

Newfoundland Verse

E. J. Pratt

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Title: Newfoundland Verse

Date of first publication: 1923

Author: E. J. (Edwin John Dove) Pratt

Date first posted: Apr. 11, 2019

Date last updated: Apr. 11, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190449

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To my
MOTHER

Newfoundland Verse

by
**E.J.
Pratt**

The Ryerson Press
Publishers Toronto

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NEWFOUNDLAND VERSE

Sea Variations

MORNING

Old, old is the sea to-day.
A sudden stealth of age
Has torn away
The texture of its youth and grace,
And filched the rose of daybreak from its waters.
Now lines of grey
And dragging vapors on its brow
Heavily are drawn;
And it lies broken as with centuries,
Though yesterday,
Blue-eyed and shadowless as a child's face,
It held the promise of a luminous dawn;
Though through its merry after-hours
It bade the sun to pour
Its flaming mintage on the ocean floor
That by a conjuror's touch was turned
To rarer treasure manifold,
Where jacinth, emerald and sapphire burned—
A fringe around a core of gold....
Old, old is the sea to-day,

Forsaken, chill and grey,
And banished is the glory of its waters;
Though through the silent tenure of the night
It bade the sterile moon to multiply
A thousand-fold its undivided light,
Within the nadir of a richer sky;
When every star a thousand cressets glowed
That, caught in wider conflagration, sent
Vast leagues of silver fire wherever flowed
The waters of its shoreless firmament.
But old and grey
Is the sea to-day,
With the morning colors blanched upon its waters.

MASKS

*What hidden soul residing
Within these forms, O sea!
Should, every hour changing,
To Time yet changeless be?
What masks hast thou not worn,
What parts not played,
Thou Prince of all the Revels
In Life's Masquerade?
Light-hearted as a jester,
The motley fits thy mood,
As the gold and the purple,
Thy statelier habitude.*

At dawn—

A trumpeter preluding a day's pageant.

At noon—

A dancer weaving new measures around the
furrows of ships with white sails.

Later—

A courier with sealed tidings hastening towards the
shore.

At sunset—

A dyer steeping colors on a bay.

Again—

A sculptor teasing faces out of the moonlit foam on a
reef.

Or carving bric-a-brac upon a beach,

Or fashioning, with age-toiled hands, a grotto
out of limestone.

The wind blows—

And a master puts a flute to his lips.

It blows again—

And his fingers take hold of organ stops

THE DESTROYER

Once more, the wind—

And thou dost go on an old familiar way

In tragic fashion,

As a corsair, pursuing his prey

With the lust of passion,

Falls like a burst of hail

On an autumn yield,

Till every reach and gulf and bay

Is left with the stubble of life and sail,

With the face of the waters like unto the face of the field.

IN RETREAT

Now like a fugitive, who, on the desert sand,
A moment broods upon the life he spilt.
And, with averted gaze,
Circling the dusky ruin of his hand,
Surveys
The Arab measure of his guilt
Before a Presence standing there that calls
His name; in cloud and shadow and in whirlwind reads
The inviolate scripture of the fates;
Then full across the desert speeds,
Until he falls,
Caught by the Avenger near the City Gates;—
So underneath the heavens' lighted scroll,
Ablaze with cryptic tokens of the slain,
Headlong to shore thy spiral waters roll
Swept by the besom of the winds; by rain
And thunder driven in flight
Along the galleries of the night,
Until upon the surge-line locked in strife
With reef and breaker thou art shattered, soon
In fang and sinew to be strewn
Around the cliffs that guard the ports of life.

O wild, tumultuous sea!
Thy waters mock our liturgy,
For thou dost take the threads of faith apart.

Wherewith the cables of our life are spun,
Strand upon strand unravelling;—thou dost hear,
Recited from a tide-wet shore,
Our creeds. Each hope and fear
Filtered from life's confessions—one by one,
Out of the dumb confusions of the heart,
Are spread before thy sight—thou Arch-Inquisitor!
How in a ruthless moment dost thou strip
The veilings from our eyes, and bid us cast
Our glances on a labyrinthine past,
Stirred by a flash that on a wave's white lip
Gleams for an instant, or by some dark sign
Within thy fearful hollows where night flings
Her crape of shadow on a tossing line
Of jetsam, will our years turn back,
To gather from a weed-grown track
A bitter tale of dimmed rememberings.

RE-BORN

As to its end the tempest drags
Its way, thou art re-born
To strength of body and beauty of face;
And thou dost cover with a tranquil grace
Those whom the winds had buffeted,
And laid upon the waters—dead.
In darkness dost thou cover them,
As some white-winged mother of the crags,
That daily gathering food
From sea-weed and from tide-wash, brings,

At fall of night, to her rock-nurtured brood
The drowsy silence of her wings.

THE DEAD CALM

How like a Pontiff dost thou lie at last,
Impassive, robed at Death's high-unctioned hour
With those grey vestments that the storm,
In the dread legacy of its power,
Around thy level form
Majestically hast cast,—
In the pale light of the moon's slow tapers burning;
All-silent in the calm recessional
Of the tide's turning;
All-passionless, though on the distant sands
Where the wreathed lilies of the spray, keen-sifted
By the late winds, are strewn, thy children call,
Their patient hands
In prayer, to thee, uplifted.

The Toll of the Bells

I

We gave them at the harbor every token—
The ritual of the guns, and at the mast

The flag half-high, and as the cortege passed,
All that remained by our dumb hearts unspoken.
And what within the band's low requiem,
 In footfall or in head uncovered fails
 Of final tribute, shall at altar-rails
Around a chancel soon be offered them.

And now a throbbing organ-prelude dwells
 On the eternal story of the sea;
 Following in undertone, the Litany
Ends like a sobbing wave; and now begins
A tale of life's fore-shortened days; now swells
The tidal triumph of Corinthians.

II

But neither trumpet-blast, nor the hoarse din
 Of guns, nor the drooped signals from those mute
 Banners, could find a language to salute
The frozen bodies that the ships brought in.
To-day the vaunt is with the grave. Sorrow
 Has raked up faith and burned it like a pile
 Of driftwood, scattering the ashes while
Cathedral voices anthemed God's To-morrow.

Out from the belfries of the town there swung
 Great notes that held the winds and the pagan roll
 Of open seas within their measured toll.
Only the bells' slow ocean tones, that rose
And hushed upon the air, knew how to tongue

That Iliad of Death upon the floes.

The Ground-Swell

Three times we heard it calling with a low,
 Insistent note; at ebb-tide on the noon;
 And at the hour of dusk, when the red moon
Was rising and the tide was on the flow;
Then, at the hour of midnight once again,
 Though we had entered in and shut the door
 And drawn the blinds, it crept up from the shore
And smote upon a bedroom window-pane;
Then passed away as some dull pang that grew
Out of the void before Eternity
 Had fashioned out an edge for human grief;
Before the winds of God had learned to strew
His harvest-sweepings on a winter sea
 To feed the primal hungers of a reef.

Magnolia Blossoms

I

The year's processions mocked her as they streamed

Across the earth with proud, unsullied grace;
Each flower in its appointed time and place,
And the unfolding of each leaf had seemed
To brand the hope on which her heart had dreamed—
That spring should drive the winter from her face,
And summer with a broken covenant trace
How spring's indentured pledges were redeemed.

Slowly they came, those blown maturities,
In chaste, irenic order, leaf and bud
And blossom, and red fruit upon the trees,
Pale blue and yellow in spring flowers, blood
Of peony and rose—she knew them all—
From the crocus to the aster in the fall.

II

But when the autumn frost had stripped each tree,
And every garden of the earth lay bare
Of leaf and flower and fruit, she turned to where
The sun's immaculate hand was on the sea.
He touched the waves and from them magically
Lilies and violets grew, and jonquils fair
As those of spring—all in November air,
In fine reversal of earth's irony.

III

Then a wind from the land sprang up and whipped

The waters till the flowers grew acid-etched
Upon her heart; but other blooms, rose-lipped,
Out of the fresh autumnal foam were fetched
By the sun's hand—strange harvest that achieves
Its seasonal fruit before the time of leaves.

The Ice-Floes

Dawn from the Foretop! Dawn from the Barrel!
A scurry of feet with a roar overhead;
The master-watch wildly pointing to Northward,
Where the herd in front of *The Eagle* was spread!

Steel-planked and sheathed like a battleship's nose,
She battered her path through the drifting floes;
Past slob and growler we drove, and rammed her
Into the heart of the patch and jammed her.
There were hundreds of thousands of seals, I'd swear,
In the stretch of that field—"white harps" to spare
For a dozen such fleets as had left that spring
To share in the general harvesting.
The first of the line, we had struck the main herd;
The day was ours, and our pulses stirred
In that brisk, live hour before the sun,
At the thought of the load and the sweepstake won.

We stood on the deck as the morning outrolled
On the fields its tissue of orange and gold,

And lit up the ice to the north in the sharp,
Clear air; each mother-seal and its "harp"
Lay side by side; and as far as the range
Of the patch ran out we saw that strange,
And unimaginable thing
That sealers talk of every spring—
The "bobbing-holes" within the floes
That neither wind nor frost could close;
Through every hole a seal could dive,
And search, to keep her brood alive,
A hundred miles it well might be,
For food beneath that frozen sea.
Round sunken reef and cape she would rove,
And though the wind and current drove
The ice-fields many leagues that day,
We knew she would turn and find her way
Back to the hole, without the help
Of compass or log, to suckle her whelp—
Back to that hole in the distant floes,
And smash her way up with her teeth and nose.
But we flung those thoughts aside when the shout
Of command from the master-watch rang out.

Assigned to our places in watches of four—
Over the rails in a wild carouse,
Two from the port and starboard bows,
Two from the broadsides—off we tore,
In the breathless rush for the day's attack,
With the speed of hounds on a caribou's track.
With the rise of the sun we started to kill,
A seal for each blow from the iron bill
Of our gaffs. From the nose to the tail we ripped them,

And laid their quivering carcasses flat
On the ice; then with our knives we stripped them
For the sake of the pelt and its lining of fat.
With three fathoms of rope we laced them fast,
With their skins to the ice to be easy to drag,
With our shoulders galled we drew them, and cast
Them in thousands around the watch's flag.
Then, with our bodies begrimed with the reek
Of grease and sweat from the toil of the day,
We made for *The Eagle*, two miles away,
At the signal that flew from her mizzen peak.
And through the night, as inch by inch
She reached the pans with the harps piled high,
We hoisted them up as the hours filed by
To the sleepy growl of the donkey-winch.

Over the bulwarks again we were gone,
With the first faint streaks of a misty dawn;
Fast as our arms could swing we slew them,
Ripped them, "sculped" them, roped and drew them
To the pans where the seals in pyramids rose
Around the flags on the central floes,
Till we reckoned we had nine thousand dead
By the time the afternoon had fled;
And that an added thousand or more
Would beat the count of the day before.
So back again to the patch we went
To haul, before the day was spent,
Another load of four "harps" a man,
To make the last the record pan.
And not one of us saw, as we gaffed, and skinned,
And took them in tow, that the north-east wind

Had veered off-shore; that the air was colder;
That the signs of recall were there to the south,
The flag of *The Eagle*, and the long, thin smoulder
That drifted away from her funnel's mouth.
Not one of us thought of the speed of the storm
That hounded our tracks in the day's last chase
(For the slaughter was swift, and the blood was warm),
Till we felt the first sting of the snow in our face.

