

COLLECTED  
POEMS



E. J. PRATT

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*COLLECTED*  
*POEMS*

by  
E. J. PRATT

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1944

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*To Viola my wife  
and  
to Claire my daughter  
this book is lovingly dedicated*

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# COLLECTED POEMS

# DUNKIRK

The English May was slipping into June  
With heralds that the spring had never known.  
Black cavalry were astride the air;  
The Downs awoke to find their faces slashed;  
There was blood on the hawthorn,  
And song had died in the nightingales' throats.

Appeasement is in its grave: it sleeps well.  
The mace had spiked the parchment seals  
And pulverized the hedging *ifs* and *wherefores*,  
The wheezy adverbs, the gutted modifiers.  
Churchill and Bevin have the floor,  
Whipping snarling nouns and action-verbs  
Out of their lairs in the lexicon,  
Bull-necked *adversatives* that bit and clawed,  
An age before gentility was cubbed.

A call came in from the Channel  
Like the wash of surf on sand,  
Borne in by the winds against the chalk escarpments,  
Into the harbours, up the rivers, along the estuaries,  
And but one word in the call.

Three hundred thousand on the beaches,  
Their spirit-level vision training West!  
A vast patience in their eyes,  
They had fought pig-iron, manganese, tungsten, cobalt;  
And their struggle with hunger, thirst,  
And the drug of sleep,  
Had multiplied the famine in their cheeks  
For England,  
By forty miles divided from her brood.

Seven millions on the roads in France,  
Set to a pattern of chaos  
Fashioned through years for this hour.  
Inside the brain of the planner  
No tolerance befogged the reason—  
The *reason* with its clear-swept halls,  
Its brilliant corridors,  
Where no recesses with their healing dusk  
Offered asylum for a fugitive.  
The straightedge ruled out errors,  
The tremors in the sensory nerves,  
Pity and the wayward impulses,  
The liberal imbecilities.  
The reason reckoned that the allied guns  
Would not be turned upon the roads  
To clear the path for the retreat.  
It reasoned well.

*Regatta and Crew*

Millenniums it had taken to make their stock.  
Piltown hung on the frontals of their fathers.  
They had lain as sacrifices  
Upon the mortuary slabs of Stonehenge.  
Their souls had come to birth out of their racial myths.  
*The sea was their school; the storm, their friend.*  
Foot by foot and hand to hand  
They had met the legions  
On the beaches and in the surf.  
Great names had been delivered unto them;  
Caractacus,  
Taking his toll of the invaders  
In his retreat to the fens and hills;  
Boadicea,  
The storming of Londinium and Verulamium,  
And the annihilation of the Roman ninth;  
Alban, Alfred, Athelney, Edington!  
And in the march of their survival  
They had fought the poll-tax and burned  
The manor rolls under Ball and Tyler.  
They had led the riots against the Enclosures.  
They had sung ballads to the rhythms of the gibbets.  
The welts had been around their necks and ankles.  
They had swept the Main with Hawkins and Drake.  
Morgan-mouthed vocabularians,  
Lovers of the beef of language,  
They had carved with curse and cutlass  
Castilian grandees in the Caribbean.  
They had signed up with Frobisher,  
Had stifled cries in the cockpits of Trafalgar.  
They had emptied their veins into the Marne.  
Freedom to them was like the diver's lust for air.  
Children of oaths and madrigals,  
They had shambled out of caves  
To write the clauses of the Charters,  
To paint the Channel mists,  
To stand hushed before the Canterbury tapers.

*The Race on the Channel*

The Royal Yacht squadrons of the Thames and Cowes,  
Those slim and rakish models of the *wave-line theory*,  
Flying the ensign with their Club devices—  
Grand-daughters of *Genesta* and the *Galatea*  
Whose racing spinnakers  
Outsilvered and outflow the sea-gulls off the Isle of Wight.  
Cutters, the pride of Folkestone and Sheerness  
With their press balloon-jibs,  
Their billows of flax and hemp  
Smothering their single masts  
And straight-running bowsprits.

Excursion paddlers—  
Last of the family known as the *fleet of the butterflies*,  
Purveyors of moonlight sonatas and Sunday siestas.

The fireboats from the London Fire Brigade.  
Luggers with four-sided sails bent to the yards  
And slung obliquely to the masts,  
Smelling of the wharves of Deal.  
Smacks that built the Grimsby name.  
Yawls with their handy mizzen-sails—  
The Jacks-of-all-trades on the English coast.  
Barges spritsail-rigged with jigger booms.  
Bluff-bowed billyboys and Norfolk wherries,  
Skiffs that stank of herring roes and Yarmouth.  
Dutch scoots and square-stemmed bawleys rank  
With kelp, fish-scales and the slime of eels.  
And with them all, the merchantmen,  
Three-funnel liners turbine-driven,  
Cabin cruisers, with whaleboats, rafts and dories  
Tied to the grimy tails of barges drawn by tugs.

A Collingwood came from Newcastle-on-Tyne,  
Trelawney and Grenville of the Cornish Line,  
And Raleigh and Gilbert from the Devon Seas  
With a Somerset Blake. They met at the quays—  
McCluskey, Gallagher, Joe Millard,  
Three riveters red from Dumbarton Yard,  
And Peebles of Paisley, a notary clerk,  
Two joiners from Belfast, Mahaffy and Burke,  
Blackstone and Coke of Lincoln's Inn,  
A butcher from Smithfield, Toby Quinn,  
Jonathan Wells, a Sheffield bricklayer,  
Tim Thomas of Swansea, a borough surveyor,  
Jack Wesley, a stoker, by way of South Shields,  
And Snodgrass and Tuttle from Giles-in-the-Fields,  
Young Bill of Old Bill with Hancock and Reid,  
Two sons of a bishop from Berwick-on-Tweed,  
A landscape gardener of Tunbridge, Kent,  
Povey, a draper from Stoke-on-Trent,  
Arthur Cholmondeley Bennington-Grubbe  
With Benbow of the Boodles Club,  
A Ralph Abercrombie, a Fetherstonehaugh  
With Smith, and Ibbs, and Jones, and Buggs—  
They met on the liners, yachts and tugs:  
The *Princess Maud*, the *Massy Shaw*,  
The *Crested Eagle*, the *Nicholas Drew*,  
The *Gurgling Jean* and the *Saucy Sue*.

Two prefects from Harrow—Dudley and Fraser,  
Fresh in their gray flannel trousers and blazer,  
Helping two tanners, Muggins and Day,  
To rig up a sail at a mizzen stay,  
Were hailed by a Cambridge stroke—“Ahoy!  
Will you let me go on your billyboy?”

A curate from Cardiff, the Reverend Evans,  
Inspired with zeal by a speech of Bevin's,  
Called on a Rochester verger named Burchall,  
Likewise inflamed by a speech from Churchill—  
Together they went to a Greenwich jetty  
And boarded a lighter—the *Bouncing Betty*.

Meadows, the valet, tapped at the door  
Of Colonel Ramsbottom, late of Lahore:  
'Twas dawn, and the Colonel was sick with a head;  
“The Dean and his lordship, the Bishop, are here,  
And your sloop, sir, is ready down at the pier,  
And may I go with you?” Meadows said—  
“No,” roared the Colonel, as he creaked out of bed,  
Blasting out damns with a spot of saliva,  
Yet the four of them boarded the *Lady Godiva*.

A Captain with a Cape Horn face,  
Being down on his luck without a ship,  
Had spent ten years in his own disgrace  
As skipper of a river ferry—  
To-night he was taking his finest trip  
As master of a Norfolk wherry.

The Junior partner, Davie Scott,  
Of MacTavish, MacEachren, MacGregor, and Scott,  
Conspired with Murdoch, MacNutt and MacPhail  
To go to Gravesend that evening and sail  
For the Beach in Mr. MacTavish's yacht.

### *Heard on the Colliers*

“I've been in a bit of a muss, mesen,  
With my game left leg,” said Eddie Glen,  
“And every night my faintin' spells,  
Contracted in the Dardanelles.”  
“My floatin' kidney keeps me 'ome,  
My shoulder too 'as never 'ealed.”  
Quoth Rufus Stirk of 'Uddersfield,  
Cracked with shrapnel at Bapaume.

“Ow, wot’s a kidney, look at me,  
A bleedin’ boulder in my lung,”  
Said ’Umphrey ’Iggins of Bermondsey;  
“A ’Igh Explosive ’ad me strung  
On the top of a ruddy poplar tree  
For thirty hours at Armenteers,  
’Aven’t spit straight nigh twenty years.”

“Now, my old woman,” said Solomon Pike,  
“Says ’Itler’s such a fidget like;  
’E steals the cows and ’ens from the Danes,  
’E rummages France, ’e chases the Poles,  
And comes over ’ere with ’is blinkin’ planes  
To drive us to the ’Yde Park ’oles  
Where there’s nary a roof that isn’t leakin’,  
Swipin’ the pillows right under our ’eads,  
Shooin’ us out from our ’umble beds.”  
“ ’E’s a mug, I says, in a manner o’ speakin’.”

“How lang d’ye ken it’ll take to get through it?”  
Said a cautious drover, Angus Bain.  
“It’ll take a bit o’ doin’ to do it,  
The blighters are dropping bombs like rain,”  
Said the costermonger from Petticoat Lane.

