When all around my spirit found
One endless agony?

Upon the Strand there was a shop
Whose window groaned with pies;
And there in hunger I would stop
And feed awhile my eyes.
And oftentimes my spirit felt
Strange envy for the flies.

And here, upon one hopeless day,
My sky grew dark with cloud;
And that old wraith assailed my faith
And this time left me cowed.
Upon the street its awful feet
Fell like a hammer loud.

I wandered home, as in a dream,
With strength-forsaken knees;
But to my door there came once more
A gift of bread and cheese.
And wildly, like a drowning man,
These morsels I did seize.

And then a deeper hunger came —
For rocks and untamed lands.
And like a far mirage I saw
Ontario's shining sands,
And heard the songs of rivermen,
And felt their iron hands.

And I grew mad for savage things;
For canyons wild with stone;
For pine and spruce and tamarack,
By the sleeping ages sown.
And a desert thirst was on my lips
And in my blood and bone.

51.

One August morn they crowned a king;
And England's skies were fair;
And I went through the jostling town
To see the royal pair.
And all the earls and all the girls
And all the lads were there.

The people came in laughing hordes
And left the countryside
As cold and barren as the sand
At ebbing of the tide.
And there were few in all the land
To miss a new king's ride.

The heavens seemed like drifted blue
From some Italian sky.
And I never will forget the way
An English king rode by,
Nor the wave of cheers that billowed past
In one great endless cry.

And often now in dreams of day
I hear again that roar,
That rolled, like breakers of the sea,
Along this human shore,
Dying and rising as it went
Behind me and before.

An Englishman is a sober chap
When he takes you out to dine;
But an English crowd is a fount of wit;
And it purrs like beaded wine;
And many a joke was a master-stroke
Along that laughing line.

With empty belly none can keep
His patriotism strong;
And when a well-filled king went by,
Between a cheering throng,
I stood as silent as the night
When winds are tired of song.

During all these tragic days
I never asked for money or
bread.

But men with bellies void as mine
Stood up and cheered the sight —
Gaunt men who fight for food like swine,
When they have strength to fight;
Sad men who take the chilling stars
For a coverlet at night.

No longer shall I wonder why
One dead moon swings the tide
When one gold crown can fill the town
From every country-side.
But when Edward passed I thought of how
The Son-of-Man did ride.

The cheering died; the crowd went out;
And home I dragged my feet;
And to lay my head upon a bed;
O God, but it was sweet.
But there were gleams through all my dreams
Of bread and wine and meat.

52.

For three long weeks those English skies
Were hung with blackest crepe;
And everywhere that I would go
I met the hideous shape
Of that grim wraith my battling faith
Could nevermore escape.

I wrote a tale under the legend:
"The Strange Story of the Black Cat."
The tale was finished at midnight;
and though I was exhausted from
hunger I walked, on the next
morning, to Charing Cross and to
my unspeakable joy J. Philip Collins
of the Fall Mail Gazette bought my tale.
And better still he took me out with him
and we dined at a vegetarian restaurant
on Charing Cross. We dined again at his
home in Chelsea at midnight.

And then one day my hope came back,
And that old spectre fled;
And through the clouds of gray and black
The sun came shining red.
And London seemed to rise again
As though it had been dead.

I sold a tale for thirty bob;
And took my evening meal
With one of England's scribes who owned
A family crest and seal.
But it was three whole days before
My stomach's wounds would heal.

And then I found a west-bound boat
That sought a cabin boy;
And soon I passed by John O'Groat
And wished the old man joy:
"Should I come back please look me up
At the Ritz or the Savoy."

53.

No song that dips in blood and tears
By God will ever be spurned.
My rhymes have felt the earthquake's crash;
With storms have they been churned;
Great craters gape along my song
Where lava streams once burned.

And he who knows a crown of thorns
Alone shall lift to light
Those mortals broken by the wheel
Of life's relentless might.
And only He who knows the dark
Shall rescue men from night.