We looked south-east, where, an hour ago,
Like a smudge on the sky-line, someone had seen
The Eagle, and thought he had heard her blow
A note like a warning from her sirene.
We gathered in knots, each man within call
Of his mate, and slipping our ropes, we sped,
Plunging our way through a thickening wall
Of snow that the gale was driving ahead.
We ran with the wind on our shoulder; we knew
That the night had left us this only clue
Of the track before us, though with each wail
That grew to the pang of a shriek from the gale.
Some of us swore that *The Eagle* screamed
Right off to the east; to others it seemed
On the southern quarter and near, while the rest
Cried out with every report that rose
From the strain and the rend of the wind on the floes
That *The Eagle* was firing her guns to the west.
And some of them turned to the west, though to go
Was madness—we knew it and roared, but the notes
Of our warning were lost as a fierce gust of snow
Eddied, and strangled the words in our throats.
Then we felt in our hearts that the night had swallowed

All signals, the whistle, the flare, and the smoke
To the south; and like sheep in a storm we followed
Each other; like sheep we huddled and broke.
Here one would fall as hunger took hold
Of his step; here one would sleep as the cold
Crept into his blood, and another would kneel
Athwart the body of some dead seal,
And with knife and nails would tear it apart.
To flesh his teeth in its frozen heart.
And another dreamed that the storm was past,
And raved of his bunk and brandy and food,
And *The Eagle* near, though in that blast
The mother was fully as blind as her brood.
Then we saw, what we feared from the first—dark
places
Here and there to the left of us, wide, yawning spaces
Of water; the fissures and cracks had increased
Till the outer pans were afloat, and we knew,
As they drifted along in the night to the east,
By the cries we heard, that some of our crew
Were borne to the sea on those pans and were lost.
And we turned with the wind in our faces again,
And took the snow with its lancing pain,
Till our eye-balls cracked with the salt and the frost;
Till only iron and fire that night
Survived on the ice as we stumbled on;
As we fell and rose and plunged—till the light
In the south and east disclosed the dawn,
And the sea heaving with floes—and then,
The Eagle in wild pursuit of her men.

And the rest is as a story told,

Or a dream that belonged to a dim, mad past,
Of a March night and a north wind's cold,
Of a voyage home with a flag half-mast;
Of twenty thousand seals that were killed
To help to lower the price of bread;
Of the muffled beat ... of a drum ... that filled
A nave ... at our count of sixty dead.

?

Dawn!
Gold-minted—
The monarch of the morn,
Awake—
Shadows withdrawn,
A sheet of glass rose-tinted—
The lake!

Splash!
A coral ring
Studded with rubies and agates and gold,
Finely wrought out.
A vision of a silver flash.
Lost! Was it a grayling,
Or a rainbow-trout?

The Shark

He seemed to know the harbor,
So leisurely he swam;
His fin,
Like a piece of sheet-iron,
Three-cornered,
And with knife-edge,
Stirred not a bubble
As it moved
With its base-line on the water.

His body was tubular
And tapered
And smoke-blue,
And as he passed the wharf
He turned,
And snapped at a flat-fish
That was dead and floating.
And I saw the flash of a white throat.
And a double row of white teeth,
And eyes of metallic grey,
Hard and narrow and slit.

Then out of the harbor,
With that three-cornered fin
Shearing without a bubble the water,
Lithely,
Leisurely,
He swam—

That strange fish,
Tubular, tapered, smoke-blue,
Part vulture, part wolf.
Part neither—for his blood was cold.

The Fog

It stole in on us like a foot-pad,
Somewhere out of the sea and air,
Heavy with rifling Polaris
And the Seven Stars.
It left our eyes untouched,
But took our sight,
And then,
Silently,
It drew the song from our throats,
And the supple bend from our ash-blades;
For the bandit,
With occult fingering,
Had tangled up
The four threads of the compass,
And fouled the snarl around our dory.

The Big Fellow

A huge six-footer,
Eyes bay blue,
And as deep;
Lower jaw like a cliff,
Tongue silent,
As hard and strong as a huskie.

A little man,
In a pressed suit,
Standing before him,
Had dug a name out of the past,
And flung it at him
Under cover of law.

The big fellow
Leaned over him,
Like a steel girder,
Just for a moment,
Then swung around on his heel
Without striking.

And I thought of the big Newfoundland
I saw, asleep by a rock
The day before,
That was galvanized by a challenge,
But eyeing a cur,
He turned,
Yawned,
Closed one eye,
Then the other,
And slept.

The Morning Plunge

Clean-limbed and arrowy he shot his way
Into the crystal waters of the bay;
Full thirty-feet below the derrick's beam,
As a lithe salmon, leaping from a stream
Hangs, instant-poised, then arches for the plunge,
Driving with lightning fin a dexterous lunge
Down to his haunts, and trails, enwreathed in mists,
A flock of garnets chasing amethysts.

In Absentia

Erect and motionless he stood,
His face a hieroglyph of stone,
Stopped was his pulse, chilled was his blood,
And stiff each sinew, nerve and bone.

The spell an instant held him, when
His veins were swept by tidal power,
And then life's threescore years and ten
Were measured by a single hour.

The world lay there beneath his eye;

The sun had left the heavens to float
A hand-breadth from him, and the sky
Was but an anchor for his boat.

Fled was the class-room's puny space—
His eye saw but a whirling disk;
His old and language-weathered face
Shone like a glowing asterisk!

What chance had he now to remember
The year held months so saturnine
As ill-starred May and blank September,
With that brute tugging at his line?

The Flood Tide

He paused a moment by the sea,
Then stooped, and with a leisured hand
He wrote in casual tracery
Her name upon the flux of sand.

The waves beat up and swiftly spun
A silver web at every stride;
He watched their long, thin fingers run
The letters back into the tide.

But she had written where the tide
Could never its grey waters fling;

She watched the longest wave subside
Ere it could touch the lettering.

The Pine Tree

I saw how he would come each night and wait
An hour or more beside that broken gate—
Just stand, and stare across the road with dim,
Grey eyes. Nothing was there but an old pine tree,
Cut down and sawn in lengths; and absently
He answered questions that I put to him.

He spoke as if some horrid deed were done—
Murder—no less—it seemed to be;
A week before, under his very eyes,
A gang of men had slain a tree.
The pine was planted seventy years ago
To celebrate his birth,
It had a right, he said, to live and grow,
And then into the earth,
By a mild and understanding law,
To pass with nature's quiet burial.
But they had come, those men, with axe and saw,
And killed it like a criminal,
And with the hangman's rope about its neck,
It swayed a moment, then with heavy sound,
Dropped with a crash of branches to the ground.

In Lantern Light

I could not paint, nor could I draw
The look that searched the night;
The bleak refinement of the face I saw
In lantern light.

A cunning hand might seize the crag,
Or stay the flight of a gull,
Or the rocket's flash; or more—the lightning jag
That lit the hull.

But as a man born blind must steal
His colors from the night
By hand, I had to touch that face to feel
It marble white.

The Secret of the Sea

Tell me thy secret, O Sea,
The mystery sealed in thy breast;
Come, breathe it in whispers to me,
A child of thy fevered unrest.

It's midnight, and from me has sleep
 Flown afar, like a bird on the wing,
All tired is my heart as I weep
 Through a winter that knows not a spring.

Why dost thou respond to my plea
 With only a minor refrain?
Thy voice in a moan floats to me,
 As an echo sobbed from my pain.

Hast thou a grief, too, like mine,
 That never heals with the years;
A bosom entombing a shrine
 Bedewed with the waste of thy tears?

Where lies my loved one to-night
 Beneath thy grey mantle so wide?
I would that his slumber were light,
 To wake with the flow of the tide.

Should he not wake, bear him this,
 An amaranth plucked from my heart;
Wreath it soft in his dreams with a kiss,
 Then return, and ere I depart.

On the flood of my soul's overflow.
 Borne on by my grief from the wild
Of this storm-beaten life, let me know
 How he slept; let me know if he smiled.

Loss of the Steamship Florizel

What changed thy face from that of yesterday,
Great Sea! that with thy mothering hands outspread
And smiling on our common life, didst lay
The table covers for our daily bread?

To-day, held by the thresh of iron shocks
Within the vortex of a lightless fate,
Thy hands are tearing seaweed on the rocks,
And thou—a stark and wild inebriate.

The Drowning

The rust of hours,
Through a year of days,
Has dulled the edge of the pain;
But at night
A wheel in my sleep
Grinds it smooth and keen.

By day I remember
A face that was lit
With the softness of human pattern;
But at night
It is changed in my sleep
To a bygone carved in chalk.

A cottage inland
Through a year of days
Has latched its doors on the sea;
But at night
I return in my sleep
To the cold, green lure of the waters.

Monologues and Dialogues

I

CARLO

"The dog that saved the lives of more than ninety persons in that recent week, by swimming with a line from the sinking vessel to the shore, well understood the importance as well as the risk of his mission."—Extract from a Newfoundland paper.

I see no use in not confessing—
To trace your breed would keep me guessing;
It would indeed an expert puzzle
To match such legs with a jet-black muzzle.
To make a mongrel, as you know,
it takes some fifty types or so,

And nothing in your height or length,
In stand or color, speed or strength,
Could make me see how any strain
Could come from mastiff, bull, or Dane.
But, were I given to speculating
On pedigrees in canine rating,
I'd wager this—not from your size,
Not merely from your human eyes,
But from the way you held that cable
Within those gleaming jaws of sable,
Leaped from the taffrail of the wreck
With ninety souls upon its deck,
And with your cunning dog-stroke tore
Your path unerring to the shore—
Yes, stake my life, the way you swam,
That somewhere in your line a dam,
Shaped to this hour by God's own hand,
Had mated with a Newfoundland.

They tell me, Carlo, that your kind
Has neither conscience, soul, nor mind;
That reason is a thing unknown
To such as dogs; to man alone
The spark divine—he may aspire
To climb to heaven or even higher;
But God has tied around the dog
The symbol of his fate, the clog.
Thus, I have heard some preachers say—
Wise men and good, in a sort o' way—
Proclaiming from the sacred box
(Quoting from Butler and John Knox)
How freedom and the moral law

God gave to man, because He saw
A way to draw a line at root
Between the human and the brute.
And you were classed with things like bats,
Parrots and sand-flies and dock-rats,
Serpents and toads that dwell in mud,
And other creatures with cold blood
That sightless crawl in slime, and sink.

Gadsooks! It makes me sick to think
That man must so exalt his race
By giving dogs a servile place;
Prate of his transcendentalism,
While you save men by mechanism.
And when I told them how you fought
The demons of the storm, and brought
That life-line from the wreck to shore,
And saved those ninety souls or more,
They argued with such confidence—
'Twas instinct, nature, or blind sense.
A *man* could know when he would do it;
You did it and never knew it.

And so, old chap, by what they say,
You live and die and have your day,
Like any cat or mouse or weevil
That has no sense of good and evil
(Though sheep and goats, when they have died,
The Good Book says are classified);
But you, being neuter, go to—well,
Neither to heaven nor to hell.

I'll not believe it, Carlo: I
Will fetch you with me when I die,
And, standing up at Peter's wicket,
Will urge sound reasons for your ticket;
I'll show him your life-saving label
And tell him all about that cable,
The storm along the shore, the wreck,
The ninety souls upon the deck;
How one by one they came along,
The young and old, the weak and strong—
Pale women sick and tempest-tossed,
With children given up for lost;
I'd tell him more, if he would ask it—
How they tied a baby in a basket.
While a young sailor, picked and able,
Moved out to steady it on the cable;
And if he needed more recital
To admit a mongrel without title,
I'd get down low upon my knees.
And swear before the Holy Keys,
That, judging by the way you swam,
Somewhere within your line, a dam
Formed for the job by God's own hand,
Had littered for a Newfoundland.

I feel quite sure that if I made him
Give ear to that, I could persuade him
To open up the Golden Gate
And let you in; but should he state
That from your legs and height and speed
He still had doubts about your breed,
And called my story of the cable

"A cunningly devised fable,"
Like other rumors that you've seen
In Second Peter, one, sixteen,
I'd tell him (saving his high station)
The devil take his legislation,
And, where life, love, and death atone,
I'd move your case up to the Throne.

II

OVERHEARD BY A STREAM

Here is the pool, and there the waterfall;
This is the bank; keep out of sight, and crawl
Along the side to where that alder clump
Juts out. 'Twas there I saw a salmon jump,
A full eight feet, not fifteen minutes past.
Bend low a bit! or else the sun will cast
Your shadow on the stream. Still farther; stop!
Now joint your rod; reel out your line, and drop
Your leader with the "silver doctor" on it,
Behind that rock that's got the log upon it.

There's nothing here; the water is too quiet;
You need a pool with rapids flowing by it:
Plenty of rush and motion, heave and roar.
To turn their thoughts from things upon the shore;
The day's too calm—I told you that before.
Just mind your line! I tell you that he's there.

