

The Green
Book of the
Bards

Bliss Carman
1898

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The Green Book of the Bards

By
Bliss Carman

The Green Book of the Bards

There is a book not written
By any human hand,
The prophets all have studied,
The priests have always banned.

I read it every morning,
I ponder it by night;
And Death shall overtake me
Trimming my humble light.

He'll say, as did my father
When I was young and small,
"My son, no time for reading!
The night awaits us all."

He'll smile, as did my father
When I was small and young,
That I should be so eager
Over an unknown tongue.

Then I would leave my volume
And willingly obey,—
Get me a little slumber
Against another day.

Content that he who taught me
Should bid me sleep awhile,
I would expect the morning
To bring his courtly smile;

New verses to decipher

new verses to accept,
New chapters to explore,
While loveliness and wisdom
Grew ever more and more!

For who could ever tire
Of that wild legendry,
The folklore of the mountains,
The drama of the sea?

I pore for days together
Over some lost refrain,—
The epic of the thunder,
The lyric of the rain.

This was the creed and canon
Of Jeffèries and Thoreau,
And all the free believers
Who worshipped long ago.

Here Amiel in sadness,
And Burns in pure delight,
Sought for the hidden import
Of man's eternal plight.

No Xenophon and Cæsar
This master had for guides,
Yet here are well recorded
The marches of the tides.

Here are the marks of greatness
Accomplished without noise,
The Elizabethan vigour,
And the Landorian poise;

The sweet Chaucerian temper,
Smiling at all defeats;
The gusty moods of Shelley,
The autumn-calms of Keats.

Here were derived the gospels
Of Emerson and John;
'Twas with this revelation
The face of Moses shone.

Here Blake and Job and Omar
The author's meaning traced;
Here Virgil got his sweetness,
And Arnold his unhaste.

Here Horace learned to question,
And Browning to reply,
When soul stood up on trial
For her mortality.

And all these lovely spirits
Who read in the great book,
Then went away in silence
With their illumined look,

Left comment, as art furnished
A margin for their skill,—
Their guesses at the secret
Whose gist eludes us still.

And still in that green volume,
With ardour and with youth
Undaunted, my companions
Are searching for the truth.

One page, entitled Grand Pré,
Has the idyllic air
That Bion might have envied:
I set a footnote there.

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FOR BLISS CARMAN AND HIS FRIENDS

[The end of *The Green Book of the Bards* by William Bliss Carman]