Sometimes the rarest flow of wine
From some poor vessel pours,
And bastards who were sadly born;
May walk Valhalla's shores;
And oftimes there is purple blood
In beggars at our doors.

54.

Home is the Port of all Content,
And joys eternal leaven;
And six days brought us sight of land;
And we made port in seven;
And every mile was like a rung
On a ladder up to Heaven.

We passed at dawn by Labrador,
Pale as a mid-day moon.
And then I heard St. Lawrence drone
An old familiar tune;
And cliffs, with singing choirs of spruce,
Were carved against the noon.

When Gaspe grew from purple mist
To carved, cathedral stone,
I stood in wonder, with my soul
To ancient stature grown;
And all the nomad joy of life
Ran riot in my bone.

No pillar held my Abbey's dome,
No beam nor architrave;
And when I saw the Laurent hills
Rise, like a swelling wave,
I felt like some long-buried soul
Who walks above his grave.

Then Beauty ran the coralled wind
And tossed me all her keys;
And I was one with shouting rock,
Was one with singing seas,
Was one with that great comradeship
Of tall, unconquered trees.

The city-dweller to his cave,
The badger to his hole.
"Lord of the Wilderness!" I cried;
"Restore me, make me whole:
Give blood of balsam to my heart,
Wind marrow to my soul."

The voyage passed another noon
 When I saw, gray and brown,
 The haughty heights of old Quebec,
 And her humble lower Town —
 One gazing meekly at the stars,
 One looking proudly down.

Our ship was moored, our voyage done;
 I touched the joyous land;
 I climbed to Montmorency rock
 And there awhile did stand,
 And watched an autumn sun go down
 In a sky like yellow sand.

And then I ran, nor cared who saw,
 And found a country field,
 Wherein I thawed my frozen heart
 Which long had been congealed;
 And like a pilgrim at a shrine
 I waited to be healed.

The moon came up and gently spurred
 Along the light of day,
 The crickets sang and beetles whirled,
 In such a friendly play;
 It seemed to me they must have heard
 That I had been away.

A cow beside me munched her meal;
A priest passed by in prayer;
A hawk flew circlewise to heaven,
Up a dark spiral stair;
And I could feel the scented breeze
Like fingers in my hair.

Deep in the valley droned a bell,
A field-mouse scampered fast —
All simple wonders of the world,
The first things and the last.
For these shall be when cities fall
And the last king has passed.

56.

Perhaps, thought I, this is a dream;
And when I wake at morn
I'll be again on London's streets
Cold, hungry and forlorn.
But soon I knew I did not dream
From rustling in the corn.

Eight steps of stone are at the gates
Of Montmorency Park;
And I slept here, and over me
I drew a sheet of dark.
But I was up at rosy dawn
Before the meadow-lark.

Canadian seers are as profound,
Canadian scholars as learned and
Canadian poets are as musical
and adventuresome as are the
seers, scholars and poets of any
country. But the men of genius in
Canada are suffering from the old
cry, "Can any good come out of
Nazareth?" William Lyon Phelps of
Yale University once declared in
Scribner's Magazine that the most
unfortunate thing that could happen
to a poet is to be born in Canada.

Love finds in Separation's hour
A ring with golden band;
And under London's ghastly arcs
I found my native land.
And now, as lovers, she and I
Will wander hand in hand.

I love my land too well to speak
The lie she loves to hear.
I know she has a painted cheek,
And callous is her ear.
And the bard who sings of pleasant things
Is the one she holdeth dear.

My land is last to living thought,
And last to walk in light:
My country, last across the world
To leave tradition's night.
Strong hater of her seers is she,
And worshipper of might.

And yet, although she hates my song,
Which bites into her ease,
I love her as the dawn loves light,
As motion loves the trees,
As roses love a garden wall,
As music loves the seas.

58.