I saw him spring up ten feet in the air—
Twelve pounder, if an ounce! Great Mackinaw!
Look! Quick! He's on! The "doctor" in his jaw.....
Snapped! Gone! You big fool: worse than any fool!
What did you think to find here in this pool—
A minnow or a shiner—that you tried
With such a jerk to land him on the side
Of this high bank? That was a salmon—fool!
The biggest one that swam within this pool;
The one I saw that jumped twelve feet—not lower;
Would tip the scales at fourteen pounds or more.
Lost—near that rock that's got the log upon it,
Gone—with the leader and the "doctor" on it.

III

OVERHEARD IN A COVE

(The Old Salt Talks Back)

Swiles=seals.

Quintal=cwt.

THE SCHOLAR (*recovering from heroic seizures*)

Existence in this little town I find
Much too constricted for an ample mind;
Unheeded on these vain and deafening shores
Might Wisdom cry aloud her precious stores—
Wisdom for whom the Universe unseen
An illustrated page has ever been;

Who but initiates may understand
The forms and pressures of her amorous hand!
Her thoughts that wander through Eternity
Would perish here beside this muddy sea,
For no divine afflatus ever reaches
The men who dry their fish upon these beaches.

THE SALT.

Your poor old dad and granddad, long since dead—
God rest their weary souls—were born and bred
Upon this shore, as fine God-fearin' sort
As ever brought a leaky ship to port.
They never put up any braggin' claims
To learnin'—couldn't more than write their names,
And yet, no dealer born could take 'em in,
In things of common sense, like figurin'
Accounts, or show them any solid reason
Why number one prime cod might any season
Drop in price, while the fish remained as good
As ever, and a quintal always stood
A quintal; and there never was a strait
Or gulf or cape they couldn't navigate;
And fair or foul it made no difference.

They had no learnin', but the chunk of sense
The Good Lord gave 'em for their calculation,
While other men who learned their navigation
From books, got drowned; so you for all your letters
Have got no call for sneerin' at your betters.

THE SCHOLAR (*with condescension*).

But, my dear man, I feel I must admit
To such a native modicum of wit,
By this, plus luck, if such a thing there be,
A man may wrest his living from the sea;
But on the troublous sea as on the land.
Note what we owe the scientific hand.
The world's dark secrets have been opened out
By men who forged their faith from honest doubt.
Who rounded out the universe for us
But Galileo and Copernicus?
Who gave us chart and compass, sextant, log,
And apparatus for detecting fog
And wind and currents? Who gave us thermometers?
Again, I ask; who, prisms and barometers?

THE SALT (*snortingly*).

A man that owns a hand can use a log,
An idiot with one eye can see a fog
When it is comin'.

THE SCHOLAR.

But no wit surmises
The calculated way the wind uprises;

The place it comes from, whereunto it goes,
Nor tell you to the mile the rate it blows,
A full seven days ahead. But Science draws
Exact determinations of the laws
That govern wind and waves; though, to be sure,
In charting atmospheric temperature
She may, for uninformed mentalities,
Use terms like unexplained contingencies.
But still, when all her facts are massed together,
Unerring is her forecast of the weather;
In our metropolis we have a man
Who *plots* it every day.

THE SALT (*fired by reminiscence*).

Like hell he can.
Whenever that fool bulletin comes out,
With cock-sure talk about the heat and drought
That's bound to last a week, I always ask
The missus for me flannels and a flask
Of gin to keep me goin' through the day.
And when it says—"Look out for frost, 'twill stay
Three days or more," I know we'll have a spurt
Of heat would boil a man inside his shirt.
Its everlasting fable—"Fair and warm"
Means "brewin' for the devil of a storm."

THE SCHOLAR (*with righteous warmth*).

This open and unshamed prevarication
Perturbs my soul with moral agitation.
A votary of Truth I shall abide,
That Wisdom of her child be justified.

THE SALT.

And let me tell you this: a half a brain
Can tell a nor'-east wind will bring a rain.
A sun-hound in the evenin' or a ring
Around the moon—there is no safer thing
For prophesyin' weather; as for cold,
You boasted that your man up yonder told
That frost was comin'. Why, sure, a skunk knows
That and more; three months ahead he grows
A chunkier tail.

THE SCHOLAR.

Your language, my good sir,
Is rank: but, waiving that, I must aver
With emphasis that human life is longer,
As knowledge grows from more to more, and stronger,
With every age, the race. Take medicine,
And note its triumphs. How shall I begin
To glorify that heavenly art enough,
Since Aesculapius.

THE SALT.

I calls it bluff,
This doctorin' business. There's Jim Hennessey's lad.
When he was young his father thought he had
The makin's of a doctor in him. I,
Inquirin' like, asked him the reason why.
He said the lad was handy with a knife,
The way he'd carve a rabbit up alive,
Or a young robin, maybe, just to see
What the innerds were like.

THE SCHOLAR.

Anatomy!
A subject of minute research.

THE SALT.

Then Jim
Put no less than six years expense on him.
When he came back, some said it was decline;
He called it asthma, but he had the sign
Of a gone man; the neighbors were afraid
To have him in; their children, so they said,
Might catch the wheezin' off his chest. One case
His dad got for him—more to save his face,
I said, but let that bide—Jim got his son
A case of Jack spavin—a wicked one

I will allow it was—in Hazzard's mare.
The boy put on a apron, then a pair
Of rubber gloves, and then he said he'd freeze
The leg and dose her up with fumes to ease
The pain; and afterwards he'd operate.
Then sew her up and leave the rest to fate.
He did his honest bit—at least he tried;
The mare kicked down the stalls before she died.

THE SCHOLAR.

But your example only serves to show
What dire results from ignorance may flow.
He had no skill for equine malady—
No special training.

THE SALT.

Just what Hennessey,
His father, thought. So the old man, grown wise,
Gave him another year to specialize—
This time in spavins.

THE SCHOLAR.

How does this impugn
The Science by which man is made immune

From all those fearsome, devastating ills,
From cholera morbus to domestic measles,
That swept the cosmos? Tell me, has not man
Added by this to his allotted span
Two decades?

THE SALT.

I don't see it with my eyes.
This generation's dyin' off like flies;
And why? Each mother son of them and daughter
Are bred on arrowroot, with milk and water.
They're all a scraggy lot; too much spoon-fed;
Wants water bottles when they go to bed;
Smokes cigarettes and drinks vile, home-made wine.
Rhubarb will corn 'em; so will dandyline.
'Tis not the same as what it was. I know,
Away back in the sixties, when our crew
Was home from swilin' and a regular streak
Of thirst had struck us, how, one night a week,
And after lodge was out, each man would take a
Good, long and steady swig of old Jamaica,
And never feel the worse on it. 'Twould blow
A colony like you to Jericho.
As tough as staragons, they had no call
For other medicine. A swig was all
They asked for, and a swig was all they got.
It cooled them off when they were dry, and shot
Them up, when they were cold. And, say, what can,
Within a lifetime, come to any man,

Except a burnin' fever or a freezin'?

THE SCHOLAR.

Your argument is void of rhyme or reason;
Your observations on disease, mere chatter.

THE SALT.

Maybe 'tis so; but I looks at the matter
Quite different wise. I holds that not in strength,
Nor muscle, nor in gumption, nor in length
Of days, are young folks like they used to be.
I minds how in a blinkin' storm at sea,
When both the captain and the mate were drowned,
Under a double reef we had to round
The Cape, on a lee coast, and, undermanned,
And the taffrail blown to bits, the youngest hand
On board, Sam Drake, took his turn at the wheel.
He couldn't see the mainmast—had to feel
The schooner's course, yet brought her down the bay,
With every shred of canvas swept away.

THE SCHOLAR.

Is not the clamant menace of the sea
Silenced by steam, by electricity,

By gasoline?

THE SALT.

My notion's still the same,
That folks were better off before they came.
More swiles were taken in the spring; more fish
Were dried upon the flakes, and if you wish
To get my views on gasoline, I think
The racket of the engine and the stink
Is drivin' all the cod out of the bay.
'Tis gettin' hopeless quite—no fish, no pay.
But there's a worse account I feel like makin'
Against new-fangled notions. They are takin'
The backbone from the lads—initiation
You called it—

THE SCHOLAR.

No. Allow my emendation

—
Initiative! However, I understand.

THE SALT.

Maybe you're right; maybe you're not. 'Tis sand,
I calls it; but no matter what 'tis called,

With any kind of little snag they're stalled.
They'd starve and die with plenty all around 'em.
I minds when our supplies ran out we found 'em,
Sometimes when we were in the bush, with tea
And baccy gone—no drink or nothin'—we
Would fetch a kettle full of juniper
And boil it for an hour or so, and stir
Barbados black-strap with it—

THE SCHOLAR (*in deep spiritual reflection*).

Do I see,
In its archetypal form, Zymology,
That most potential art?

THE SALT.

Yes, sir, the brew
Would grow a jumper on your chest. We'd chew
The dried sap of the spruce, and then we'd take
Dried tea-leaves with the chips of bark and make
A powerful, fine smoke. You never saw,
I suppose, a man rig up a lobster claw
With quid, to get a drag when he had lost
His pipe? I needn't ask. That never crossed
Your mind. I'd like to see a good round score
Like you, a-headin' all for Labrador,
Stowed in a fore-and-after with the sea,
A-ragin' through the scuppers. It would be

A sight for Satan, every time the ship,
With not too much of ballast, took a dip
To come right up again with soakin' jibs—
To watch your queasy stomachs and your ribs
In need of oilin'.

THE SCHOLAR.

Trivial your words,
Your passions bestial. The irrational herds
Roaming the plains would scorn such thoughts as these;
The ox, the zebra and the ass appease
Their several hungers, earth-born as they are—
Without afflatus, without mind—with far
More worthy satisfactions. What care you
(recurrence of symptoms)
For the primrose by the river's brink, the blue
Within the violet's eye, in fine, for flowers?
Eating and drinking you lay waste your powers,
The world being too much with you. Have you felt
A presence that disturbs you? Have you knelt
At Nature's shrine, bathed at her crystal fount,
And found her central peace? Say, do you count
By figures or by heart-throbs? Have you never
Listened to brooks that babble on for ever?
Sermons there are in stones; alas, they stir
You not.

THE SALT.

Shame on you, you
idolater,
For worshippin' stocks and stones. I see you took
All your religion from a bot'ny book,
And a dry, small lump it is, by every sign
That I can see, you heathen. I gets mine
From another kind of book. You don't need learnin'
Neither, the kind that kills the soul's discernin'
Of spiritual things. That's what our parson said,
And he had learnin', too. It killed him dead
Before he gave it up, like a dry rot
That puts the blight on damson plums—that's what
It is. Give me what makes a critter whole,
And pours the blazin' glory on his soul,
And saves him from the horrors.

THE SCHOLAR (*on the verge of a paroxysm*).

A most rude
Conception of the spirit's growth—mere food
For sucklings, for the race at those low stages
Of history that form the world's Dark Ages.
From your contentions, then, must I assume
That in your mind's horizon is no room
For formulæ that dominate our times;
For laws that tell how by successive climbs
Our common human nature has become
The paragon magnificent for dumb

And erring brutes? Millions of years have passed
Between the first crude cycle and the last,
In which, despite the bludgeonings of chance
And fate, has man his own deliverance
Wrought out; survived the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. In the eternal rocks
Engraven is the epic.

THE SALT.