\* \* \*

Out on the Channel—laughter died.  
Casual understatement  
Was driven back from its London haunts  
To its clinical nakedness  
Along the banks of the Ilissus.  
In front of the crew were rolling mountains of smoke  
Spilling fire from their Vesuvian rims;  
The swaying fringes of Borealis blue;  
The crimson stabs through the curtains;  
The tracers’ fiery parabolas,  
The falling pendants of green from the Verey lights;  
The mad colours of the murals of Dunkirk.



Space, time, water, bread, sleep,  
Above all—sleep;  
Commodities beyond the purchase of the Rand.  
*Space*—a thousand pounds per foot! Not up for sale  
In the cabin suites or on the floors of the lighters.  
The single Mole was crammed with human termites,  
Stumbling, falling on the decks of the destroyers,  
Sleeping, dying on the decks of the transports  
Strung along the seaward end.  
The solid black queues on the sand waited their turn  
To file along the bridgehead jetties  
Improvised from the army lorries,  
Or waded out to swim  
Or clutch at drifting gangplanks, rafts and life-belts.  
*Time*—Days, weeks of the balance of life  
Offered in exchange for minutes now.

Stuff of the world's sagas in the heavens!  
Spitfires were chasing Heinkels, one to twenty.  
The nation's debt unpaid, unpayable,  
Was climbing up its pyramid,  
As the Hurricanes took on the Messerschmitts.

*The Multipedes on the Roads*

Born on the blueprints,  
They are fed by fire.  
They grow their skin from carburized steel.  
They are put together by cranes.  
Their hearts are engines that do not know fatigue  
In the perfection of their valves,  
In the might of their systolic thrusts.  
Their blood is petrol: Oil bathes their joints.  
Their nerves are wire.  
From the assembly lines they are put on inspection.  
They pass tests,  
Are pronounced fit by the drill-sergeants.  
They go on parade and are the pride of the High Command.  
They take, understand and obey orders.  
They climb hills, straddle craters and the barbed barricades.  
They defy bullets and shells.  
Faster than Genghis' cavalry they speed,  
Crueller than the hordes of Tamburlaine,  
Yet unknowing and uncaring.  
It is these that the rearguards are facing—  
Creatures of conveyor belts,  
Of precision tools and schedules.  
They breathe through carburetted lungs;  
If pierced, they do not feel the cut,  
And if they die, they do not suffer death.  
And Dunkirk stands between the rearguards and the sea.

\* \* \*

Motor launches from the Port of London,  
Life-boats from the liners,  
Whale-boats, bottoms of shallow draught,  
Rammed their noses into the silt,  
Packed their loads and ferried them to scoots and drifters.  
Blood and oil smut on their faces,  
The wounded, dying and dead were hauled up  
Over the rails of the hospital carriers  
In the nets and cargo slings.

*In the Skies*

The world believed the trap was sprung,  
And no Geneva words or signatures of mercy  
Availed the quarry on the sands.  
The bird's right to dodge the barrels on the wing,  
The start for the hare,  
The chance for the fox to cross his scent,  
For the teeth to snap at the end of the chase,  
Did not belong to this tally-ho.  
The proffered sword disclaimed by the victor,  
The high salute at the burial of a foe  
Wrapped in the folds of his flag,  
The wreath from the skies,  
Were far romantic memories.  
As little chivalry here  
As in the peregrines chasing the carriers,  
As in the sniff of the jackals about a carcass!  
Here over the dunes  
The last civil rag was torn from the body of war—  
The decencies had perished with the Stukas.

\* \* \*

From Dover to Dunkirk,  
From Dunkirk to Ramsgate,  
And back to the dunes.  
Power boats of the enemy  
Were driving torpedoes into transports and colliers,  
Lifting the engines clear from their beds,  
Blowing the boilers, sheering the sterns,  
And the jettisoned loads gathered up from the sea  
Were transferred to other decks  
And piled in steep confusion  
On the twisted steel of the listed destroyers,  
On the rough planks of the barges,  
Into the hatches of the freighters,  
Jammed against bulkheads and riddled ventilators,  
On the coils of the cables,  
On quarterdecks and in the fo’c’sles,  
On the mess-tables and under them.  
“Was that roar in the North from the *Rodney*?  
We hope to God it was.”  
Drip of the leadlines on the bows—  
“Two fathoms, sir, four feet, three and a half.”  
“Wake up, you dead end. You’re not on the feathers now.  
Make room for this ’ere bloke.”  
“Stiff as cement ’e is.” “Git a gait on,  
Or the Stukas’ll be raisin’ boils on your necks.”  
“Ahoy, skipper, a can of petrol.”  
“Compass out of gear—Give us the line to Ramsgate.”  
“Follow the skoots.”

The great birds, carrying under their wings  
The black distorted crosses,  
Plunged, straightened out.  
Laid their eggs in air,  
Hatched them in fountains of water,  
In craters of sand,  
To the leap of flame,  
To the roar of avalanche.

And in those hours,  
When Death was sweating at his lathe,  
When heads and legs and arms were blown from their trunks,  
When the seventh day on the dunes became the eighth,  
And the eighth slumped into the dawn of the ninth,  
When the sand's crunch and suck under the feet  
Were sounds less to be endured than the crash of bombs  
In that coma and apathy of horror—  
It was then that the feel of a deck,  
The touch of a spar or a halyard,  
Was like a hold on the latch of the heart of God.  
*It's the Navy's job!*  
It's their turn now,  
From the Beach to the ports.  
Let the Stukas break their bloody necks on the Mole;  
Let the fires scorch the stars—  
For now, whether on the burnished oak of the cabins,  
Or on the floor-boards of the punts,  
Or in the cuddies of the skiffs,  
Sleep at last has an even game with Death.

The blessed fog—  
Ever before this day the enemy,  
Leagued with the quicksands and the breakers—  
Now mercifully masking the periscope lenses,  
Smearing the hair-lines of the bomb-sights,  
Hiding the flushed coveys.  
And with it the calm on the Channel,  
The power that drew the teeth from the storm,  
The peace that passed understanding,  
Soothing the surf, allaying the lop on the swell.  
Out of the range of the guns of Nieuport,  
Away from the immolating blasts of the oil-tanks,  
The flotillas of ships were met by flotillas of gulls  
Whiter than the cliffs of Foreland;  
Between the lines of the Medway buoys  
They steamed and sailed and rowed,  
Back to the roadsteads, back to the piers  
Inside the vigilant booms,  
Back to the harbours,  
Back to the River of London, to England,  
Saved once again by the tread of her keels.

# THE RADIO IN THE IVORY TOWER

(1937—Sept. 1939)

This is the castle of peace,  
And this its quietest hour;  
There isn't a cry from the gathering dusk,  
There isn't a stir in the mist;  
The fog has scarfed the moon and stars,  
The curtains are drawn on the tides;  
There isn't a wave at the curve of the shore;  
A granite-gray silence covers the land,  
And the gulls are asleep on a soundless swell.

Nor is there a sign that under this Rock,  
At the heart of the earth, the volcanoes  
Await the word of the Lord of Misrule  
To renew their ancient carnival;  
Nor is there a sign above the Rock  
That the earth responds to the whip of the sun,  
Directing its pace and its orbit.  
This is the cloister of the world,  
Reduced to a cell in the fortress of peace  
In the midst of anonymous, infinite darkness.

A slight turn of a dial,  
And night and space and the silence  
Thronged and tongued with life—  
As the hosts might swarm through a lens  
From a blood drop  
Or a spot of dust in the heavens.  
Out of the void they came  
To storm the base of the tower,  
To hammer the walls of the cell  
And tap at the mullioned panes.

Polaris, the scout of Orion,  
Was frigidly, jealously  
Watching a speck on the frontier.  
Adjusting a monocle,  
He focused a stare which had often congealed  
The blood of explorers,  
And frozen their hands to the sextants  
Till their bodies starched on the parallels.  
He flashed to his chief  
That a pair of Muscovite eagles  
Had taken his stare without blinking,  
Had rifled the pole right under his nose,  
And, southward advancing, had brushed with their wings  
One-half the floor of the world.  
Nor would it be long, he predicted,  
Before complaints would come from the stars,  
All the way from zenith to nadir,  
That their eyes had been blinded by grit,  
The moment those birds had swept  
All the dust from the planet Tellurian  
With one whiff of their insolent tails.

A civilized group from the west,  
Lithe, sleek and genteel  
And ambassadorial,  
Silked from their speech to the rim of their cuffs,  
Were joined by a rout from the east:  
Battered, uncouth and down at the heel,  
Reeking with smoke from Nanking,  
Weathering typhoons off Shanghai and Burma,  
They filled the night with their clamour,  
And spattered the shirts of the Cabinet Ministers  
With sludge from the bed of the Yangzte.



From the south, south-east and south-west  
Came the ghosts of the master of rapture,  
Invoked by their master executants.  
Through larynx and fingers and lips,  
From catgut and silver and brass,  
They were harassed by spirits still in the flesh  
Who strove through auditions  
With tap-dance and croon, with yodel and bleat,  
To grind out an art cacophonous.

And choirs arrayed in white robes  
Who had heard of blood that redeemed,  
Of fires that refined  
And of glory that sanctified dying,  
Were massed in their anthem formation  
To peal forth their late Hallelujahs  
To a sovereign of love, law and order.