Immortal Vastness that doth brood
In space; serene, benign,
Whose pure lips deign to wear the stain
Of man's poor cup of wine,
Lift to Thy strong, eternal song
This broken cry of mine.

Times Square

FORTY-SECOND Street is where life begins —
Where the subways vomit on the cool night air;
Night-clubs, theatres, dance-halls, inns,
Broadway is a woman with bright, red hair.
Blind Bill's tapping on the pavement there.
His tap, tap, tap, is the count of doom.
Broadway down is dark as a tomb.
Broadway up is a sea of fire
Where a tired world burns its mad desire.
They beat like moths at this red-white flame,
And they come out blind and they come out lame.
Forty-second Street is where life begins:
Night-clubs, theatres, dance-halls, inns.
Forty-second Street is the place life ends:
The life of home and the life of friends.

Broadway is wise as a night-hawk's wing,
But she never heard a white birch sing.
And she never saw a stream drop down
From a silver star to a pine-washed town.
And she never heard cold balsams croon
As they stroked dark boughs on a stainless moon.

And she never knew the joy of calm
When tamaracks sing in a morning psalm.
Broadway is drunk from her street's mad cries;
And a dead soul sleeps on the couch in her eyes.
Her jazz-hounds bray and she pours her gold
While men are hungry and women are cold.
She pours her gold, and a lad from Maine
Draws over his shoulders a cloak of rain
And dreams as he walks the Great White Way
Of the pine-dark hills where the blue lakes play.
He's a hungry lad too proud to tell;
But his brain grows mad at the drifting smell
From the heartless doors of a hundred grills:
He is mad for bread and the white Maine hills.

The world-heard "Times" has a world-seen wall
Where letters of gold in a white ring crawl.
And night by night on a living wire
The tale of the world flows here in fire.
But up at a turn in the Great White Way
A bread-line crawls like a cloud of gray.
And as it moves to the soup's warm goal
The lights grow cold as the midnight's soul.
Criterion, Astor, Gayety, Loew's,
Paramount, Palace — shows, shows, shows!
And the taxies roar and the bread line grows.
And the night-clubs drink in a house of mirth,
The suicide-cups of a mirth-mad earth.

Go back, my lad, to the pine-dark hills;
There's a white way there that is bright with snow.
The "White Way" here has a light that kills;
And its cry of mirth is a cry of woe.
Go back my lad to the north's wild lakes
Where a clean night sleeps and a clean dawn wakes.

Forty-second Street is where life begins:
Night-clubs, theatres, dance-halls, inns.
Forty-second Street is the place life ends —
The life of home and the life of friends.

Cave Dwellers

THERE is a dark cavern
Frozen with a night-shade,
Where tired folk are dwelling
Like unmeadowed sheep.
Here no thrush is musical;
No flower is fragrant.
Who dwells long here is blinded
With a strange sleep.

Among the tired hosts
Are a few gay folk
Who love cold shadows
And who love jaundiced light.
They sing the tired to sleep
With a strange narcotic
Drawn from black poppies
On a ledge of night.

Wine sparkles in the cavern;
But that wine is blood
Gathered from the tired hearts
In a cup of hate.
Love stands there naked,
Thin-lipped and homeless,
Beating with her white hands
At a closed gate.

Above the dark cavern
Are wild, wooded hills,
And corn-whispering acres
With a rich field.
The air is full of song:
Meadow-larks and whip-poor-wills
Make a glad temple
Of every wood and field.

Here are cool hammocks
By clean, laughing waters,
And here is red fruit
Groaning on the limb.
And here is Love,
Under moon-whitened blossoms
Singing out thanksgiving
In a low, sweet hymn.

Many come to the cavern
And open the dark gate;
And bid all the tired folk
Drink of the day.
They tell them of bird-song
And tree-song and sea-song;
But when the gates close
No man has come away.

Crosses have called them;
White fire has urged them;
Saints have exhorted them,
And martyrs have died,
But the sad, tired folk
Creep to their cold beds
Like a fearful bridegroom
To a hated bride.