Pedley's lad,
When he came back from learnin', was as bad
As Hennessey. I might say worse, for he
Lacked any bit of skill that Hennessey
Might seem to own if he got started right.
Pedley, for so his old man thought, was quite
A brainy boy when growin' up. He'd shirk
Any and every job that looked like work.
He wouldn't run, he wouldn't walk; he'd fetch
A book, and then for hours at a stretch
He'd squat down on the wharf—takin' the air,
I said it was. He wouldn't read. He'd stare,
Then drowse, then stare again, just like a sheep.
Whose brains the wise God only gave for sleep,
When Jeff, his younger brother, might be seen
Shapin' the model of a brigantine,
Or doin' something handy, steepin' bark,
Or renderin' out the liver of a shark.
Well, when the old man finally understood
He could do nothin' with him, for the good

Of his soul—the last thing left—he thought he'd send
Him off to join the Church; thought if he'd spend
Ten years wearin' a collar or a satin
Gown, and got crammed right to the neck with Latin,
And the seven tongues, and all the other learnin',
He'd be a thumpin' wonder on returnin'.
He was. As bad as you for gall, he'd chin
The Lord out of his job, on points like sin,
Damnation and the rest of it. He told
Us how the world—I can't just mind how old,
He said it was; but just to illustrate
His point, he took a pencil and a slate,
Marked five in the left-hand corner near the top,
And added zeros till he had to stop
For want of room, and added more by tongue,
Then ended, claimin' that the world was young.
Just like a mushroom, so to speak; and when
He thought he'd finished his explainin', then
Our pastor put a poser to him straight.
Just how, he asked him, did he calculate
It out?—the parson, I'll allow, was rough
On questions—Was the slate not big enough?
Did he run out of zeros? Was he sure
He had the tally right? A zero more,
What mattered it, and how did he arrive
By any kind of reckonin' at that five?
It looked so lonesome by itself. Would not
Another zero do instead? And what
Do you allow his answer was? I've heard
Some blasphemy against the Livin' Word
Within my time—the Livin' Word that says
The world's bin waggin' now, omittin' days,

Six thousand years; but Word and Church and Lord,
The evidence of the Fathers and the Sword
Of the Spirit, everything—he cast them out
With one deliberate, sacrilegious clout.
He told us—and it sounded like a boast—
He told us—are you listenin'?—that the most
Of all his facts he got from skulls; from graves
Of savages that one time lived in caves;
From skeletons of serpents, elephants;
I think he mentioned bugs and bees and ants
And frogs' backbones and such, but most of it
He got from skulls so old that not a bit
Of chop was left upon the jowls. He said—
Grantin' the man who owned the skull was dead
So long, the crown had rotted—yet he'd tell
The story from the jaw-bone just as well.

THE SCHOLAR (*delivering le grand coup*).

Thanks to the scientist's imagination,
The point is proven to a demonstration,
Your patriarchal history is a fable,
A groundless fiction like your Tower of Babel,
Your Samson or your Jonah. Had you sense
To follow while I forge the evidence,
How from the void of dancing vortices,
The human mind has wrought its destinies,
You'd gather what the Universe discloses.

THE SALT (*with profound disgust*).

I'm done with you, my lad—I stands by Moses.

IV

THE PASSING OF JERRY MOORE

(*Juniper Hall answers the critics*).

Did Jerry get through the gates of gold,
To join the white-robed Saints, that basked
In the glory of the Father's fold?

That was the question each man asked,
As Jerry lay with his cold feet
And his cold hands under the sheet.

The last man, known as Juniper Hall,
The life-time pal of Jerry Moore,
Spoke—as soon as he had the floor—
And said he disagreed with them all.
He thought the judgment of Doran,
That sanctified and solemn man,
Put altogether too great store
Upon the words of Jerry's speech,
As Jerry sat in the rain and swore
At the fish that rotted on the beach.
Why shouldn't a man, who day by day
Had seen the clouds wipe out the sun
And botch the work his hands had done,

Pour out his soul in a natural way,
On the chance of ridding his chest of it,
And tell the Lord what he thought of it all—
The rain, the fog and a hungry fall,
The rotten fish and the rest of it?

Then Juniper asked why Solomon Rowe
(Who handed out to sinners gratis
Timely advice such as might flow
From him, a saint of ten years' status)
Should so denounce what occupied
Old Jerry's mind the night he died.
He had spent the day in mending a net
And splicing a rope; without a thought
About the way a sinner ought
To make eternal peace, he ate
His three good hearty meals and went
To bed. He took no Sacrament;
He had no dying pains; he gave
No groans; nor called the Lord to save
His soul; but in his dreams he talked,
With a sort of chuckle in his speech,
Of a shoal of caplin on the beach,
And of the punt that he had caulked,
And other things that he had done.
The case was proved, for Jake, his son,
Who lay beside him on the bed,
Had vouched for all that Solomon said.
But Jerry's life from the day of his birth
Was only meant for the jobs of earth,
Like caulking punts and mending nets,
And catching fish to pay his debts.

He would shout like a man with gospel soul
At the saving news of a herring shoal,
That swarmed down the bay in the spring,
And no one louder than Jerry could sing
As he'd barrel 'em up or smoke 'em,
His rough, red hands, a-reeking with brine,
And his clothes with a mixture of turpentine,
Of tar and cod-liver oil and oakum;
What wonder then that in his sleep,
As he dreamed about that caplin shoal,
The thought should so have tickled his soul
And made him laugh, instead of weep,
Like the saints that get so short of breath
In the last hour before their death?
Besides, it's claimed he had not met,
For want of savings, a just debt
He owed to Rowe before he died.
But, then, as he had often said,
The reason why he had not paid
It off—the Lord had never dried
His load of cod; but Solomon Rowe
Had owed a hundred dollars or so
For years, though the sun had always shone
Upon the fish of Solomon.

Then Juniper thought that Watchnight Percy—
The one who spoke of the Lord's great mercy—
Though his heart was right, yet, on the whole,
Was over-anxious for Jerry's soul.
Was Jerry's chance, like that of the thief,
Merely the miracle of belief,
That in the final midnight hour

Springs from the Lord Almighty's power
And heavenly grace? Juniper could
Not argue this point for want of light
So left the question as it stood,
To deal with the claim of Christopher Wright.

Much that was spoken by Christopher
Had a measure of truth, said Juniper.
It was true that Jerry, with his mind
So bent on worldly things, might find
Beyond those gates of pearl and gold,
Within those heavenly pavilions,
Where white-robed angels by the millions
Bask in the glory of the fold,
No angel who would undertake
To wean his thoughts from earthly things,
And fit him up with a pair of wings;
Or—still more hopeless job—to make
Him change his manners and his speech,
So that those lordly potentates
Might not be shocked, as Jerry's mates
Were often shocked upon the beach.
All this, he said, and more beside
May yet be true of the man that died—
(Jerry, who swore when the mood was on.
And worried the soul of Solomon;
Jerry, the most consistent liar
That ever told a fish-yarn when,
On a wintry night, a crew of men
Were gathered around a tamarack fire!)

"I do not care," said Juniper,
Looking direct at Christopher,

"What Gabriel may think of Jerry,
Or (turning around to stare at Joe)
What the sins were that Doran might know:
Or whether he laughed in his sleep and was merry
In the hour of death, as Jake, his son,
Who lay beside him in the bed
Reported the news to Solomon
Of what the dying man had said."

Thus Juniper spoke, his eyes a-glow,
His bony fingers pointing at Rowe.

Then we felt a deep hush fall
Upon the room, as Juniper Hall
Spoke to the dead man under the sheet,
Just as a common man might greet
A living friend. "Well, Jerry, old mate,
They may talk as they like—now that you're cold—
Of those who enter the Father's fold,
Through mercy and grace. They may talk of the fate
Of your soul. They may shake their heads and groan
For fear God's mercy was not shown
To you before you died. I know
Nothing of what the angels do,
Or where the souls of dead men go;
But I'll take my chance in saying that you,
Who always did your day's work well,
Had far too good a soul for hell.
I do not know the kind of luck
That came to Christopher and Joe
And saved from the fire the soul of Rowe,
Nor how the balances are struck

At death; but I'd like to state
If things like contra accounts are stored
On the shelves of the upper Courts of the Lord.
Who judges the hearts of men, that your slate,
Jerry, should tell by a clean score
How you were head of a life-boat crew,
With no one as good at the stern oar,
And always on hand when a storm blew;
And tell how you pulled young Davie Cole,
(Who sits on that bench) out of a hole
In the slob ice one bitter night
In March when Davey was frozen through,
And lugged him ashore with his face as white
As the lip of a ghost, and brought him to,
With no one around to lend you a hand.
Yes, Jerry, old mate, if you never reach
For want of faith the angels' land,
Without a sea, without a beach,
Maybe the Lord in His good grace,
May find close to the boundary
Of heaven and the outer place,
A strip of shoreline by a sea,
Where the winds blow and where you,
As skipper of a life-boat crew,
May throw a line across the deck
Of many a crowded, foundering wreck.
And on fine days when not aboard
Your skiff, but lying up, the Lord
May find odd jobs, perhaps a sail
To mend, that in a Galilean gale
Was torn, or one or two old punts
That He and Simon Peter once

Used on the lake; or say, 'Here's bark
And oakum, oil and pitch, all that
You need; go—caulk that leaky ark
That went aground on Ararat.'
And when you call your gang together,
Some night in raw December weather
(The gang made up of your lifeboat crew,
And other spotted saints of God,
Exiled to that shore with you
Because, while on the earth, they trod
On both the broad and narrow ways)
To tell your yarns before a blaze
Of balsam piled on tamarack—
That night, I swear, I will come back
(As stoker from the outer land
On special leave from Lucifer)
To start your fire with my brand;
I swear it now," said Juniper.

V.

THE HISTORY OF JOHN JONES

The sun never shone,
The rain could not fall
On a steadier man than John.
A holy man was John,
And honest withal.
His mates had never heard

Drop from his guarded lip
An idle word,
But twice—first, while on board his ship,
When he had lost his pipe, he swore,
Just a mild damn, and nothing more;
And once he cursed
The government; but then he reckoned
The Lord forgave him for the first,
And justified the second.

And he was temperate in all his ways,
Was John;
He never drank, but when Thanksgiving days
Came on;
Never in summer on a fishing trip
Would he allow the smell on board his ship;
Only in winter or in autumn,
When a cramp or something caught him,
Would he take it, for he prized it,
Not for its depraved abuses,
But for its discreeter uses,
As his Church had authorized it.

The sun had never shone
On a kinder man than John,
Nor upon
A better Christian than was John.
He was good to his dog, he was good to his cat,
And his love went out to his horse;
He loved the Lord and his Church, of course,
For righteous was he in thought and act;
And his neighbors knew, in addition to that,

He loved his wife, as a matter of fact.

Now, one fine day it occurred to John,
That his last great cramp was on;
For nothing that the doctor wrote
Could stop that rattle in his throat.
He had broken his back upon the oar,
He had dried his last boat-load of cod,
And nothing was left for John any more,
But to drift in his boat to the port of God.

Creatures of Another Country

I

THE BIRD OF PARADISE

Answer my riddle, will you? Nay,
Do not toss your head that way,
With such a ruffle of passion.
I merely asked you who was fleeced
To pay the jeweller and modiste
For this last word in fashion.
I have a right, if you only knew,
To put this delicate point to you—
Those sapphires dancing on your crest,
That cluster of rubies on your breast,
That necklace there, those pearls! The price?

Who paid it? Bird of Paradise!

And the only kind of reply that came
Out of that vision of tropical flame

Was that little ruffle of passion.

A tango of color from scarlet to green
Evolved as I watched the beauty preen

Her plumes in that maddening fashion.

So I left the Bird of the Garden to call,

This time, upon the Bird of the Hall;

For my temples beat with the throb of fire,

And I could not find in that land of Desire

A cooling wind, or water, or ice

To quench a fever in Paradise.

And the only answer I got in the Hall

Was a glance of repulse from the belle of the Ball,

With a little ruffle of passion;

Though I had a right to ask, I am sure,

Who sent that tiara for her coiffure,

And that latest corsage of fashion.

Not those the jewels I gave her to wear,

Not those the drops that hung from her ear;

And my fever burned like a thirst in Sahara,

When that osprey swung above the tiara,

And I knew no wind, nor water, nor ice

Might cool this hell in Paradise.

THE EPIGRAPHER

His head was like his lore—antique,
His face was thin and sallow-sick,
With god-like accent he could speak
Of Egypt's reeds or Babylon's brick
Or sheep-skin codes in Arabic.

To justify the ways divine,
He had travelled Southern Asia through—
Gezir down in Palestine,
Lagash, Ur and Eridu,
The banks of Nile and Tigris too.