Tenore robusto and coloratura,  
Deep-chested contralto and basso profundo  
Entered to sing of their balcony lovers,  
Of jealousies, hates and neurotic farewells,  
Of picadors, passionate gypsies,  
Of damsels anaemic waiting at windows  
For exiles that never returned.

\* \* \*

The moon waxed and waned,  
And came again to the full,  
Till the sea arose to the equinox.  
But only ferrets of sound  
Came out of the fog  
To worm themselves through the cracks in the cobbles.  
The waters leaped at the splayed bastions—  
The might of the waters  
Against the weight of the concrete,  
Against the strength of the steel—  
But only the dull reverberation of their paws  
Disturbed the insulation of the tower;  
Only the faintest echoes seeped through the copper roof  
As the gulls screamed around the weather-vane.

(September 1939)

The dial swung to the 69,  
And with the sprint of light  
On the last lap of the kilocycles  
Blew in the great syllabic storm of the age.  
Slow in the deep bass started the overture,  
Heavy with guttural chords  
And growling consonants that raked the cuspid  
With timed explosions.  
A crash of the dental mutes  
Was followed by the pour of the open vowels  
Along a huge Teutonic corridor.  
And when the serried sibilants struck High G,  
A child ran from the room of the tower,  
An Alsatian bristled his neck,  
A Dachshund slunk under a chair;  
And the period ended with the frenzy  
Of thirty thousand voices orchestrated  
To reduce the Götterdämmerung  
To a trundle lullaby.  
O master mason! What was wrong with the mortar  
That, built to withstand the siege of the sea,  
Should crumble beneath the roar from a throat?

Another turn, and the static combined  
With the music of march and the roll of drums,  
To prelude the close of a civilized aeon.  
With a new salute and macabre step,  
Chaos came in at the call of the horns.  
No longer did news pause to rest on the journey,  
Relayed through the stations in story and comment,  
To be combed and groomed by the censors  
In the leisured light of the studios:  
But straight from the rape of the liners,  
From the listed decks of the cruisers,  
From trenches and plants and fields,  
Came the grind from the lurch of the life-boats,  
The sputter of salt from the throats,  
The caterpillar crunch of the tanks,  
The cries that out-blared the burst of the shells,  
And the wheeze from the lungs that followed the sirens  
In the smother of black-outs that covered the world.

Then Time shedding his mask,  
His lazy hour-glass, his rusty scythe,  
And all his tattered mortalities  
Curved over bowed decrepit shoulders,  
Assumed the stature of a young Apollyon.  
He rose to be the Paragon of power.  
A set of golden keys  
Closing all doors of life,  
Fitting the wards of death,  
Hung from a girdle at his waist;  
And as he led his mad aerial legions  
Around the turret,  
What thunders tarried in his fists!  
What voltage in the dark tips of his wings!

## COME AWAY, DEATH

Willy-nilly, he comes or goes, with the clown's logic,  
Comic in epitaph, tragic in epithalamium,  
And unseduced by any mused rhyme.  
However blow the winds over the pollen,  
Whatever the course of the garden variables,  
He remains the constant,  
Ever flowering from the poppy seeds.

There was a time he came in formal dress,  
Announced by Silence tapping at the panels  
In deep apology.  
A touch of chivalry in his approach,  
He offered sacramental wine,  
And with acanthus leaf  
And petals of the hyacinth  
He took the fever from the temples  
And closed the eyelids,  
Then led the way to his cool longitudes  
In the dignity of the candles.

His mediaeval grace is gone—  
Gone with the flame of the capitals  
And the leisured turn of the thumb  
Leafing the manuscripts,  
Gone with the marbles  
And the Venetian mosaics,  
With the bend of the knee  
Before the rose-strewn feet of the Virgin.  
The *paternosters* of his priests,  
Committing clay to clay,  
Have rattled in their throats  
Under the gride of his traction tread.

One night we heard his footfall—one September night—  
In the outskirts of a village near the sea.  
There was a moment when the storm  
Delayed its fist, when the surf fell  
Like velvet on the rocks—a moment only;  
The strangest lull we ever knew!  
A sudden truce among the oaks  
Released their fratricidal arms;  
The poplars straightened to attention  
As the winds stopped to listen  
To the sound of a motor drone—  
And then the drone was still.  
We heard the tick-tock on the shelf,  
And the leak of valves in our hearts.  
A calm condensed and lidded  
As at the core of a cyclone ended breathing.  
This was the monologue of Silence  
Grave and unequivocal.

What followed was a bolt  
Outside the range and target of the thunder,  
And human speech curved back upon itself  
Through Druid runways and the Piltdown scarps,  
Beyond the stammers of the Java caves,  
To find its origins in hieroglyphs  
On mouths and eyes and cheeks  
Etched by a foreign stylus never used  
On the outmoded page of the Apocalypse.

## SILENCES

There is no silence upon the earth or under the earth like the silence  
under the sea;  
No cries announcing birth,  
No sounds declaring death.  
There is silence when the milt is laid on the spawn in the weeds and  
fungus of the rock-clefts;  
And silence in the worth and struggle for life.  
The bonitoes pounce upon the mackerel,  
And are themselves caught by the barracudas,  
The sharks kill the barracudas  
And the great molluscs rend the sharks,  
And all noiselessly—  
Though swift be the action and final the conflict,  
The drama is silent.

There is no fury upon the earth like the fury under the sea.  
For growl and cough and snarl are the tokens of spendthrifts who know  
not the ultimate economy of rage.  
Moreover, the pace of the blood is too fast.  
But under the waves the blood is sluggard and has the same  
temperature as that of the sea.

There is something pre-reptilian about a silent kill.

Two men may end their hostilities just with their battle-cries.

“The devil take you,” says one.

“I’ll see you in hell first,” says the other.

And these introductory salutes followed by a hail of gutturals and sibilants are often the beginning of friendship, for who would not prefer to be lustily damned than to be half-heartedly blessed?

No one need fear oaths that are properly enunciated, for they belong to the inheritance of just men made perfect, and, for all we know, of such may be the Kingdom of Heaven.

But let silent hate be put away for it feeds upon the heart of the hater. To-day I watched two pairs of eyes. One pair was black and the other grey. And while the owners thereof, for the space of five seconds, walked past each other, the grey snapped at the black and the black riddled the grey.

One looked to say—“The cat,”

And the other—“The cur.”

But no words were spoken;

Not so much as a hiss or a murmur came through the perfect enamel of the teeth; not so much as a gesture of enmity.

If the right upper lip curled over the canine, it went unnoticed.

The lashes veiled the eyes not for an instant in the passing.

And as between the two in respect to candour of intention or eternity of wish, there was no choice, for the stare was mutual and absolute.

A word would have dulled the exquisite edge of the feeling,

An oath would have flawed the crystallization of the hate.

For only such culture could grow in a climate of silence,—

Away back before the emergence of fur or feather, back to the unvocal sea and down deep where the darkness spills its wash on the threshold of light, where the lids never close upon the eyes, where the inhabitants slay in silence and are as silently slain.

## THE PRIZE CAT

Pure blood domestic, guaranteed,  
Soft-mannered, musical in purr,  
The ribbon had declared the breed,  
Gentility was in the fur.

Such feline culture in the gads  
No anger ever arched her back—  
What distance since those velvet pads  
Departed from the leopard's track!

And when I mused how Time had thinned  
The jungle strains within the cells,  
How human hands had disciplined  
Those prowling optic parallels;

I saw the generations pass  
Along the reflex of a spring,  
A bird had rustled in the grass,  
The tab had caught it on the wing:

Behind the leap so furtive-wild  
Was such ignition in the gleam,  
I thought an Abyssinian child  
Had cried out in the whitethroat's scream.



## FROM STONE TO STEEL

From stone to bronze, from bronze to steel  
Along the road-dust of the sun,  
Two revolutions of the wheel  
From Java to Geneva run.

The snarl Neanderthal is worn  
Close to the smiling Aryan lips,  
The civil polish of the horn  
Gleams from our praying finger tips.

The evolution of desire  
Has but matured a toxic wine,  
Drunk long before its heady fire  
Reddened Euphrates or the Rhine.

Between the temple and the cave  
The boundary lies tissue-thin:  
The yearlings still the altars crave  
As satisfaction for a sin.

The road goes up, the road goes down—  
Let Java or Geneva be—  
But whether to the cross or crown,  
The path lies through Gethsemane.

## THE INVADED FIELD

They brought their youth up on the lore  
Of the Phoenix and the pyre,  
Of birth from death and gold from fire  
And the myth of the Aryan spore.

They measured life in metric tons,  
Assessed both man and beast,  
And with their patriot sweat they greased  
The breechblocks of their guns.

They took their parables from mud—  
*How pure the crocus grows!*  
*See how the fragrance of a rose*  
*May spring from buried blood!*

So, on the promise of this yield  
The youth swung down the road,  
Goose-stepping to their songs, and sowed  
Their bodies on the field.

\* \* \*

Now if a brier should here be born  
In some ironic hour,  
Let life infect both leaf and flower  
But death preserve the thorn.

## COME NOT THE SEASONS HERE

Comes not the spring-time 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 horned owl  
    On a glacial stone.

## STILL LIFE

To the poets who have fled  
To pools where little breezes dusk and shiver,  
Who need still life to deliver  
Their souls of their songs,  
We offer roses blanched of red  
In the Orient gardens,  
With April lilies to limn  
On the Japanese urns—  
And time, be it said,  
For a casual hymn  
To be sung for the hundred thousand dead  
In the mud of the Yellow River.