Bald Mountain

JOE lives on Bald Mountain — Revelstoke way.
He is up near stars, where wild goats play.
He loves Bald Mountain in a strong heart's way:
And old Bald Mountain loves Joe.

His cabin is spired with long, blue smoke,
As high as a spire seen by Salisbury folk.
He goes twice yearly down to Revelstoke —
Once on the clean, crisp snow.

There's a wide plateau around Joe's door
Where in August the flowers in a red fire roar.
Here the rainbows lean, to re-learn that lore
Which the high blooms only know.

Thomas a Kempis is the cabin's guest:
There's a wild field-rose in Othello pressed:
The Mermaid-Tavern has a spark out west;
And the stars are in its glow.

Joe came from Sussex and hawthorne lanes.
His hands were soft in the English rains;
But they're hard hands now, and covered with stains
When the blackberries hang low.

On winter nights, when the air is thin,
He listens to Kreisler on his violin,
But he tunes off when the crooners begin,
And the jazz-hounds blare their woe.

Joe, the hermit, was an Oxford blue —
The stroke of a two-year's winning crew;
Yet no one knows but a favored few
Who were old-time cronies of Joe.

He often says: "You may think me queer.
There's a pagan blush on things up here
That suits me better than the smirk and leer
When the churchfolk come and go."

Joe, the hermit has missed many things —
Crime and the law and the word that stings;
But his sleep is cool with angels' wings
That over his cabin flow.

Joe's on Bald Mountain, and he's there to stay:
He is up near stars where wild goats play.
He loves Bald Mountain in a strong man's way.
And old Bald Mountain loves Joe.

NOTES: You will find more than one Oxford man who prefers the solitude of Canada's mountains to the pettiness of modern life.

In the rarified air of high altitudes the smoke from a cabin will, on windless days, rise to great heights in a straight column. The reference to Salisbury spire—the highest spire in England—is employed to emphasize this phenomenon.

There are plateaus in the Rocky Mountains that, in August, are flame-swept with flowers of incomparable brilliance.

The Cosmic Librarian

I wake as the night's drowsy verger
Snuffs out the rebellious last star;
And I watch the titanic slow merger
Of color and sunlight afar,
The supreme and primordial merger
Of color and sunlight afar.

I walk in the young, virile splendor,
As the graying sky pales into white;
And I spend, like a prodigal spender,
Warm gold from the mintage of light—
Warm gold that no mortal needs render
To Caesar's imperial might.

Here, at the far end of dawning,
I meet one, ripe-fruited with years;
Bare-footed and bronze, he is lawning
A garden with orderly shears.
Above him a cumulus awning
Hides the lost tribes of the spheres.

He culls from compassionate grasses
The warm elemental of ruth.
Unconscious of lore, he amasses
That wisdom whose ageing is youth;
That wisdom the lore-hunter passes,
That lore which is basic of truth.

He reads from a book that is seeded
With script of the Infinite Plan.
The Cosmic Librarian has deeded
These volumes primeval to man,
These tomes which the wise have unheeded
Since ever our learning began.

The Woe-Born Beauty

THIS winter's night is strangely cold with fire,
With slow, deceiving light that numbs and
chills.

The star-dissolving moon moves swiftly higher
And pours her white libation on the hills;
Nor knows how cold the silver oil she spills
Over that flaming hearth where, fierce and hard,
The white fuel burns, nor is consumed, nor charred.

We thought all beauty luscious, warm, mature —
The purpling grape, the woodland rich with leaf;
Yet here she walks a cold, dismantled moor
And draws her hand across the harp of grief.
No harvest gold is here, no mellowing sheaf,
And yet what glory can surpass the light
Of these high, silver candles of the night.

We are all mourners, and some darkly go;
And some translate their discord to sweet sound,
And take their grief as winter takes her snow
To beautify her sadly-widowed ground.
And this brave spirit in all life is found —
In the green ivy's flood which dares to crawl
Over the broken arch, the crumbling wall.