And every occult Hebrew tale
He could expound with learned ease,
From Aaron's rod to Jonah's whale.
He had held the skull of Rameses—
The one who died from boils and fleas.

Could tell how—saving Israel's peace—
The mighty Gabriel of the Lord
Put sand within the axle-grease
Of Pharaoh's chariots; and his horde
O'erwhelmed with water, fire and sword.

And he had tried Behistun Rock,
That Persian peak, and nearly clomb it;
His head had suffered from the shock
Of somersaulting from its summit—
Nor had he quite recovered from it.

From that time onward to the end,

His mind had had a touch of gloom;
His hours with jars and coins he'd spend,
And ashes looted from a tomb,—
Within his spare and narrow room.

His day's work done, with the last rune
Of a Hammurabi fragment read,
He took some water spiced with prune
And soda, which imbibed, he said
A Syrian prayer, and went to bed.

* * * * *

And thus he trod life's narrow way,—
His soul as peaceful as a river—
His understanding heart all day
Kept faithful to a stagnant liver.

L'ENVOI.

When at last his stomach went by default,
His graduate students bore him afar
To the East where the Dead Sea waters are,
And pickled his bones in Eternal Salt.

Ode to December, 1917

Was ever night so wild as this—this bleak December

night!

Veiled in the sombre shroud that sepulchred the day;
Why thus bereft of heaven's beams, of moon and starry
light,

Are all its ancient charms in sorrow laid away?

The year dies out with drifted leaves, with winds
and floods of rain,

Companions of the tempest with its brood of fears;
And voices far above us echo back the world's great
pain,

In tongueless language inarticulate through tears.

Why passed with such inevitable speed

The eager splendor of the awakening spring?
So little did it seem to know or heed

Our outward cries, our hidden murmuring;
It shone upon us shyly for some reason,
Then flew into the summer's briefer season,
And found, amidst its roses fully blown,
A transient radiance fleeter than its own.

How sweet the flowers grew in the woods last May!

The trillium, splashed by sunlight, jauntily
Awoke to match the whiteness of its ray

With white of blood-root and anemone.
Within the stray leaves on the humid ground,
Beside the fallen trunks of trees, were found
Numerous hepaticas whose lilac hue
Seemed woven of heaven's purple and its blue,
And, near at hand, a running streamlet told
Of treasure hidden in the marigold.

A little while they stayed; how short the space!
We watched them as the hours went by,
We looked again, and saw them die—
Thus did they pass away; but in their place,
In meadow and in vale sprang up
The daisy and the buttercup;
Then on the creeping slopes of sunny hills,
By winding dales and tortuous rills,
Blue vervain rose to greet the sun,
Ere half the summer's race was run;
And in the fields and on the plains.
By forest paths, by country lanes,
By wayside and in garden plot,
The bluebell and forget-me-not;
And fair the bottle-gentian grew
Beside the wintergreen and rue.

And everywhere around us from the throats
Of joyous birds pealed forth ecstatic praise—
Glad hymns in which were heard no notes
Of dim unrest and troubled lays.
The heart had never taught them sorrows,
Regretful yesterdays nor morrows;
Each morning brought them its full boon of light,
And in return they gave their gift of song—
Free utterance that had no tale of wrong
Within the horizon of their life to right;
And when the evening drew to twilight close,
Fell the light mantle of their calm repose.

Fled are they all;
The flowers and the birds,

In vain we call,
 With cries too dumb for words.
The fragrance and the music gone,
The fire of sunset, flush of dawn,
The waterlily in the lake,
The robin's love-song in the brake;
 All these are fled and gone,
And with us now the night,
The wild December night.

Far, far away upon the seas
The billows tell their agonies;
The ocean in its frenzied roar
Lashes the ramparts of the shore;
The tempest with its shattering thunder
Drives the iron bulwarks under;
The furies, in their path advancing,
Are seen around the breakers dancing;
The sea-mews, blinded by the light
Of mast-head signals, flaring bright,
Are rent by blow of spar and sail
Within the clutches of the gale,
And sailors, drenched by salt and foam,
Yearn for the fireside of their home.

And thus upon the land
 Earth's ravage is laid bare;
Slapped by the storm's fierce hand,
 The wildcat and the bear
Lie huddled in the sand
 That marks their common lair;
The trees in angry lurch

That grew beside each other—
The hemlock and the birch—
Now strive with one another,
In strangely human mood,
Born of unnatural feud.

Around the hoary mountain sides
The storm hurls its impetuous shock,
Is answered by the torrent's tides,
The iron echoes of the rock.
Gone are the woodland notes of spring,
The airs of summer's short-lived breath,
The autumn, too, has taken wing,
The year has rushed into its death.
Gone, like the memory of a dream,
A rainbow hovering o'er a stream;
And we, of nature's joys bereft,
Are with her deepening shadows left,
With grey upon the sea,
And driftwood on the reef,
With winter in the tree,
And death within the leaf.

Far, far away, across the distant deep,
Heaven's lightnings flash from out a darker scroll;
Midnight and darkness in wild chaos keep
A dawnless vigil, as slow thunders roll
Over a world upon whose face the storm
Breaks, and within the terrors of eclipse,
Fall the swift strokes of Death, clothed in the form
Of some dread angel of Apocalypse.
There rides a tempest heedless of the check

Of law, and with no mandate but its will,
Whose function lies alone in power to wreck,
That never hears the fiat, "Peace, be still!"
There, through deep, winding valleys that had known
The quiet haunts of peasants; through the green,
Sweet-tufted verdure that the spring had sown;
Through glens where only roe and fawn were seen
In peace; through plains where once the sunset's brush
Placed its soft crimson on the silent streams;
There, through that land that often loved the hush
Of evening and the tenderness of dreams,
Rolls now the bugle with its alien blast,
The cry of battle on the midnight air,
The fiery summons to earth's legions massed
Mid bayonets gleaming in the rocket's glare;
And streams that to the North Sea once had brought
The dawn's white silver and the sunset's gold,
Now pour such tides as Nature never wrought.
The ruddier treasures of a wealth untold.

O Nature! Thou that lovest life
In herb and brute and feathered kind,
Who leadest from the night's long strife
The morn with rays of promise lined;
Who bringest forth the vital glow
To bathe the trees in glorious light,
And bid the woodland flowers grow,
Clothed spotless in their raiment bright;
Who givest food to hart and hare
Upon the snowy mountain's crest,
And to the ravens everywhere,
The storm-proof covert of their nest;—

Hast thou within thy bounteous plan,
 So rich and measureless and mild,
No boon wherewith to succour man,
 Thy youngest, feeblest, blindest child?
Prostrate upon a formless field,
 Bedewed with unavailing tears,
While the slow hours, faltering, yield
 This nameless triad of the years;
What balm shall touch his stricken eyes?
 What hand shall drive away his dead?
What tones shall quieten his cries?
 What voice shall resurrect his dead?

O Winds; that sweep the surges from the bosom of the
sea,
Strong with a strength unmeasured, as the chainless
 lightnings—free;
Ye nether rivals of the thunders, as their voice your own,
Yet theirs excelling in your major harmonies of tone;
Ye mighty arbiters of light and shade, of hope and
gloom,
Who fashion for the morn its cradle, for the eve its tomb,
Who garrison the towers of God with clouds in dark
array,
Marshalling their watch and slumber till their hidden
fires play;
All day ye played upon the forest pines a mournful
strain,
As if the slowly ebbing year were laboring in its pain;
Upon the land ye tossed the agéd leaves in aimless quest,
And on the deep ye filled the sailor's heart with wild
unrest.

O Winds! that stir the ashes of our altars while our cries
From hearthstone and from chancel in our agony arise,
That drive us in our frantic hours to prayer upon our
knees,
While those we love drift shelterless upon the homeless
seas;
O lift us once again to God! this time on kindlier wings

So weary are we of the strife and fear the tempest brings;
Give us the vision of His gardens under skies of blue,
We have lived so long in shadow of the cypress and the
yew;
Sing through the swell that crowns the ocean
 when its rage has passed,
Resign the terrors of the gale, the furies of the blast;
Then through the vibrant music of the lyre of sea and
land
Which our storm-sated world first heard when
 from the Creator's hand
It rose at the Great Dawn, breathe soon that
 sweet, untroubled peace,
That vista of life's cravings reared on hopes that never
cease;
Blow out upon the raven plumes of this December night,
The world's unresting miseries, her shadow and her
blight;
The story of her passions, and her dark, unfathomed sin,
The outward blow that slaughters, and the guilt
 that slays within;
And deep from out the storm's last throes, peal
 forth in life re-born,
The blazon of the future with the heralds of the morn;

The anthem of a world re-strung to human love and
grace,
The full-toned orchestration of the heart-throbs of the
race.

Newfoundland

Here the tides flow,
And here they ebb;
Not with that dull, unsinewed tread of waters
Held under bonds to move
Around unpeopled shores—
Moon-driven through a timeless circuit
Of invasion and retreat;
But with a lusty stroke of life
Pounding at stubborn gates,
That they might run
Within the sluices of men's hearts,
Leap under throb of pulse and nerve,
And teach the sea's strong voice
To learn the harmonies of new floods,
The peal of cataract,
And the soft wash of currents
Against resilient banks,
Or the broken rhythms from old chords
Along dark passages
That once were pathways of authentic fires
And swept by the wings of dream.

*Red is the sea-kelp on the beach,
Red as the heart's blood,
Nor is there power in tide or sun
To bleach its stain.
It lies there piled thick
Above the gulch-line.*

*It is rooted in the joints of rocks,
It is tangled around a spar,
It covers a broken rudder,
It is red as the heart's blood,
And salt as tears.*

Here the winds blow,
And here they die,
Not with that wild, exotic rage
That vainly sweeps untrodden shores,
But with familiar breath
Holding a partnership with life,
Resonant with the hopes of spring,
Pungent with the airs of harvest.
They call with the silver fifes of the sea,
They breathe with the lungs of men,
They are one with the tides of the sea,
They are one with the tides of the heart,
They blow with the rising octaves of dawn.
They die with the largo of dusk,
Their hands are full to the overflow,
In their right is the bread of life,
In their left are the waters of death.

Scattered on boom

*And rudder and weed
Are tangles of shells;
Some with backs of crusted bronze,
And faces of porcelain blue,
Some crushed by the beach stones
To chips of jade;
And some are spiral-cleft
Spreading their tracery on the sand
In the rich veining of an agate's heart;
And others remain unscarred,
To babble of the passing of the winds.*

Here the crags
Meet with winds and tides—
Not with that blind interchange
Of blow for blow
That spills the thunder of insentient seas;
But with the mind that reads assault
In crouch and leap and the quick stealth,
Stiffening the muscles of the waves.
Here they flank the harbors,
Keeping watch
On thresholds, altars and the fires of home,
Or, like mastiffs,
Over-zealous,
Guard too well.

*Tide and wind and crag,
Sea-weed and sea-shell
And broken rudder—
And the story is told
Of human veins and pulses,*

*Of eternal pathways of fire,
Of dreams that survive the night,
Of doors held ajar in storms.*

Flashlights and Echoes

From the Years of 1914 and 1915

I

A COAST

Scaling where a hundred crags
Disclose their high, precipitous walls,
Up hidden clefts and burnished jags,
The shore-line like a python crawls.
Along a league of ridges overspread
With the dead trunks of pine and oak, it drags
A roughening path; around the head
Of the last bluff it climbs, then falls,
Spilling its folds on spur and boulder,
Down a deep gulch where it rears and sprawls
Upon the Cape's lean shoulder.

Rolling dusks and vapors pour
A turgid silence on the shore,
Broken by a curlew screaming,
And a low, regurgitant note

Borne in from the laboring throat
Of a wave along a line of basalt streaming;
And, further off, where denser gloom
The headland and a reef-curve hides,
Falls the ground-swell's muttered boom
From the belfries of the tides.

Under a tattered curtain of fog
A flaw of wind makes the waters start;
They drift and scud and whirl;
And, held a moment near the heart
Of the eddy, a waterspout,—
Or some wild thing with twisted shape,
Compact of mist and wind and surge—
Hangs like a felon off the Cape.