And if your metric paragraphs  
Incline to Western epitaphs,  
Be pleased to return to a plain  
Where a million lie  
Under a proletarian sky,  
Waiting to trouble  
Your lines on the scorched Ukrainian stubble.  
On the veined marble of their snows  
Indite a score to tether  
The flight of your strain;  
Or should you need a rougher grain  
That will never corrode with weather,  
Let us propose  
A stone west of the bend where the Volga flows  
To lick her cubs on the Stalingrad rubble.

Hasten, for time may pass you by,  
Mildew the reed and rust the lyre;  
Look—that Tunisian glow will die  
As died the Carthaginian fire!  
To-day the autumn tints are on  
The trampled grass at Marathon.  
Here are the tales to be retold,  
Here are the songs to be resung.  
Go, find a cadence for that field-grey mould  
Outcropping on the Parthenon.  
Invoke, in other than the Latin tongue,  
A Mediterranean Muse  
To leave her pastoral loves—  
The murmurs of her soft Theocritean fold,  
Mimosa, oleander,  
Dovecotes and olive groves,  
And court the shadows where the night bedews  
A Roman mausoleum hung  
Upon the tides from Candia to Syracuse.

# AUTOPSY ON A SADIST

(after Lidice)

The microscope was at a loss to tell  
The composition of his brain and glands—  
Why blood should be like catnip to his smell,  
And paws be given him instead of hands.

What toxins in a mammal's milk could serve  
To manufacture luxuries out of pains,  
Anaesthetize the sympathetic nerve  
Or turn to sleet the fluids of his veins?

Much less could it explain those pointed ears  
That caught the raptures of a werewolf's howl,  
The allegretto strains in human tears,  
The hallelujahs in a tiger's growl.

## FATHER TIME

Worry had crept into the old man's face.  
Why did he have to tilt the hour-glass  
So often? Strange, he thought, this hurried pace  
Of the atoms as they strove to pass  
From bulb to bulb, fighting their way  
From life to death in an unexplained stampede.

He had measured many tempos in his season,  
But never cared for speed.  
He always liked the sanitary, slow,  
Grave manner of the mountains.  
He had seen them flow  
In rivulets of crystal grains  
Down through this very corridor  
To the deltas of the ocean shore.  
He had watched the plants and trees turn into coal;  
The marks of the fronds were in the veins  
Resembling those of his own hands and temples.  
He remembered how he used to while  
Away the aeons, pondering the roll  
Of the Amazon and Nile.  
The curve of the sand dunes of Sahara,  
The depositions of the layers of gneiss,  
The march of the granite boulders  
Under the control  
Of dynasties of ice.

He thought of the prehistoric file  
Of the saurians, one long and leisured day,  
On the crumbling bridges from Australia to Malay.  
And now this new adventurer—  
Which called itself a soul,  
With its mélange of pride,  
Courage, honour, suicide,  
Pursuing an eternal goal—  
Had come along to wreck  
His cool pre-Cambrian sense of sequence.  
He shot a last glance at the trek  
Of the human granules through the bottleneck,  
Then rose and smashed the glass, and with the dust  
Christened the knoll—  
SEBASTOPOL!



## SEEN ON THE ROAD

The pundit lectured that the world was young  
As ever, frisking like a spring-time colt  
Around the sun, his mother. The class hung  
Upon his words. I listened like a dolt,

And muttered that I saw the wastrel drawn  
Along a road with many a pitch and bump  
By spavined mules—this very day at dawn!  
And heading for an ammunition dump.

The savant claimed I heckled him, but—Hell!  
I saw the fellow in a tumbril there,  
Tattered and planet-eyed and far from well,  
With Winter roosting in his Alpine hair.

# THE BARITONE

He ascended the rostrum after the fashion of the Caesars:  
His arm, a baton raised oblique,  
Answering the salute of the thunder,  
Imposed a silence on the Square.  
For three hours  
A wind-theme swept his laryngeal reeds,  
Pounded on the diaphragm of a microphone,  
Entered, veered, ran round a coil,  
Emerged, to storm the passes of the ether,  
Until, impinging on a hundred million ear-drums,  
It grew into the fugue of Europe.

Nickel, copper and steel rang their quotations to the skies,  
And down through the diatonic scale  
The mark hallooed the franc,  
The franc bayed the lira,  
With the three in full flight from the pound.  
And while the diapasons were pulled  
On the *Marseillaise*,  
The *Giovinezza*  
And the *Deutschlandlied*,  
A perfect stretto was performed  
As the *Dead March* boomed its way  
Through *God Save The King*  
And the *Star Spangled Banner*.

Then the codetta of the clerics  
(Chanting a ritual over the crosses of gold tossed into the crucibles to  
back the billion credit)  
Was answered by  
The clang of the North Sea against the bows of the destroyers,  
The ripple of surf on the periscopes.  
The grunt of the Mediterranean shouldering Gibraltar,  
And the hum of the bombing squadrons in formation under Orion.

And the final section issued from the dials,  
WHEN—  
Opposed by contrapuntal blasts  
From the Federated Polyphonic Leagues  
Of Gynecologists,  
Morticians,  
And the Linen Manufacturers—  
The great Baritone,  
Soaring through the notes of the hymeneal register,  
Called the brides and the grooms to the altar,  
To be sent forth by the Recessional Bells  
To replenish the earth,  
And in due season to produce  
Magnificent crops of grass on the battlefields.

## THE STOICS

They were the oaks and beeches of our species.  
Their roots struck down through acid loam  
To weathered granite and took hold  
Of flint and silica, or found their home  
With red pyrites—fools' mistake for gold.  
Their tunics, stoles and togas were like watersheds,  
Splitting the storm, sloughing the rain.  
Under such cloaks the morrow could not enter—  
Their *gravitas* had seized a geologic centre  
And triumphed over subcutaneous pain.

Aurelius! What direction did you take  
To find your hermitage?  
We have tried but failed to make  
That cool unflawed retreat  
Where the pulses slow their beat  
To an aspen-yellow age.  
To-day we cannot discipline  
The ferments rattling underneath our skin.  
Where is the formula to win  
Composure from defeat?

And what specific can unmesh  
The tangle of civilian flesh  
From the traction of the panzers?  
And when our children cry aloud  
At screaming comets in the skies, what serves  
The head that's bloody but unbowed?  
What are the Stoic answers  
To those who flag us at the danger curves  
Along the quivering labyrinth of nerves?

## THE MYSTIC

Where do you bank such fires as can transmute  
This granite-fact intransigence of life,  
Such proud irenic faith as can refute  
The upstart logic of this world of strife—  
Its come-and-go of racial dust, its strum  
Of windy discords from the seven seas,  
Its scream of fifes and din of kettle-drum  
That lead the march towards our futurities?  
The *proof*, that slays the reason, has no power  
To stem your will, corrode your soul—though lime  
Conspire with earth and water to devour  
The finest cultures from the lust of slime;  
Though crumbled Tartar hordes break through their sod  
To blow their grit into the eyes of God.

# MISSING: BELIEVED DEAD: RETURNED

Steady, the heart!  
Can you not see  
You must not break  
Incredulously?

The dead has come back,  
He is here at the sill;  
Try to believe  
The miracle.

Give me more breath,  
Or I may not withstand  
The thrill of his voice  
And the clasp of his hand.

Be quiet, my heart,  
Can you not see  
In the beat of my pulse  
Mortality?

## THE IMPATIENT EARTH

Back to the earth would we come  
In the fullness of years,  
As we return home at dusk  
When our eyes are dim with day  
And our feet tired with stubble.  
We would come with slow step  
Along the cool loam of lanes,  
Home to your heart  
With the mellow toll of bells in the west.

But not as to-day would we come  
To the trumpet's unnatural summons,  
With our loins girt for a longer race  
And our faces set for a different goal,  
With our feet strung to the measures of life,  
To a riot of bells in the east.

This is the season for blood-root and bud-break,  
For freshets and resinous airs,  
For the mating migrations  
Of swallows and whitethroats.  
For the scaling of crags,  
For the plangent call of the surf  
Where ospreys are building their nests.

Then why should we come out of season  
To take the long lease of your heart,  
When the swift irresponsible trespass  
Of our feet above ground  
Is cut short by the halt of the sentry?—  
There are months still to go for the autumn,  
And months for the poppies to bloom,  
Though hate and greed have grown to their harvest,  
Though tolerance, forgiveness and love are forgotten  
Like scars on the body of Christ—  
Too soon in the morning for youth  
To take the deep draught of your opiate!



## THE OLD ORGANON (1225 A.D.)

When Genghis and his captains  
Built their pyramids of skulls  
Outside Bokhara and Herat,  
And sacked Otrar and Samarcand,  
There was no sophistry between the subject and the verb;  
For what the Khan said, he meant.  
Behind the dust were the hoofs of his cavalry,  
Behind the smoke was his fire.  
And when Mohammed and Jehal-ud-Din,  
In their flight from the Indus to the Caspian,  
Appealed to Allah for protection,  
Even the Great God of Islam  
Could find no escape for the faithful,  
When he knew the flight was regimented  
To the paces of a Mongol syllogism.