No silver birches* flamed across this wood
Until her piteous charcoal bade them rise.
No cascade ever danced her interlude,
Between the cloud and sea, until the skies
Loosed on the earth their cataclysmic cries.
And not until the loam with steel was torn
Was shaped the bearded wheat, the yellowing corn.

Thus, as through wounded clouds we see the stars,
We shall look up through sorrow and be glad,
Reach through the rift and pluck the rose of Mars
And wear it on the cloak of Galahad.
The preludes of our joys are oftentimes sad;
And, if our entrance moved through gates of pain,
Shall that dread, grievous exit be in vain?

Pale winter evening, cold with frost-born fire!
Wild, hueless valleys, chilled with mocking light!
Is this thin, shivering wood, this gownless choir
The same that sang bravuras through the night
When rose an August moon with copper light?
Is this mute stream the same as that which ran
Heavy with stars and warm with feet of Pan?

Yea, 'tis the same sweet spirit in them burns;
Nor are they turned by sorrow from their goal;
But hold a weave which in their looming turns
Until we gain the beauty of the whole.
And when they shall again reverse the scroll,
This frail white moon that, bloodless, floats on high
Will mount once more, in reddening bronze, the sky.

*After a forest fire silver birches will often rise from the burnt ground.

Star Sandals

THE stars have lost their sandals in the sea;
They drift, a silver host, across the bars:
The slender shoe of Venus, blown alee,
And that red, flaming moccasin of Mars.

The austere host of heaven that march the night,
With leagues of silent chaos in each stride,
Lament when they behold their fallen light
Drift, in a chartless joy, across the tide.

And we, like sandals of our loftier souls,
Move with more vagrance than our spirit wills,
Caught in a savage ocean-tide that rolls
With fickle heart between the eternal hills.

The Plains of Abraham

YEAR after year the grass has slowly spread,
Over this field's reproach, her cloth of green,
Like healing ointment on the wounds of war.
Year after year the solemn daisies blow
Their frail, white reeds of beauty on this moor
To drown the echo of old bugle calls.
To-day the four-edged winds of heaven lift
A nobler blade than any two-edged sword
Which swung in man's old madness on this hill,
Where two alone of all who fell have fame;
While all the other sleepers, brave as they,
As dear to a maiden's arms, to a comrade's heart,
Are chambered in our long forgetfulness.
They died to give red valor to this field;
But what historic glamor shall atone
For the untimely sleep of one dead soul;
Or what romance of battle can compare
With that white splendor of an age of peace?
I turn these eras like a mighty tome
And hear those wind-voiced trees that on these cliffs
Sang the dawn-anthems of a waking world.
Why chain this field to one mad night of war;

When the cool hand of peace lay on its shoulder
Through lovely eons of unwarring time?
Here now two lovers walk this commanding hill;
And what they say shall linger on the wind
When men forget this was a place of strife.
The fleur-de-lis and the red English rose
Have each a lovelier essence than was spilled
On any field of battle. May they grow,
In the fair garden of our bloodless years,
Over the eternal tombs of sword and gun.

The Lesbian Gives a Rose

THE lesbian gave its paramour a rose,
And kissed its painted lips; and at the sound
The world's dead lovers wailed beneath the
ground,
And beauty's genial current waned and froze.
And living men, of splendid brow and thigh,
Trembled as though some doom were moving by,
And maids of rounded breast and billowy hair
Withdrew from open casements, and the moon
Hurried across the sky in mute despair.
And there was sadness on the face of noon.
And then I saw the ghosts of Rome appear;
And in her slumber Carthaginia wept;
And through the buried ages I could hear
The grief of many empires as they slept.
At last I felt the earth grow suddenly cold,
And in the haunts of lovers bells were tolled;
For all the blooms had turned to winter snows,
Proud rebels when that lesbian gave a rose.