II

LATER

(A man speaks)

Was that a cry you say you heard?
Where? No. The winds would drown it quite.
No sound would reach the shore to-night,
Except the scream of some wild bird.

A flash, you say, that cut the rain
Like a red knife? It could not be;
There's nothing living in this sea.

Don't look so frightened. What—again?

The lifeboat! They are hailing me.

They need a man for the stern oar;
The wind drives dead upon this shore,
A rudder's helpless in this sea.

III

(A woman speaks).

No. That was not a scream I heard;
One could not hear so far away.

That flash was but the breakers' spray,
That cry, the note of some wild bird.

IV

MORNING

I would not know him had I not
Once marked for him that tattoo spot—
A ship with flying-jib and spanker,
And underneath a chain and anchor.

Nor I, but for that reefer flap
Of moleskin, and this oilskin cap

I found a gunshot from the shore,
I'd know it from a hundred more.

We cannot take him home this way.
'Twould kill the woman straight to lay
The lad like this upon the bed,
And fetch her in to see him dead.

There is a chance she might not know
It was her son—he's battered so.
She'd know him by some canny trace,
Such as that birth-mark on his face,
And, what would smite her like a brand,
This stumped, third finger of his hand.

This coat and cap will tell her all;
We'll get him buried by night-fall;
There is no need to tell her more—
That we found the body on the shore.

V

GREAT TIDES

Great Tides! You filled the reaches
Under the North's wild blow;
Yet could not spare this smaller cup
Its salter overflow.

Huge hands! You rear our bulwarks up

With power to none akin;
Yet cannot lift a door-latch up
That a lad may enter in.

VI

THE AFTER-CALM

What is that color on the sea,
Dotted by the white sails of ships?
It is blue, you say. We know it not, and yet
We know the blue of violet,

The hue of mid-day skies,
And the sapphire of young children's eyes;
But *that* we do not know—unless it be
The pallor of dead lips.

That band upon the sea?
A sash of green that in a moment's time
Becomes a girdle of wrought gold,
Held by a silver clasp of surge.
It cannot be.
That green is now a belt of slime,
And now—an iron-knotted scourge,
And now—the form of some anguineal fold.

That crimson core with sepia fringe,
And orange tints between,
Shows how the sun's white alchemy

In vain attempt is seen
To paint a pansy on the sea.

That red is not the pansy's red,
Nor what the garden poppy shows,
Nor the vermilion that is spread
Upon the pastel of the rose,
But some deep smear that has its name
In the sprawled characters of the flood,
A splash of fire, a troubled flame,
That takes its color from the blood
Of one who through the night had died,
Breaking his body on the tide.

VII

SCENES FROM AFAR

(A Battlefield)

Above the tottering ramparts of the day
Massed clouds dissolve their lines; reform, and break
Into a thousand fragments from the grey.
Scattered, they drift awhile, then come to rest
On some far shore like mariners marooned,
While down the burning avenue of the west
The sun drops, flaming, like an angry wound.

A raven rises from the eastern skies,
Mounts up the lifted causeways of the north,

Winging an arc of shadow as she flies;
And soon the broken fragments close again,
 The straylings of her brood flock to her wings—
Whirlwind and cloud, the thunder and the rain,
 And what is left of night's unuttered things.

Now closed is every seam of sky and land.
The air, the water and the sod are one,
And every gulf of light and darkness spanned.
O spirits that love the daylight and the sun,
 That with unerring fingers trace,
When night's dark moments are outrun,
 The swarthy features of the morning's face;
In whose involvéd weavings hour by hour
 Are fashioned forth the hues of nature's dress,
In dew and rainbow, grass and tree and flower,
 And all the patterns of earth's loveliness;
Whose iridescent splendors burn
In vein of leaf, in curl of fern.
And in the flame the summer throws
Upon the poppy and the rose!
Draw near with every voice that's heard
In sound of cataract and bird,
With every color that the spring
Sheds on a blossom, blade or wing:
Come with your potencies that stir
The sap of life in pine and fir
That high along the mountains climb;
Bring rosemary and thorn and thyme
And heather—all that dawn distils
Of fragrance from your clouded hills:
From heath and glade and marge of lake,

Draw near and watch the morning break!

Wherefore should a daisy bloom,
Or scent come from the thorn?
What sun could penetrate this gloom,
Make redolent this morn?
The lark is banished from the sky,
The thrush has fled the ground,
Not heaven's chorus could outvie
This bacchanal of sound
That from the throat of fire and flood
Would drown the voice of God,
Answering the challenge of the blood
That cries out from the clod.

Where are the lilies that your valleys yield,
Or those that in foul waters blow?
May not the primrose of the field
Bloom near the snow?
Should not the clover in the meadows bare,
The sweet-briar in the hedges there,
Burst red and grow?

They cannot bloom. Spring's gales have lost
Their power the earth to leaven,
For those dark vapors would exhaust
The lavender of heaven.

A DIRGE

Now let the earth take
 Into its care,
All that it travailed for,
 All that it bare.

Leaves of the forest,
 Yellow and red,
The drifting and scattered,
 The dying and dead;

Grass of the hill-slopes,
 Sickled and dried,
Vines that over-night
 Blasted and died;

Blossoms and flowers
 Nipped with the cold,
Trees that have fallen
 A century old;

Moths of the candle-flame,
 Gnats from the stream,
Wraiths from the moonlight,
 Spectres of dream;

All that the earth gave,
 All that it bare—
With all its far kindred
 Of water and air.

And in those rutted acres

Which the heart's red blood has sown,
Soon shall the bramble flourish
Where the gentian had grown;
And wherever ran the myrtle,
Let the dust of thistles be shed,
For these, with nightshade and burdock,
Shall fast cover the dead.

IX

THE SEED MUST DIE

Ye meadows, groves, your birth renew; ye orchards,
vineyards, grow!
Where fast the wastrel waters of the Marne and Yser
flow;
On the plains bestow your verdure, to the hills your
odors fling.
Before the smile of Ceres, let your golden censer swing.

For never since great Nature ran her sluices to the sea,
And opened up her flood-gates at the Rain-God's first
decree,
Have richer tides flowed round your rooted hidings in
the clay,
Than these which seek quite other veins from those of
yesterday.

Bring forth the fruitage of your loins in deep,
impurpurate stain,

Ye vines, that sprang to life from out the throes of
British pain;
Gird on your strength, ye pines that shade the dead on
yonder height;
Re-knot your tissues with the stubborn fibre of their
might.

And let the rose its crimson darken towards the purple
shade,
Full-flushed with blood imperial—the price that Britain
paid,
The lily and the jonquil greet once more their native
hills,
Companioned by anemones and sun-crowned daffodils.

Command the earth its seed receive, in rare profusion
sent,
Pledged to high increase in the wine of life's last
sacrament,
For when sowed Nature seed like this since Time in
cycles ran,
Or bade the soil accept so strange, so stern a harvest
plan?

X

COME NOT THE SEASONS HERE

Comes not the springtime here,
Though the snowdrop came,

And the time of the cowslip is near,
For a yellow flame
Was found in a tuft of green;
And the joyous shout
Of a child rang out
That a cuckoo's eggs were seen.

Comes not the summer here,
Though the cowslip be gone,
Though the wild rose blow as the year
Draws faithfully on;
Though the face of the poppy be red
In the morning light,
And the ground be white
With the bloom of the locust shed.

Comes not the autumn here,
Though someone said
He found a leaf in the sere
By an aster dead;
And knew that the summer was done,
For a herdsman cried
That his pastures were brown in the sun,
And his wells were dried.

Nor shall the winter come,
Though the elm be bare,
And every voice be dumb
On the frozen air;
But the flap of a waterfowl
In the marsh alone,
Or the hoot of a hornéd owl

On a glacial stone.

XI

ON THE SHORE

Come home! the year has left you old;
 Leave those grey stones; wrap close this shawl,
Around you for the night is cold;
 Come home! he will not hear your call.

No sign awaits you here but the beat
 Of tides upon the strand,
The crag's gaunt shadow with gull's feet
 Imprinted on the sand,
And spars and sea-weed strewn
 Under a pale moon.

Come home! he will not hear your call;
Only the night winds answer as they fall
 Along the shore,
 And evermore
Only the sea-shells
 On the grey stones singing,
And the white foam-bells
 Of the North Sea ringing.

XII

BEFORE A BULLETIN BOARD

(After Beaumont-Hamél)

God! How should letters change their color so:
A little *k* or *m* stab like a sword;
How dry, black ink should turn to red and flow,
And figures leap like hydras on the board?

A woman raised her voice, and she was told
That strange things happen at the will of God;
Thus, dawn from midnight; thus, from fire the gold;
Thus did a rose once blossom from a rod.

But stranger things to-day, than that the rod
Should flower, or the cross become a crown—
Stranger than gold from fire; else how should God
Bring on the night before the sun go down.

XIII

BEFORE AN ALTAR

(After Gneudecourt)

Break we the bread once more,
The cup we pass around—
No, rather let us pour

This wine upon the ground;
And on the salver lay
The bread—there to remain.
Perhaps, some other day,
Shrovetide will come again.

Blurred is the rubric now,
And shadowy the token,
When blood is on the brow,
And the frail body broken.

XIV

SNOWFALL ON A BATTLE-FIELD

Compassion of heaven,
From night's crystal bars,
Falling so gently
In wreaths of white stars;

Petals of mystery
Culled in far lands;
Crosses of Calvary,
Wrought by strange hands;

Gems from His mountains,
Facets so rare,
Foam from His fountain
Eternally fair.

Why do they lovingly
 Leave their fair home,
These leaves of God's gardens,
 To stray on earth's loam?

See how they hover
 Over faces so cold,
How reverently cover
 The young and the old!

Compassion of heaven,
 Tears from God's eyes,
Falling so gently
 Out of the skies.

The Great Mother

Where meet the streams from the earth's many fountains,
 That part from each other with myriad aims—
The Danube that springs from its far-distant mountains,
 The Tiber, the Seine, the Rhine and the Thames;
Far from each other, independent and free,
Yet do not all of them flow to the sea?

Loud do their cataracts fling out their thunder
 Through the deep gorges that lead them along.
Hundreds of leagues divide them asunder;
 Yet, see how resistless their dark waters throng.

In whirlpool and rapid, with agonized motion,
Until they find rest in the world's level ocean.

And from the world's frontiers came the world's races,
Diverse as their colors and languages run;
Life bade them stand with alien faces,
With wrongs to requite, till Death made them one
With the silence that broods on his passionless land,
By the call of his voice and the seal of his hand.

Repose now their ashes in earth's tender keeping—
Dust unto dust, as the autumn leaves fall;
Peace, peace at last to tired eyes sleeping,
To Saxon, and Teuton, to Latin and Gaul;
Back to the great Mother—thus it must be,
As their home-rivers flow to the sea.

In Memoriam

I

The Dead! Upon a purple-bordered scroll
We wrote their names; then gazed awhile, and said:
"These are the fallen; these, our honored dead,
The silent ones in Death's vast muster roll.
This one was strong and ruddy; that one frail,
Though fleet of foot and keen. The first one met
His fate in that fierce fight at Courcellette;

The other died of wounds at Passchendaele."

And thus we mused, pointing from name to name
With sad, slow count. We spoke of things like grass,
And withered leaves, and faded flowers, birth,
Old age, decay and dust, glory and fame,
And other strange mortalities that pass
At length into the all-insatiate earth.

II

Then, suddenly, through the mist that wrapped our sight,
An utterance fell, as of great waters flowing—
Slow, but with mightier accent ever growing
Around a blazing shaft of central light:
"Fallen! There is no downward plunge. The estate
Is high. Go!—roll thy plumb-line up, and ask
Thy Master for His measures, as the task
Is one that would the heavens triangulate,"

And so were compassed life's fine agonies;
By ranging hopes, and longings cut adrift
From earth's unstable shores; by faiths that spanned
Illimitable wastes and wrecking seas;
By noble strands of nature, scattered swift
From the white fingers of God's spacious hand.