## THE NEW (1937 A.D.)

Now when the delegates met around the tables  
And lifted up their voices,  
The subjects were their civilizing tasks,  
The fulfilment of historic missions,  
The redemption of the national honour,  
And the emancipation of the slaves.  
But flaws were hidden in the predicates,  
And in the pips of the adverbials,  
And the rhetorical adjectives  
Assumed the protective colouring  
Of the great cats against the jungle grass—  
THEREFORE,  
In all the wealth of their possessive pronouns,  
Not a syllable was spared  
For the oil reported in the foreign shales.

## THE SUBMARINE

The young lieutenant in command  
Of the famous submarine, the K-  
148, had scanned  
The sea circumference all day:  
A thousand times or so his hand  
Revolved the prism in the hope  
That the image of the ship expected,  
But overdue, might be reflected  
Through the lenses of his periscope.  
'Twas getting late, and not a mark  
Had troubled the monotony  
Of every slow expanding arc  
Of the horizon. Suddenly  
His grip froze to the handle! What  
Was that amorphous yellow spot  
To the north-east? Was it the lift  
Of a wave, a curl of foam, a drift  
Of cloud? Too slow for foam, too fast  
For cloud. A minute more. At last  
The drift was taking shape; his stroke  
Of luck had fallen—it was SMOKE!

An hour of light in the western sky,  
And thirty seconds for descent;  
The quarry ten miles off. Stand-by!  
The valves were opened—flood and vent—  
And the water like a rumble of thunder  
Entered the tanks. Two generators  
Sparked her fins and drove her under  
Down the ocean escalators.

No forebear of the whale or shark,  
No saurian of the Pleiocene,  
Piercing the sub-aquatic dark  
Could rival this new submarine.  
The evolution of the sea  
Had brought forth many specimens  
Conceived in horror—denizens  
Whose vast inside economy  
Not only reproduced their broods,  
But having shot them from their wombs,  
Devoured them in their family feuds  
And passed them through their catacombs.  
But was there one in all their race  
Combined such terror with such grace,  
As this disturber of the glooms,  
This rapid sinuous oval form  
Which knew unerringly the way  
To sound and circumvent a storm  
Or steal a march upon her prey?  
No product she of Nature's dower,  
No casual selection wrought her  
Or gave her such mechanic power  
To breathe above or under water.

In her thoracic cavities  
One hundred tons of batteries  
Were ready, on the dive, to start  
The musculation of the heart.  
And where outside a Ming museum  
Could any antiquarian find  
An assemblage such as here was shrined  
Within the vault of her peritoneum?  
Electric switches, indicators.  
Diving alarm-horns, oscillators,  
Rudder controls, and tubes and dials,  
Yellow, white, magenta vials,  
Pipes to force out battery gases,  
Pressure gauges, polished brasses,  
Surrounded human figures caught  
At their positions, silent, taut,  
Like statues in the tungsten light,  
While just outside the cell was night  
And a distant engine's monotone  
Tapping at a telephone.  
And now two hundred feet below  
She held her bearings towards her foe,  
While silence and the darkness flowed  
Along an un navigated road.

In half an hour she stopped and blew  
The water ballast with her air,  
Rose stealthily to surface where  
Upon the mirror in full view,  
Cutting an Atlantic swarth  
The trail of smoke turned out to be  
A fat mammalian of the sea,  
Set on a course north-east by north,  
And heavy with maternity.  
Within her frame-work iron-walled  
A thousand bodies were installed,  
A snug and pre-lacteal brood  
Drawing from her warmth and food,  
Awaiting in two days or three  
A European delivery.  
Blood of tiger, blood of shark,  
What a prey to stalk and strike  
From an ambush in the dark  
Thicket of the sea!

Now like

The tiger-shark viviparous  
Who with her young grown mutinous  
Before the birth-hour with the smell  
Of blood inside the mother, will expel  
Them from her body to begin  
At once the steering of the fin,  
The seizure of the jaw, the click  
Of serrated teeth fashioned so well  
Pre-natally to turn the trick  
Upon a shoal of mackerel—  
So like the shark, the submarine  
Ejected from her magazine  
The first one of her foetal young.  
It ran along the trolley, swung  
Into a flooded tube and there  
Under a jet of compressed air  
It found the sea. A trip-latch in  
The tube a second later sprung  
A trigger, and the turbine power  
Acting on the driving fin  
Paced it at fifty miles per hour.

So huge and luscious was this feast,  
The 148 released  
Three others to offset the chance  
Of some erratic circumstance  
Of aim or speed or tide or weather.  
And during this time nothing was seen  
Except to an eye in the submarine  
Of that bevy of sharks on the sea together,  
So accurately spaced one after the other,  
And driven by thirst derived from the mother.  
Each seemed on the glass a tenuous feather  
Of gold such as a curlew in flight  
Would make with its nether wing skimming the swell;  
Not a hint of a swerve to the left or right,  
The gyros were holding the balance so well.

The rich-ripe mammal was swimming straight  
On the course of her chart with unconcerned leisure,  
Her steady keel and uniform rate  
Combining so perfectly with the deep black  
Of the hull—silhouette against the back-  
Drop of the sunset to etch and measure  
The target—when three of those shafts of foam  
At the end of their amber stretch struck home.  
The first one barely missed—to plough  
A harmless path across her bow:  
The next tore like a scimitar  
Through flesh to rip the jugular;  
Boilers and bulkheads broke apart  
When the third torpedo struck the heart;  
And with what logic did the fourth  
Cancel the course north-east by north,  
Hitting abaft the beam to rut  
The exploding nitrates through her gut.

The young commander's time was short  
To log the items for report.  
Upon the mirror he descried  
Three cavernous wounds in the mammal's side—  
Three crumbled dykes through which the tide  
Of a gluttonous Atlantic poured;  
A heavy starboard list with banks  
Of smoke fluted with steam which soared  
From a scramble of pipes within her flanks;  
Twin funnel-nostrils belching red,  
A tilting stern, a plunging head,  
The foundering angle in position,  
And the sea's reach for a thousand souls  
In the last throes of the parturition.



Now with her hyper-sensitive feel  
Of her master's hands on the controls—  
A pull of a switch, a turn of a wheel,  
The submarine, like the deep-sea shark,  
Went under cover, away from the light  
And limn of the sunset, from the sight  
Of the stars, to a native lair as dark  
As a kraken's grave. She took her course  
South-west by south—for what was the source  
Of that hum to the port picked up by the oscillator?  
A rhythm too rapid, too hectic for freighter  
Or liner! This was her foe, not her prey:  
Faster and louder, and heading her way!  
Beyond the depth where the tanks could flood 'er,  
She drove her nose down with the diving rudder,  
Far from the storm of shells or thrust  
Of the ram, away from the gear-wrenching zone  
Of the depth-bomb, away from the scent and lust  
Of a killer whose might was as great as her own.

# BRÉBEUF AND HIS BRETHERN

I

The winds of God were blowing over France,  
Kindling the hearths and altars, changing vows  
Of rote into an alphabet of flame.  
The air was charged with song beyond the range  
Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.  
Skylines unknown to maps broke from the mists  
And there was laughter on the seas. With sound  
Of bugles from the Roman catacombs,  
The saints came back in their incarnate forms.  
Across the Alps St. Francis of Assisi  
In his brown tunic girt with hempen cord,  
Revisited the plague-infected towns.  
The monks were summoned from their monasteries,  
Nuns from their convents; apostolic hands  
Had touched the priests; foundlings and galley slaves  
Became the charges of Vincent de Paul;  
Francis de Sales put his heroic stamp  
Upon his order of the Visitation.  
Out of Numidia by way of Rome,  
The architect of palaces, unbuilt  
Of hand, again was busy with his plans,  
Reshaping for the world his *City of God*.  
Out of the Netherlands was heard the call  
Of Kempis through the *Imitatio*  
To leave the dusty marts and city streets  
And stray along the shores of Galilee.  
The flame had spread across the Pyrenees—  
The visions of Theresa burning through  
The adorations of the Carmelites;  
The very clouds at night to John of the Cross  
Being cruciform—chancel, transept and aisle  
Blazing with light and holy oracle.  
Xavier had risen from his knees to drive  
His dreams full-sail under an ocean compass.  
Loyola, soldier-priest, staggering with wounds  
At Pampeluna, guided by a voice,  
Had travelled to the Montserrat Abbey  
To leave his sword and dagger on an altar  
That he might lead the *Company of Jesus*.

The story of the frontier like a saga  
Sang through the cells and cloisters of the nation,  
Made silver flutes out of the parish spires,  
Troubled the ashes of the canonized  
In the cathedral crypts, soared through the nave  
To stir the foliations on the columns,  
Roll through the belfries, and give deeper tongue  
To the *Magnificat* in Notre Dame.  
It brought to earth the prophets and apostles  
Out of their static shrines in the stained glass.  
It caught the ear of Christ, reined his hands  
And feet, bidding his marble saints to leave  
Their pedestals for chartless seas and coasts  
And the vast blunders of the forest glooms.  
So, in the footsteps of their patrons came  
A group of men asking the hardest tasks  
At the new outposts of the Huron bounds  
Held in the stern hand of the Jesuit Order.