Manhattan

SHE turns aside the traffic of the clouds
And searches in the jewel-vault of the stars,
Wounding the wings of angels, flying low,
And spreading fear on pathways of the moon.
No reach has dared so grandly since the hills
Rose in white fury at a glacier's horn.
Manhattan, great rock—lifter of the world!
Who shall assail your herculean fame?

And yet, O proud Manhattan, thus did Thebes
And thus did Babylon prepare for sleep —
The same long sleep of dust that waits your towers.
The empyrean scythe is harder steel
Than any you have tempered: at its touch
Your temples will bow down like yellow grain;
And nothing shall endure beyond that day
Save some Homeric glory that was caught
From the high mountain reaches of your song.
Go then, if you would keep for that great hour
Some deathless fragment, and renew your heart,
Until a pastoral hungering for truth
And all things lovely shapes into a creed.
The call for beauty now is a whispering wind —
A murmuring inaudible in your halls

Drowned by a bugle wail for baser things.
Where is the Sinain lust for wisdom now?
And where that silence in whose womb is born
All immortality of thought and sound?
What temple shall avail for one lost song!
What structure shall atone for one lost soul!
You fashioned well your white, gigantic comb
To rake the tangle from the clouds of heaven
But failed to comb the serpents from the hair
Of that dark-eyed Medusa in your soul.

Manhattan, Queen of Builders, hail all hail!
Daring has won its crown, and you have dared
To thrust cold bayonets in the breast of noon.
Now to the sightless towers, the loftier domes
Than any you have builded with carved stone.
Mix your new mortar with a flaming rose;
And choose ye marble, cool as early dawn,
From the neglected quarries of your heart
And build for coming hosts the towers invisible.

The Song of the New Jesus

ALL the fat and shiny preachers
From their pulpits say:
"Time has made a great improvement
In our Lord today.
Once he preached a foolish sermon
Praising peace and love;
Now he wears a colonel's khaki
And a mailed glove."

Here comes Jesus, lowly Jesus,
Riding on a battleship:
"Rule Britannia" in his pocket,
Pistols on his hip.
Simon Peter, happening near,
Turns and says to me:
"Gadzooks, how the Lord has changed
Since old Gethsemane."

Jesus led the English forces
Or the bishop lied,
Jesus drove the Prussian horses
(Gad! how he could ride!).
He went out with every army,
Driving this and that;
Russian, German, French and English:
What an acrobat!

"Blessed are the meek," said Jesus,
In the days of yore;
Now he stands in nave and pulpit
Urging men to war.
Long ago He cried to Peter:
"Put away your sword."
Now he leads His hosts to battle:
He's a fickle Lord.

Once He said: "Resist not evil."
(Did He speak in fun?)
Now he favors sword and shrapnel,
Bayonet, gas and gun.
Once, all nations saw sweet pity
On His sorrowed face.
Now he keeps his love exclusive
For some favored race.

Here comes Jesus, lowly Jesus,
Riding on a battleship:
"Rule Britannia" in his pocket,
Pistols on his hip.
Simon Peter, happening near,
Turns and says to me,
"Gadzooks, how the Lord has changed
Since old Gethsemane."

Light Thou My Torch

RELIGHT my torch, O Lord, at Thy white fire;
I hold it far aloft, and wait Thy will:
My hands have fallen in slumber on my lyre,
My voice has long been still.
The darkness lies upon us like a frost;
It creeps with a cold madness over the land:
I will awake Thy children who are lost
If Thou wilt flame my torch at Thy warm hand.
Is it too late? Or can the fire be seen —
So heavy is the blindness on men's eyes?
The stars are white, the woods are billowing green,
Blue is the sea, and blue the unfading skies,
Yet beauty like an ungathered harvest lies.
Light Thou my torch: I feel Thee bending near
As the calm Christmas carols haunt the air.
The light within my hands grows suddenly clear:
Lord, Thou hast heard my prayer.
I give Thee thanks: now to the world I go
Flaming with beauty, fathered by Thy hand.
I go through the wild wood, down the cool sand;
I speak with footsteps on the unspoken snow.
The torch burns high and clear,
And nomad winds on gypsy bugles blow,