The Hidden Scar

No blow, no threat, no movement of the hand.
No word burst from the leash of calm control,
Betraying passions slumbering in the soul;
But friendship's added years could not withstand
A curve that rose unbidden and unplanned
From the flexed silence of the lips—a dart
That struck, rending the texture of the heart,
And, entering deeper, seared like a brand.

Some years have passed. To-day, no lure of mine
Restores the confidence he gave of old;
The outer court of strangers with its forms
Of soulless exchange—there we meet. The shrine
Within where sacred fires once burned is cold,
And love no more the ashen altar warms.

Evening

So calm the air; the sunset's dying beat
Wafts slowly to me from the distant brim
Of silent waters; evening shadows dim
Press close the day's spent hours, loath to greet
The veiled advance of night; slumbering sweet
The stillness as the purple threads the rim
Of yonder crimson, preluding a hymn
Of choral wavelets silvering at my feet.

O restful solitude! Here life's frail trust
Grows, nurtured near the heart of mystery,
Expands into fruition, from the clod
Of cynic trappings, orbs to symmetry—
The place where light strikes through Time's circling
dust,
And reverent hush attends the tread of God.

In a Beloved Home

(To W. H. G.)

Without, the heavy vapors in an endless train
Along the river's gorge drag wearily.
Autumn has fled, and winter's mastery
Takes votive tribute from his white domain;
The Northern winds unleashed bring in the rain
Which, blending at the night's austerity,
Turns into hail and white-flaked fantasy
That weirdly haunt the streaming window-pane.

Within, a peace that only heaven sends
To men who, pilgrims though they be, yet know
Life's simple gifts—a home, the heart of friends,
The company of the past; a fragrant briar;
All these were ours, for in the hearth's rich glow
Even Hamlet came and brooded on the fire.

The Conclusion of "Rachel"

(A story of the sea)

IN MEMORY OF R. S. LE D.

* * * * *

The breeze, that with the morn had freshened up,
Now with the mid-day died. Far to the east,
The horizon, clear at dawn, slowly withdrew,
Its lines dissolving moodily in mist.
The after hours grew still in sullen peace,
Save where the ground-swell, uttering a weird note,
Broke the dead silence. Soon (a globe of fire
Behind a bank of smoke that thickened fast
Against a dull circumference of grey)
The moon arose, and tongueless vapors stole
Heavily athwart the sea. Within her home
The widow sat alone, peering afar
Through the raised window at the distant point
Round which the vessel in the morning sailed.
She sat, her long, thin fingers intertwined
And resting in her lap, and now and then
With drooping head she prayed, or seemed to pray,
Though neither words nor sound escaped her lips.
There she remained until the smaller hours
Had passed; then took her lamp and went to bed—

And yet more from the habit of the night
Than from the weary willingness of sleep.
Later than usual did the morning break;
The drops were splashing on the window-pane;
A heavy fog came drifting down the shore,
Shrouding both sea and land. The dread North-East
Was hoisting forth the signals of her power
In scurrying fog, and intermittent gusts
Of rain. The shoremen, hurrying to the beach,
Pulled high and dry their boats, and ran their skiffs
To safer moorings, well inside the bar.
Another night, and still the blast increased
Its power, tearing, lifting cottage roofs,
But nowhere did it make completer ruin
Than in the heart of Rachel. By the light
Of a small lamp she watched the weather glass,
And saw how, as she tapped it every hour,
The dark line sank. It was now, she thought, the ship
Had reached the weltering tide-rips off Cape Race.
Would the frail timbers stand the shock of waves?
And how avoid the reefs when neither moon
Nor stars gave to the compass friendly aid?
There seemed no limit to the rising scale
Through which the tempest climbed. At times it paused
To speak with tragic whisperings that clutched
The widow's pulse, and then with fearful shriek
It filed her nerve, while from the distant seas
There came long, whistling interludes of death.
Another morning came. The fog had blown
Away, and through the rift of clouds that massed
The eastern vault, the fitful sunlight gleamed
Upon white billows that a thousand leagues

Had come, and now with jealous leap sought heights
Unscalable, save to the petrel's wings.
A week passed by with heavy-shodden feet;
The hours seemed weighted with unnatural calm,
So different from the lightsome, freshening stir
That follows in the usual wake of gales.
Summer had taken leave, and yet the air
Seemed bashful of the fall, for every day
Mirrored the one before, as if the storm
Had over-wrought its ends, and paralyzed
The will of nature for the season's change.
The village-folk again commenced their work,
Rebuilding stages which the wind had wrecked
And littered round the beach; but work was done
By hands scarce conscious of the task, for thought
Was dazed, and eyes saw nothing but the sea.
So Rachel moved within her home. Some friends
Had come to see her, and had gone away,
Saying among themselves how old she looked.
How wan her face, and how her hair had turned
Within so short a time to ashen grey.
A picture of her son hung on the wall,
A boy of three within his father's arms.
How often had she, in the earlier years
Following her husband's death, gazed on the face,
And mused upon the likeness of the two.
And now each night she got up from her bed,
Lighted the lamp and held it near the frame,
While questionings beat sorely at her heart,
Notes of despair unuttered by the lips:
Was this, then, after all, the goal of years—
The end for which the lad was born, had lived,

Had grown, for which by night and day she strove,
The guerdon of life's vigils, and the crown
Of Love's recordless givings? Nor was left
The mother's ancient right, inalienable,
To challenge death within the last great hour,
And from his hands to wrest the life she loved.
There flashed now through her mind, as every time
She looked upon his face, a night long past,
When croup had racked his frame—when she had fought
Death with a woman's courage as she watched
The cradle's tiny heavings, till the dawn
Revealed the cooling moisture on the brow,
And told her she had won. In that high test
She well remembered how her rising strength
Could pit itself against the Adversary,
Emerge, though weakened with the night's long fight,
Triumphant, glad, rejoicing with the morn.
Absorbed now with the picture and the past,
She gazed so long that now and then the boy
Seemed to her wondering eye to stir, and smile,
And move his lips as if he wished to speak,
And for a passing moment did a hope
Flicker a feeble path across her breast,
That the black menace of the past few days
Might prove the hideous phantom of a dream,
When, sudden, through the night's dull gloom, a moan,
Escaping from the swell, smote on her ear,
And brought her thoughts back to the eastern storm.
At length, one morning, into port there sailed
A vessel from the harbor of St. John's;
Rounding the cape, she picked up here and there,
Tidings of wreckage all along the shore—

Remnants of spars and cordage, casks and planks,
And canvas rent in shreds. She brought a tale
That bore direct upon the village homes.
A naiad's head, carven in wood, was found,
Thrown high upon the reef, the self-same head
That marked the *Swallow's* prow, and, lying near,
A plank that had the vessel's name inscribed.
Throughout the days and weeks following the storm
She often left her home to wander off,
Searching as if some object of her love
Had strayed upon the moor or on the beach.
At times she stood awhile and looked, with eyes
That somehow had forgotten how to weep,
Far out to sea. At times she made her way
Along the shore to where two beetling crags
Rose from their slippery base, as if they'd break
The waves with a last crash. There in the cleft,
With arms outstretched, she would implore the sea
Give up its dead, while the resurgent tides,
Upbraided, would creep guiltily away.
One evening, when the east winds blew, and rain
Fell chill upon her, there had come a friend
Who led her gently to her cottage home,
And through a long and restless night had stayed
In watchful ministry close by her bed,
Soothing the urge of hectic on her brow,
And answering with a voice instinct with peace,
The breaking, wayward fragments of her lips.
Another morn and sleep. With a white hand
The day was ushered in. The seams of pain
And arid loss which each awakening light
Had freely veined, now reappeared no more.

The fall's loud blast that whirled the senile leaves
Above the trees, she did not hear; nor sound
Of breaking seas, nor swirl of surge or foam.

A Fragment from a Story

I

(THADDEUS, *a traveller, speaking to Julian,
an old man*)

.....

... Fields far and near,
Hills, ridges, valleys, lowlands, marsh and plain,
Far to the horizon's utmost rim were filled
With clashing millions. All earth's tribes
Had by some common instinct gathered there,
Peopling the shadows of the awful zone—
The forest shades, the fissures of great rocks,
And caverns cut within the rotted mould;
Each nation's youth, its lithest, strongest, best,
Closed up the crimson rendezvous. The streams
That ran their livid washings through the clefts
Of spade or nature's highways, fouled and choked
With drifted foliage of a year grown old,
Too soon, with autumn's hectic leaves and limbs,
And sheddings rare of dearer castaways.
As leaves fall, so upon the plains fell men;

Some tossed awhile within the gust of combat,
High on the sweltered air, returned to earth
As flesh and blood and bone unrecognized,
And indistinguishable dust. Some swayed,
Not knowing why they did, as if a breath
Of unnamed pestilence had touched their senses,
Robbed them of aim and guidance. Thus they drooped
And fell; and others could not die till hours
Wore into days and nights. Restless they moved.
And shuddered; clutched convulsively at stones
Or roots, and clenched their teeth upon their hands,
Stifling their moans. And lads of growing years,
Who pain or weariness had never known,
Lay in strange sleep upon the fields, alone,
Or huddled up in ghastly heaps where death
Had flung them. Night winds gambolled with their hair,
Golden and brown and dark—they heeded not.
And far along the distant battle lines—
Movements as various as the tides, the rise
The flow, the swift recessions of despair;
Huge gaps that rendered void the toil of years.
The lines re-formed and the price paid; strong men
Who lunged and parried thrusts and lunged again,
Struck and were struck, unknown to each the foes,
Save in the general quarrel and its cause.
And through the lulls of intermittent fight
Was blown death's bitterest music—the low sob
Of brothers mourning brothers dead, the curse
Of fallen men that had not seen their foes,
The unavailing moan that answers moan
At night in the far comradeship of wounds.
Then, strangest of all sights, the harvest moon

A moment broke through misty cloud, and shed
Upon the fields a sickly, yellow light,
Disclosing pallid faces, blue, strained lips,
And eyes that stared, amazed, through open lids
That had no time to shut—that looked and asked
But one eternal question. Then the moon
Grew dimmer as the mist increased, and showed,
In hazy outlines, hurrying forms that moved
In twos and threes, from place to place, and laid
Upon the stretchers, one by one, the dead,
Torn, jagged, mud-smeared and crumpled, carrying them
To rows of damp, deep trenches, newly dug,
Where they were placed in groups of eight or ten,
In order, side by side, and face to face—
And the moon shone full again—the harvest moon.

JULIAN.

Your words would tax the heart's belief. I thought
That here along these shores when, at the close
Of a week of storm, the gull alone remained
Upon the waters, and the blinds were drawn
Within a hundred homes, that there was left
On earth nothing that might out-range the winds.

THADDEUS.

Death—Death stalked everywhere on land and sea,
In clouds that banked the sun, in mists that hid

The stars, or half disclosed the swollen moon.
No cavern sunk beneath the earth but bore
His foot-prints. Deep below the waters' rim
Great fish had trailed his scent. Earth's myriad forms
Had felt the plague-spot of his rampant touch.
From the small field-mouse, caught within the fumes
Of sulphurous air that crept from knoll to knoll,
Withering the grass blades, to the giant fighter
Of storm and wave that, ribbed and sheathed with steel,
Felt the swift scorpion in her sides, then rocked
And plunged with bellowing nostrils till she sank
In a wild litany of guns, with wind,
And night, and flame. But busier was his hand
With subtler workmanship. On eye and brow
And cheek were delved the traces of his passing—
Blindness, that like a thunder-clap at noon.
Closed on the sight; furrows that struck the veins,
Turning the red sap from its wonted course;
Sharp lines of pain and fury and quick hate
That on the instant changed to graven stone,
Callous and motionless. And deadlier still,
With flying leap he strode a continent,
Or the wide prairies of a sea, and snatched
The cup from the wan fingers of a life
That slaked its thirst upon the wine of hope;
So sure his hand—light, as with finger-tips,
He touched the hair and wove the grey and white
Within the brown, or hard, with rough-spurred heel,
He mauled the bosom till its heavings ceased.

JULIAN.

Where ever in its course was this wide world
So plunged in an unmeasured desolation?
What tenders offered, save in a fool's faith,
Would gamble on the chance of raising it
From the complete involvement of its ruin?