And in Bayeux a neophyte while rapt  
In contemplation saw a bleeding form  
Falling beneath the instrument of death,  
Rising under the quickening of the thongs,  
Stumbling along the Via Dolorosa.  
No play upon the fancy was this scene,  
But the Real Presence to the naked sense.  
The fingers of Brébeuf were at his breast,  
Closing and tightening on a crucifix,  
While voices spoke aloud unto his ear  
And to his heart—*Per ignem et per aquam*.  
Forests and streams and trails thronged through his mind.  
The painted faces of the Iroquois,  
Nomadic bands and smoking bivouacs  
Along the shores of western inland seas,  
With forts and palisades and fiery stakes.  
The stories of Champlain, Brulé, Viel,  
Sagard and Le Caron had reached his town—  
The stories of those northern boundaries  
Where in the winter the white pines could brush  
The Pleiades, and at the equinoxes  
Under the gold and green of the auroras  
Wild geese drove wedges through the zodiac.  
The vows were deep he laid upon his soul.  
“I shall be broken first before I break them.”  
He knew by heart the manual that had stirred  
The world—the clarion calling through the notes  
Of the Ignatian preludes. On the prayers,  
The meditations, points and colloquies,  
Was built the soldier and the martyr programme.  
This is the end of man—*Deum laudet*,  
To seek and find the will of God, to act  
Upon it for the ordering of life,  
And for the soul’s beatitude. This is  
To do, this not to do. To weigh the sin;  
The interior understanding to be followed  
By the amendment of the deed through grace;  
The abnegation of the evil thought  
And act; the trampling of the body under;  
The daily practice of the *counter virtues*.  
“In time of desolation to be firm

And constant in the soul's determination,  
Desire and sense obedient to the reason."

The oath Brébeuf was taking had its root  
Firm in his generations of descent.  
The family name was known to chivalry—  
In the Crusades; at Hastings; through the blood  
Of the English Howards; called out on the rungs  
Of the siege ladders; at the castle breaches;  
Proclaimed by heralds at the lists, and heard  
In Council Halls:—the coat-of-arms a bull  
In black with horns of gold on a silver shield.  
So on that toughened pedigree of fibre  
Were strung the pledges. From the novice stage  
To the vow-day he passed on to the priesthood,  
And on the anniversary of his birth  
He celebrated his first mass at Rouen.

And the first clauses of the Jesuit pledge  
Were honoured when, embarking at Dieppe,  
Brébeuf, Massé and Charles Lalemant  
Travelled three thousand miles of the Atlantic,  
And reached the citadel in seven weeks.  
A month in preparation at Notre Dame  
Des Anges, Brébeuf in company with Daillon  
Moved to Three Rivers to begin the journey.  
Taking both warning and advice from traders,  
They packed into their stores of altar-ware  
And vestments, strings of coloured beads with knives,  
Kettles and awls, domestic gifts to win  
The Hurons' favour or appease their wrath.  
There was a touch of omen in the warning,  
For scarcely had they started when the fate  
Of the Franciscan mission was disclosed—  
News of Viel, delivered to Brébeuf,—  
Drowned by the natives in the final league  
Of his return at Sault-au-Récollet!

April 26  
1625

Back to Quebec by Lalemant's command;  
A year's delay of which Brébeuf made use  
By hardening his body and his will,  
Learning the rudiments of the Huron tongue,  
Mastering the wood-lore, joining in the hunt  
For food, observing habits of speech, the ways  
Of thought, the moods and the long silences.  
Wintering with the Algonquins, he soon knew  
The life that was before him in the cabins—  
The troubled night, branches of fir covering  
The floor of snow; the martyrdom of smoke  
That hourly drove his nostrils to the ground  
To breathe, or offered him the choice of death  
Outside by frost, inside by suffocation;  
The forced companionship of dogs that ate  
From the same platters, slept upon his legs  
Or neck; the nausea from sagamite,  
Unsalted, gritty, and that bloated feeling,  
The February stomach touch when acorns,  
Turk's cap, bog-onion bulbs dug from the snow  
And bulrush roots flavoured with eel skin made  
The menu for his breakfast-dinner-supper.  
Added to this, the instigated taunts  
Common as daily salutations; threats  
Of murderous intent that just escaped  
The deed—the prologue to Huronia!

Midsummer and the try again—Brébeuf,  
Daillon, de Nouë just arrived from France;  
Quebec up to Three Rivers; the routine  
Repeated; bargaining with the Indians,  
Axes and beads against the maize and passage;  
The natives' protest when they saw Brébeuf,  
High as a totem-pole. What if he placed  
His foot upon the gunwale, suddenly  
Shifted an ounce of those two hundred pounds  
Off centre at the rapids! They had visions  
Of bodies and bales gyrating round the rocks,  
Plunging like stumps and logs over the falls.  
The Hurons shook their heads: the bidding grew;  
Kettles and porcelain necklaces and knives,  
Till with the last awl thrown, upon the heap,  
The ratifying grunt came from the chief.  
Two Indians holding the canoe, Brébeuf,  
Barefooted, cassock pulled up to his knees,  
Planted one foot dead in the middle, then  
The other, then slowly and ticklishly  
Adjusted to the physics of his range  
And width, he grasped both sides of the canoe,  
Lowered himself and softly murmuring  
An *Ave*, sat, immobile as a statue.



So the flotilla started—the same route  
Champlain and Le Caron eleven years  
Before had taken to avoid the swarm  
Of hostile Iroquois on the St. Lawrence.  
Eight hundred miles—along the Ottawa  
Through the steep gorges where the river narrowed.  
Through calmer waters where the river widened,  
Skirting the island of the Allumettes,  
Thence to the Mattawa through lakes that led  
To the blue waters of the Nipissing,  
And then southward a hundred tortuous miles  
Down the French River to the Huron shore.  
The record of that trip was for Brébeuf  
A memory several times to be re-lived;  
Of rocks and cataracts and portages,  
Of feet cut by the river stones, of mud  
And stench, of boulders, logs and tangled growths,  
Of summer heat that made him long for night,  
And when he struck his bed of rock—mosquitoes  
That made him doubt if dawn would ever break.  
'Twas thirty days to the Georgian Bay, then south  
One hundred miles threading the labyrinth  
Of islands till he reached the western shore  
That Banked the Bay of Penetanguishene.  
Soon joined by both his fellow priests he followed  
The course of a small stream and reached Toaniché,  
Where for three years he was to make his home  
And turn the first sod of the Jesuit mission.

'Twas ploughing only—for eight years would pass  
Before even the blades appeared. The priests  
Knew well how barren was the task should signs,  
Gestures and inarticulate sounds provide  
The basis of the converse. And the speech  
Was hard. De Nouë set himself to school,  
Unflinching as to his Breviary,  
Through the long evenings of the fall and winter.  
But as light never trickled through a sentence,  
Either the Hurons' or his own, he left  
With the spring's expedition to Quebec,  
Where intermittently for twenty years  
He was to labour with the colonists,  
Travelling between the outposts, and to die  
Snow-blind, caught in the circles of his tracks  
Between Three Rivers and Fort Richelieu.

Daillon migrated to the south and west  
To the country of the Neutrals. There he spent  
The winter, fruitless. Jealousies of trade  
Awoke resentment, fostered calumnies,  
Until the priest under a constant threat  
That often issued in assault, returned  
Against his own persuasion to Quebec.

Brébeuf was now alone. He bent his mind  
To the great end. The efficacious rites  
Were hinged as much on mental apprehensions  
As on the disposition of the heart.  
For that the first equipment was the speech.  
He listened to the sounds and gave them letters,  
Arranged their sequences, caught the inflections,  
Extracted nouns from objects, verbs from actions  
And regimented rebel moods and tenses.  
He saw the way the chiefs harangued the clans,  
The torrent of compounded words, the art  
Concealed within the pause, the look, the gesture.  
Lacking all labials, the open mouth  
Performed a double service with the vowels  
Directed like a battery at the hearers.  
With what forebodings did he watch the spell  
Cast on the sick by the Arendiwans:  
The sorcery of the Huron rhetoric  
Extorting bribes for cures, for guarantees  
Against the failure of the crop or hunt!  
The time would come when steel would clash on steel,  
And many a battle would be won or lost  
With weapons from the armoury of words.  
Three years of that apprenticeship had won  
The praise of his Superior and no less  
Evoked the admiration of Champlain.  
That soldier, statesman, navigator, friend,  
Who had combined the brain of Richelieu  
With the red blood of Cartier and Magellan,  
Was at this time reduced to his last keg  
Of powder at the citadel. Blockade,  
The piracy of Kirke on the Atlantic,  
The English occupation of Quebec,  
And famine, closed this chapter of the Mission.

1629

Four years at home could not abate his zeal.  
Brébeuf, absorbed within his meditations,  
Made ready to complete his early vows.  
Each year in France but served to clarify  
His vision. At Rouen he gauged the height  
Of the Cathedral's central tower in terms  
Of pines and oaks around the Indian lodges.  
He went to Paris. There as worshipper,  
His eyes were scaling transepts, but his mind,  
Straying from window patterns where the sun  
Shed rose ellipses on the marble floor,  
Rested on glassless walls of cedar bark.  
To Rennes—the Jesuits' intellectual home,  
Where, in the *Summa* of Aquinas, faith  
Laid hold on God's existence when the last  
Link of the Reason slipped, and where Loyola  
Enforced the high authoritarian scheme  
Of God's vicegerent on the priestly fold.  
Between the two nostalgic fires Brébeuf  
Was swung—between two homes; in one was peace  
Within the holy court, the ecstasy  
Of unmolested prayer before the Virgin,  
The daily and vicarious offering  
On which no hand might dare lay sacrilege:  
But in the other would be broken altars  
And broken bodies of both Host and priest.  
Then of which home, the son? From which the exile?  
With his own blood Brébeuf wrote his last vow—  
“Lord Jesus! Thou didst save me with thy blood;  
By thy most precious death; and this is why  
I make this pledge to serve thee all my life  
In the Society of Jesus—never  
To serve another than thyself. Hereby  
I sign this promise in my blood, ready  
To sacrifice it all as willingly  
As now I give this drop.”—Jean de Brébeuf.