And over the dying echoes I can hear
The tramp of feet behind me: they have come —
A host with hunger of the dawn for light,
With thirst of the dark seed for April rain.
They fashion words on lips that long were dumb:
They soon will speak again.
Lord, keep my torch aflame with light until
I lead these pilgrims to that promised land,
Which lies beyond the ache of many a hill —
A haven of lotus leaves and singing sand,
Where all the world's lost rhyme in one wind blows,
And all dead sunsets waken in one rose.
And all lost moonlight shall be gathered up
Into one slender lily's stainless cup.
There, with awakened eyes, shall we behold
Beauty, with all her drapery fallen away;
And every dawn will come with purer gold,
And whiter stars will wash the night away;
And we shall breathe of air that, white and cool,
Lies on our breasts like lilies on a pool.
And there, on slopes of eons yet to be,
With beauty shall we keep eternal tryst,
Until, in some triumphant hour, we see
That crowning bloom of loveliness — the Christ.

Christmas Day, 1934.

My Country

“WE want you not when you blossom with song.
We want you not when your lyre is strong
But we have a strange insatiable lust
For a poet's bones, for a dead bard's dust.

“You ask for bread and a jug of wine
For singing songs of this land of thine.
But you'll get no wine and you'll get no bread;
Though we'll fight like demons, when you are
dead,
To keep your ashes,” my country said.

NOTE: Canada made no gesture (save a private one sponsored by Peter McArthur) to keep Bliss Carman in Canada, but she made one of the most disgusting pleas in history to retain his ashes.

The author, feeling the injustice of this same forced exile, wrote this poem after visiting that part of Connecticut which, for so many years, gave to our fine poet those necessities of life which were denied him by his own country.—W. M.

Fire- Place

WIND crawls down
Like a chimney-sweep.
It wakens the coals
From darkening sleep.

The doors are latched;
The windows are barred;
But the air floods in
From the wind-worn yard.

It creeps through chinks
And curls at your feet.
It drinks up the room's cheer
And laps up the heat.

An old man mutters
To his stone-quiet mate:
“Someone's at the window;
Someone's at the gate.”

The casements shiver
As if spirits went by —
Spirits with footsteps
Like wind on the rye.

Old men and women
Hear mute things:
They hear deep silence
Like a voice that sings.

They hear wild storms
On glassy seas;
They feel warm blood
In fingers that freeze.

If someone rapped wildly
On this window or door
He'd get no answer
Save the wind's hushed roar.

But the folk that come
Without flesh or word
Are seen here clearly,
And are clearly heard.

The old man mutters
To his stone-quiet mate:
"Seven is a dark hour;
It's late, very late.

It's late, very late
Come mother," "Aye, aye,
I'll come when flames
On the black hearth die."

But it isn't the flames
That bid her wait:
It's someone at the window,
Someone at the gate:

Someone with footsteps
Like wind on the wheat;
Someone whose foot-prints
Are made by no feet.

The Living Word

Not because He was a Jew,
And of David's line,
But because He is true,
And because He is fine;
Not because He is God,
In an ordered part,
But because He is good
Is He Lord of my heart.

Old histories may err,
But To-day does not lie,
For, resplendent and fair,
My Lord wanders by.
In your hand and mine
His Word lives again.
His face is ashine
In the beauty of rain.

Not because it was said
In a Book He must die,
Am I Heavenward led,
Am I lifted on high.
Clear once was the Light,
By our rituals blurred:
Theology's blight
Is a curse on the Word.

My Lord does not hide
In the face of a cloud.
He walks by my side
With all wisdom endowed;
Not spectral and hoary,
With precept and ban,
But lovely in glory
Of Nature and Man.