THADDEUS.

Many there were who, clutching at a straw
Of some dark saying of the past, some tone,
Or flash of eye carrying strange emphasis,
Sought for the battered remnants of their faith
An anchorage; and around a clay-damp grave
That buried hope with dust would stoop to tie
Their heartstrings to a pansy, murmuring thus:
"Who bade this flower renew its own fair lease
Of youth perennial? Springs it not this year
From the same soil and root, with that same pride
With which a year ago it lifted up
Its face before the sun? Does not each year
Declare its trumpet-pledges at the spring?"

JULIAN.

Think they so to convince the heart with words
Like those, to mesh it with a logic meet
For bloodless ends? What though the winds of May

Call to the springing rootlets, lure the bud
From the rose-stem, and chase the resinous sap
From the pine's trunk to branch and topmost twig—
Who yields to such delusion? Does the spring
Forget November's hecatombs, the last
Convulsion of the leaf, the gale-torn limbs
Of trees scarred to the death, the flowers that danced
Upon the fields scythed by the autumn's hands.
The writhen spectres of earth's quick decay
Flashed out upon the winds? All these as dust
Around the season's tombs—dust-heaps, no more;
As sands that eddy in the desert, these:
For these no resurrection. What amends
Does summer make for winter's numbing stroke?
It's death he gives, not slumber. His pale forms
Breathe not again, and eyelids that have closed
On the congealing air reflect no more
The warm glance of the sun. The swallows build
Their nests once more within the eaves; the thrush,
The red-breast and the lark cover again
Their young in bush and tree and meadow-grain—
They have not died. But weak ones that, impaled
Upon the thorn, screamed out their notes of pain,
Or dashed, wing-broken, by the wildering blast,
Fell when their strength had failed them on far plains,
On treeless hills, or dazed in homeward flight,
Fluttered and sank in furrows of the sea—
Their song has ended; *they* return no more.

THADDEUS.

Yet, like a crocus in the swamps of spring,
I saw life push its way through mire of death,
Triumphant.

JULIAN.

How?

THADDEUS.

A ship lay motionless,
Not anchored, nor becalmed, but held in spell
Of some great shock. She listed heavily
As though a hidden wound had gripped her loins,
And in the rain and chill were lowered boats,
So filled they lacked the margin of an inch
To meet the water's edge. A law well known
To men who live upon the sea here ran
Its old and honored course. The boats were few
And small, and there was left upon the deck
A sturdier throng who stretched out willing hands
To save the weak. One boat hung yet suspended,
Filled short of obvious risk, and a slim girl
Stepped out, and gave an aged woman, left
Unnoticed in the crowd, her place. Her lips
Were closed, and her face pale, but yet a smile
Made soft and sweet the pallor of her cheeks.
Then out into the night the boat was rowed,
Steadily and silently. No clamour broke

The stillness on the deck, nor was there sound
Of any voiced farewell, but here and there
A hand was raised, and a white fluttering
Answered the distant rhythm of the oars.

JULIAN.

Chaos indeed may well disclose a star
Caught unaware within the tangled drift
Of cloud and chasing glooms. Look on the plains
Again. Charred ruins, not of nature's hand,
Lie deep within unfathomable slime.
How foul the wreckage stands—a spectacle
So ill that it might seem to bar for ever
The lily's right to grow therein again.

THADDEUS.

And yet a few short hours before, when death
Was taking in his most exacting toll
Of this, his bloodiest year, were women seen,
Fulfilling well their office. Lovingly
Their hands were placed on the hot flush of wounds
Made by the steel of surgeon and of foe.
They beat the angels, at the angels' game,
Those women. God might well His embassy
Forego—His feudals of pure space—and take
In chartered ministry those lovelier forms,
They know the ravelled driftings of our life,

And hence God's art of salvage all the more.

JULIAN.

These are fine colors woven in a grey
And tattered fabric.

THADDEUS.

Grant you not as well
A value to a life that's lost! The lad
That struck out in the storm without a star,
Or faintest glimmer of a port, that took
His orders with blanched cheeks, yet with a heart
That pumped its resolution through young limbs,
Untaxed till now by paths wherein the errand
Failed by fore-doom of the sure goal—think you,
That with his eyes made blind before he struck
The highway, when his senses clouded fast
With the delusions of ungoverned winds,
That falling here, somewhere around the place
Of starting, he should then be counted out,
His life not worth the value of a smile?

JULIAN.

This tangled, sacrificial thread has grown

Till it has thickened to a scourge that bears
No discipline in human fashionings.

THADDEUS.

Causes lost awhile on earth try out
On new arenas fiercer qualities.
They are re-born upon the air; they storm
The souls of men; find homes in thunder peals;
Are hitched to lightnings. Slain, they rise again
With such forged temper that they turn aside
The opposing edge of armouries of steel.
Marks he the issue well, who sees here naught
Save huge world-fires upon whose smouldering ruins
Man's hand has lost its cunning to re-build,
Or that the piles new-reared shall fall once more
In the mad blasts that periodic run
Their cycles of decay? May not the eye
Range over those dun fields of death and see,
From vile putrescence, beauty rise in light
Unquenchable? May not the scar remind
The sufferer of his healing as of wound?

JULIAN.

Look how in cluttered heaps the crosses rise,
Stacked pile on pile, until they twist and sag
The rivets on the bolted doors of God.
This is a storm beyond imaginings,

Unknown to land or sea. Were waves and gales
The only agents of man's ruin, then
The chance might fall upon his side—the fight
With nature growing simpler every hour,
Her ways being known; but when the struggle takes
Its eddying fortunes in these blinded routes,
Not once, nor twice, as though an incident
Of casual kind had touched man's history,
But as a baffling epidemic strikes
A thousand times his life, failure of cure—
How strike this foul, insistent integer
Clean from his life? ... The taint is in the blood.

II

A LATER SPRING

A flash of indigo in the air,
A streak of orange edged with black!
A bluebird skimmed the spruces there,
A redstart followed in his track.

The light grows in the eastern skies,
The deeper shadows are withdrawn;
From marsh and swamp the vapors rise
In the cool cloisters of the dawn.

What loom, a-weaving on the land,
Such color and fragrance fuses!
Magenta and white on moss and sand,

Azaleas, arethusas.

And higher up along the steeps,
The pink of mountain-laurel;
While lower down the yellow creeps
From celandine and sorrel.

Sea-foam or snow-drift, flecked with spurt
Of flame, upon the grasses spread.
The snow is foam of mitre-wort;
The flame, the ragged robin's red.

.....

Where sits the lily of the morning dew
When light winds waken,
And gems that the violets hold
Gently are shaken
To crystalline purple and blue,
And emerald, crimson and gold
From the heart of the rose unfold,
And burst into view;

There, at the dawn's first blush,
The notes of a brown thrasher fall,
And the importunate voice of the thrush
Blends with a tanager's call;
There, under a dragon-fly's wings,
A stream carols by with sweet noise,
And slowly a daffodil swings
To a humming-bird's marvellous poise.

(Thaddeus, walking through a field in the direction of

Julian's home. The day is warm and sunny. A rapid stream, a short distance away, flows through a valley whose banks slope down from small hills covered with evergreen. Afar off, the land is high and forest-clad. At a bend of the stream he suddenly meets Julian.)

THADDEUS.

There is a quality in this air that stirs
The blood as readily as the balsam sap.
What brew, what chemistry; what hand is this
That grips the pestle? Never was the grass
So green upon the fields. A miracle!
Throughout arterial nature, marble-cold
And pale, are heard the joyous sounds of life
Revived; earth's wells are opened in the vales;
Through ice-clad mountains, chiselled by the hands
Of northern blasts, the gurgling waters run
In stream and torrent, and in the mad plunge
Of cataract. Beyond the snow-capped ranges
Lusty young rivers tear and strain at the dugs
Of the foot-hills, and parting, force their pace
Through gorge and valley to the open sea.
Life, boundless, keen, ecstatic, uncontrolled!
Vast, heaving, surging life, strung to great thews,
Rapt in wide wonderments. Flail, life of Spring!
Born of prophetic gales and plangent shocks,
That rouse the torpor of earth's granite veins,
And sluggard eyes. Glorious in resurrection!
Thou peerless colorist of nature's life!

With what unrivaled hands the lines are drawn.
The shadows set, and the rich hues enwrought
Upon how great a canvas! The far climb
Majestic of fresh-foliaged ash and elm
Along the mountain crags; the river banks
Where the white spray falls softly on the iris,
And violets creep along the sides; the gift
Of minted treasure on the open fields,
Where bloom those golden legions of the earth—
The daffodils and lowland marigolds;
Cerulean tints that light our common paths.
That bless our road-sides, cheer our vacant wastes;
Bluets and harebells and the lilac bloom;
Orchards a-flame beneath a setting sun,
And, trailing slow around moss-covered rocks.
The flower of May superlatively veined.
Come! Leave your tents, O mortals, gather here
In Nature's high rotunda, crystal-domed,
And offer praises Julian, give me
Your hand. We meet under new skies to-day.
The times are changed; the earth renews her face;
There is a fine contagion in the spring
For heavy hearts.

JULIAN.

You would infect the blood
Of an old man.

THADDEUS.

Come, Julian! In this life
There is an unslain good that has outlived
All floods and fires. There are undaunted spirits
The age has not destroyed. I have seen them breathe
Upon dry bones until they leaped with sinew;
Even flotsam by their touch was salvable.
No life, however craven at the face,
But found a courage stirring at the core.
The groundwork's there to build a structure on;
The hand that yesterday tore like an eagle's claw
Now pours in balm to-day, blesses and cures.
There is a restoration in a smile
We knew not of; we had forgotten it—
But wings unseen were flying in the night.

JULIAN.

I would there was a rock from which man's hopes
Might never more be swept, or that his blood
Might always bathe his heart with healthy stream.
But those alternate currents, like the seasons,
Have been our fateful legacy through all time.
What power is this you speak of, that the dark
May sudden blaze with light before the morn
Is ushered in at nature's call? Is this
The ultimate conquest of her will, that day
Shall not know supersession by the night,
With earth's diurnal axis overruled?

THADDEUS.

Have you not noticed, standing in the aisles
Of some high-vaulted temple when the massed
And reverent throngs were hushed in expectation,
How a great organ poured forth like a flood
Its spell of music as the master's hands
Swept the wide boards? What power over the soul
To lift its hopes, to plant its aspirations
In the rich soil of heaven came from the touch!
But let untutored fingers meet the keys,
And the rapt ear is split by harsh discords.
Are not the strings, the instrument, the same
With either press? But how extremes depend
Upon the craft of him who plays. Life's songs
From baser jars and fretted failures range
Along the gamut of their enterprise,
In spiral movement to such high refrains
As could, with buoyant amplitude of roll,
Lift up the souls of sinking men, and float
The world's grey cares on seas of evening-calm...
Have you not heard such music when the winds
Are given boundless space wherein to blow
Upon the greenness of the earth? They pass,
And from the meadows and the valley-slopes
The latent rhythms of the daisies blend
With the low rustle of the sedge. They pass
Again, and lo, in grander orchestra,
The pines lift up their voices on the hills.
A blade of grass, a daisy or a pine,

A wave, a waterfall, a heart-string, these,
Tuned to the world's blood rhythms, now await.
As cords you touch, as reeds you breathe upon,
The rising pulses of the morning air.

JULIAN.

Dust gathers in my mouth. I cannot speak
What I would say. Whether it is the drought
Of age, or some strange filtrate of the past
That sets a parchèd seal upon the lips,
I do not know. It may be that from thistles
I tried to gather figs, or where I looked
Before I plucked, I said the vines were dry.
Now I am old. I find the roadways blocked,
And memory, ranging through the fungus years,
Finds but the husks where it would take the fruit.
And yet there is a knocking in this clay—
A restless flame—something that, if it could,
Would leap these grammared confines of slow speech,
And give the echo to your dancing words.

THIS BOOK IS A PRODUCTION OF
THE RYERSON PRESS,
TORONTO, CANADA

[The end of *Newfoundland Verse* by E. J. (Edwin John Dove) Pratt]