Nor did the clamour of the *Thirty Years*,  
The battle-cries at La Rochelle and Fribourg,  
Blow out the flame. Less strident than the names  
Of Richelieu and Mazarin, Condé,  
Turenne, but just as mighty, were the calls  
Of the new apostolate. A century  
Before had Xavier from the Indies summoned  
The world to other colours. Now appeals  
Were ringing through the history of New France.  
Le Jeune, following the example of Biard  
And Charles Lalemant, was capturing souls  
By thousands with the fire of the *Relations*:  
Noble and peasant, layman, priest and nun  
Gave of their wealth and power and personal life.  
Among his new recruits were Chastellain,  
Pijart, Le Mercier, and Isaac Jogues,  
The Lalemants—Jerome and Gabriel—  
Jerome who was to supervise and write,  
With Ragueneau, the drama of the Mission;  
Who told of the survivors reaching France  
When the great act was closed that “all of them  
Still hold their resolution to return  
To the combat at the first sound of the trumpets.”  
The other, Gabriel, who would share the crown  
With Jean Brébeuf, pitting the frailest body  
Against the hungers of the wilderness,  
The fevers of the lodges and the fires  
That slowly wreathed themselves around a stake.

Then Garnier, comrade of Jogues. The winds  
Had fanned to a white heat the hearth and placed  
Three brothers under vows—the Carmelite,  
The Capuchin, and his, the Jesuit.  
The gentlest of his stock, he had resolved  
To seek and to accept a post that would  
Transmit his nurture through a discipline  
That multiplied the living martyrdoms  
Before the casual incident of death.

To many a vow did Chabanel subject  
His timid nature as the evidence  
Of trial came through the Huronian records.  
He needed every safeguard of the soul  
To fortify the will, for every day  
Would find him fighting, mastering his revolt  
Against the native life and practices.  
Of all the priests he could the least endure  
The sudden transformation from the Chair  
Of College Rhetoric to the heat and drag  
Of portages, from the monastic calm  
To the noise and smoke and vermin of the lodges,  
And the insufferable sights and stinks  
When, at the High Feast of the Dead, the bodies  
Lying for months or years upon the scaffolds  
Were taken down, stripped of their flesh, caressed,  
Strung up along the cabin poles and then  
Cast in a pit for common burial.  
The day would come when in the wilderness.  
The weary hand protesting, he would write  
This final pledge—"I, Noel Chabanel,  
Do vow, in presence of the Sacrament  
Of Thy most precious blood and body, here  
To stay forever with the Huron Mission,  
According to commands of my Superiors.  
Therefore I do beseech Thee to receive me  
As Thy perpetual servant and to make  
Me worthy of so sublime a ministry."

And the same spirit breathed on Chaumonot,  
Making his restless and undisciplined soul  
At first seek channels of renunciation  
In abstinence, ill health and beggary.  
His months of pilgrimages to the shrines  
At Rome and to the Lady of Loretto,  
The static hours upon his knees had sapped  
His strength, turning an introspective mind  
Upon the weary circuit of its thoughts,  
Until one day a letter from Brébeuf  
Would come to burn the torpors of his heart  
And galvanize a raw novitiate.

### III

1633

New France restored! Champlain, Massé, Brébeuf  
Were in Quebec, hopes riding high as ever.  
Davost and Daniel soon arrived to join  
The expedition west. Midsummer trade,  
The busiest the Colony had known,  
Was over: forty-three canoes to meet  
The hazards of return; the basic sense  
Of safety, now Champlain was on the scene;  
The joy of the Toanché Indians  
As they beheld Brébeuf and heard him speak  
In their own tongue, was happy augury.  
But as before upon the eve of starting  
The path was blocked, so now the unforeseen  
Stepped in. A trade and tribal feud long-blown  
Between the Hurons and the Allumettes  
Came to a head when the Algonquin chief  
Forbade the passage of the priests between  
His island and the shore. The Hurons knew  
The roughness of this channel, and complied.

In such delays which might have been construed  
By lesser wills as exits of escape,  
As providential doors on a light latch,  
The Fathers entered deeper preparation.  
They worked incessantly among the tribes  
In the environs of Quebec, took hold  
Of Huron words and beat them into order.  
Davost and Daniel gathered from the store  
Of speech, manners, and customs that Brébeuf  
Had garnered, all the subtleties to make  
The bargain for the journey. The next year  
Seven canoes instead of forty! Fear  
Of Iroquois following a recent raid  
And massacre; growing distrust of priests;  
The sense of risk in having men aboard  
Unskilled in fire-arms, helpless at the paddles  
And on the portages—all these combined  
To sharpen the terms until the treasury  
Was dry of presents and of promises.

The ardours of his trip eight years before  
Fresh in his mind, Brébeuf now set his face  
To graver peril, for the native mood  
Was hostile. On the second week the corn  
Was low, a handful each a day. Sickness  
Had struck the Huron, slowing down the blades,  
And turning murmurs into menaces  
Against the Blackrobes and their French companions.  
The first blow hit Davost. Robbed of his books,  
Papers and altar linens, he was left  
At the Island of the Allumettes; Martin<sup>[A]</sup>  
Was put ashore at Nipissing; Baron<sup>[A]</sup>  
And Daniel were deserted, made to take  
Their chances with canoes along the route,  
Yet all in turn, tattered, wasted, with feet  
Bleeding—broken though not in will, rejoined  
Their great companion after he had reached  
The forest shores of the Fresh Water Sea,  
And guided by the sight of smoke had entered  
The village of Ihonatiria.



A year's success flattered the priestly hope  
That on this central field seed would be sown  
On which the yield would be the Huron nation  
Baptized and dedicated to the Faith;  
And that a richer harvest would be gleaned  
Of duskier grain from the same seed on more  
Forbidding ground when the arch-foes themselves  
Would be re-born under the sacred rites.  
For there was promise in the auspices.  
Ihonatiria received Brébeuf  
With joy. Three years he had been there, a friend  
Whose visit to the tribes could not have sprung  
From inspiration rooted in private gain.  
He had not come to stack the arquebuses  
Against the mountains of the beaver pelts.  
He had not come to kill. Between the two—  
Barter and battle—what was left to explain  
A stranger in their midst? The name *Echon*<sup>[B]</sup>  
Had solved the riddle.

So with native help

The Fathers built their mission house—the frame  
Of young elm-poles set solidly in earth;  
Their supple tops bent, lashed and braced to form  
The arched roof overlaid with cedar-bark.  
“No Louvre or palace is this cabin,” wrote  
Brébeuf, “no stories, cellar, garret, windows,  
No chimney—only at the top a hole  
To let the smoke escape. Inside, three rooms  
With doors of wood alone set it apart  
From the single long-house of the Indians.  
The first is used for storage; in the second  
Our kitchen, bedroom and refectory;  
Our bedstead is the earth; rushes and boughs  
For mattresses and pillows; in the third,  
Which is our chapel, we have placed the altar,  
The images and vessels of the Mass.”  
It was the middle room that drew the natives,  
Day after day, to share the sagamite  
And raisins, and to see the marvels brought  
From France—marvels on which the Fathers built  
A basis of persuasion, recognizing  
The potency of awe for natures nurtured  
On charms and spells, invoking kindly spirits  
And exorcising demons. So the natives  
Beheld a mass of iron chips like bees  
Swarm to a lodestone: was it gum that held  
Them fast? They watched the handmill grind the corn;  
Gaped at a lens eleven-faceted  
That multiplied a bead as many times,  
And at a phial where a captive flea  
Looked like a beetle. But the miracle  
Of all, the clock! It showed the hours; it struck  
Or stopped upon command. Le Capitaine  
Du Jour which moved its hands before its face,  
Called up the dawn, saluted noon, rang out  
The sunset, summoned with the count of twelve  
The Fathers to a meal, or sent at four  
The noisy pack of Indians to their cabins.  
“What did it say?” “Yo eiouahaoua—  
Time to put on the cauldron.” “And what now?”

“Time to go home at once and close the door.”  
It was alive: an *oki* dwelt inside,  
Peering out through that black hub on the dial.

As great a mystery was writing—how  
A Frenchman fifteen miles away could know  
The meaning of black signs the runner brought.  
Sometimes the marks were made on peel of bark,  
Sometimes on paper—in itself a wonder!  
From what strange tree was it the inside rind?  
What charm was in the ink that transferred thought  
Across such space without a spoken word?

This growing confirmation of belief  
Was speeded by events wherein good fortune  
Waited upon the priestly word and act.  
A moon eclipse was due—Brébeuf had known it—  
Had told the Indians of the moment when  
The shadow would be thrown across the face.  
Nor was there wastage in the prayers as night,  
Uncurtained by a single cloud, produced  
An orb most perfect. No one knew the lair  
Or nest from which the shadow came; no one  
The home to which it travelled when it passed.  
Only the vague uncertainties were left—  
Was it the dread invasion from the south?  
Such portent was the signal for the braves  
To mass themselves outside the towns and shoot  
Their multitudes of arrows at the sky  
And fling their curses at the Iroquois.  
Like a crow's wing it hovered, broodily  
Brushing the face—five hours from rim to rim  
While midnight darkness stood upon the land.  
This was prediction baffling all their magic.  
Again, when weeks of drought had parched the land  
And burned the corn, when dancing sorcerers  
Brought out their tortoise shells, climbed on the roofs,  
Clanging their invocation to the Bird  
Of Thunder to return, day after day,  
Without avail, the priests formed their processions,  
Put on their surplices above their robes,  
And the Bird of Thunder came with heavy rain,  
Released by the nine masses at Saint Joseph.

Aug. 27  
1635

Nor were the village warriors slow to see  
The value of the Frenchmen's strategy  
In war. Returning from the eastern towns,  
They told how soldiers had rebuilt the forts,  
And strengthened them with corner bastions  
Where through the embrasures enfilading fire  
Might flank the Iroquois bridging the ditches,  
And scaling ramparts. Here was argument  
That pierced the thickest prejudice of brain  
And heart, allaying panic ever present,  
When with the first news of the hated foe  
From scouts and hunters, women with their young  
Fled to the dubious refuge of the forest  
From terror blacker than a pestilence.  
On such a soil tilled by those skilful hands  
Those passion flowers and lilies of the East,  
The *Aves* and the *Paternosters* bloomed.  
The *Credos* and the *Thou-shalt-nots* were turned  
By Daniel into simple Huron rhymes  
And taught to children, and when points of faith  
Were driven hard against resistant rock,  
The Fathers found the softer crevices  
Through deeds which readily the Indian mind  
Could grasp—where hands were never put to blows  
Nor the swift tongues used for recrimination.  
Acceptance of the common lot was part  
Of the original vows. But that the priests  
Who were to come should not misread the text,  
Brébeuf prepared a sermon on the theme  
Of Patience:—"Fathers, Brothers, under call  
Of God! Take care that you foresee the perils,  
Labours and hardships of this Holy Mission.  
You must sincerely love the savages  
As brothers ransomed by the blood of Christ.  
All things must be endured. To win their hearts  
You must perform the smallest services.  
Provide a tinder-box or burning mirror  
To light their fires. Fetch wood and water for them;  
And when embarking never let them wait  
For you; tuck up your habits, keep them dry  
To avoid water and sand in their canoes. Carry

Your load on portages. Always appear  
Cheerful—their memories are good for faults.  
Constrain yourselves to eat their sagamite  
The way that they prepare it, tasteless, dirty.”

And by the priests upon the ground all dots  
And commas were observed. They suffered smoke  
That billowed from the back-draughts at the roof,  
Smothered the cabin, seared the eyes; the fire  
That broiled the face, while frost congealed the spine;  
The food from unwashed platters where refusal  
Was an offence; the rasp of speech maintained  
All day by men who never learned to talk  
In quiet tones; the drums of the Diviners  
Blasting the night—all this without complaint!  
And more—whatever sleep was possible  
To snatch from the occasional lull of cries  
Was broken by uncovenanted fleas  
That fastened on the priestly flesh like hornets.  
Carving the curves of favour on the lips,  
Tailoring the man into the Jesuit coat,  
Wrapping the smiles round inward maledictions,  
And sublimating hoary Gallic oaths  
Into the *Benedicite* when dogs  
And squaws and reeking children violated  
The hours of rest, were penances unnamed  
Within the iron code of good Ignatius.  
Was there a limit of obedience  
Outside the jurisdiction of this Saint?  
How often did the hand go up to lower  
The flag? How often by some ringing order  
Was it arrested at the halliard touch?  
How often did Brébeuf seal up his ears  
When blows and insults woke ancestral fifes  
Within his brain, blood-cells, and viscera,  
Is not explicit in the written story.

But never could the Indians infer  
Self-gain or anything but simple courage  
Inspired by a zeal beyond reproof,  
As when the smallpox spreading like a flame  
Destroying hundreds, scarifying thousands,  
The Fathers took their chances of contagion,  
Their broad hats warped by rain, their moccasins  
Worn to the kibes, that they might reach the huts,  
Share with the sick their dwindled stock of food—  
A sup of partridge broth or raisin juice,  
Inscribe the sacred sign of the cross, and place  
A touch of moisture from the Holy Water  
Upon the forehead of a dying child.

Before the year was gone the priests were shown  
The way the Hurons could prepare for death  
A captive foe. The warriors had surprised  
A band of Iroquois and had reserved  
The one survivor for a fiery pageant.  
No cunning of an ancient Roman triumph,  
Nor torment of a Medici confession  
Surpassed the subtle savagery of art  
Which made the dressing for the sacrifice  
A ritual of mockery for the victim.  
What visions of the past came to Brébeuf,  
And what forebodings of the days to come,  
As he beheld this weird compound of life  
In jest and intent taking place before  
His eyes—the crude unconscious variants  
Of reed and sceptre, robe and cross, brier  
And crown! Might not one day baptismal drops  
Be turned against him in a rain of death?  
Whatever the appeals made by the priests,  
They could not break the immemorial usage  
Or vary one detail. The prisoner  
Was made to sing his death-song, was embraced,  
Hailed with ironic greetings, forced to state  
His willingness to die.

“See how your hands  
Are crushed. You cannot thus desire to live.

No.

Then be of good courage—you shall die.

True!—What shall be the manner of my death?

By fire.

When shall it be?

To-night.

What hour?

At sunset.

All is well.”

Eleven fires

Were lit along the whole length of the cabin.

His body smeared with pitch and bound with belts

Of bark, the Iroquois was forced to run

The fires, stopped at each end by the young braves,

And swiftly driven back, and when he swooned,

They carried him outside to the night air,

Laid him on fresh damp moss, poured cooling water

Into his mouth, and to his burns applied

The soothing balsams. With resuscitation

They lavished on him all the courtesies

Of speech and gesture, gave him food and drink,

Compassionately spoke of his wounds and pain.

The ordeal every hour was resumed

And halted, but, with each recurrence, blows

Were added to the burns and gibes gave place

To yells until the sacrificial dawn,

Lighting the scaffold, dimming the red glow

Of the hatchet collar, closed the festival.



Brébeuf had seen the worst. He knew that when  
A winter pack of wolves brought down a stag  
There was no waste of time between the leap  
And the business click upon the jugular.  
Such was the forthright honesty in death  
Among the brutes. They had not learned the sport  
Of dallying around the nerves to halt  
A quick despatch. A human art was torture,  
Where Reason crept into the veins, mixed tar  
With blood and brewed its own intoxicant.  
Brébeuf had pleaded for the captive's life,  
But as the night wore on, would not his heart,  
Colliding with his mind, have wished for death?  
The plea refused, he gave the Iroquois  
The only consolation in his power.  
He went back to his cabin, heavy in heart.  
To stem that viscous melanotic current  
Demanded labour, time, and sacrifice.  
Those passions were not altered over-night.  
Two plans were in his mind—the one concerned  
The seminary started in Quebec.  
The children could be sent there to be trained  
In Christian precepts, weaned from superstition  
And from the savage spectacle of death.  
He saw the way the women and their broods  
Danced round the scaffold in their exaltation.  
How much of this was habit and how much  
Example? Curiously Brébeuf revolved  
The facets of the Indian character.  
A fighting courage equal to the French—  
It could be lifted to crusading heights  
By a battle speech. Endurance was a code  
Among the braves, and impassivity.  
Their women wailing at the Feast of Death,  
The men sat silent, heads bowed to the knees.  
“Never in nine years with but one exception,”  
Wrote Ragueneau, “did I see an Indian weep  
For grief.” Only the fires evoked the cries,  
And these like scalps were triumphs for the captors.  
But then their charity and gentleness  
To one another and to strangers gave

A balance to the picture. Fugitives  
From villages destroyed found instant welcome  
To the last communal share of food and land.  
Brébeuf's stay at Toaniché gave him proof  
Of how the Huron nature could respond  
To kindness. But last night upon that scaffold!  
Could that be scoured from the heart? Why not  
Try out the nurture plan upon the children  
And send the boys east, shepherded by Daniel?

The other need was urgent—labourers!  
The villages were numerous and were spread  
Through such a vast expanse of wilderness  
And shore. Only a bell with a bronze throat  
Must summon missionaries to these fields.  
With the last cry of the captive in his ears,  
Brébeuf strode from his cabin to the woods  
To be alone. He found his tabernacle  
Within a grove, picked up a stone flat-faced,  
And going to a cedar-crotch, he jammed  
It in, and on this table wrote his letter.  
“Herein I show you what you have to suffer.  
I shall say nothing of the voyage—that  
You know already. If you have the courage  
To try it, that is only the beginning,  
For when after a month of river travel  
You reach our village, we can offer you  
The shelter of a cabin lowlier  
Than any hovel you have seen in France.  
As tired as you may be, only a mat  
Laid on the ground will be your bed. Your food  
May be for weeks a gruel of crushed corn  
That has the look and smell of mortar paste.  
This country is the breeding place of vermin.  
Sandflies, mosquitoes haunt the summer months.  
In France you may have been a theologian,  
A scholar, master, preacher, but out here  
You must attend a savage school; for months  
Will pass before you learn even to lisp  
The language. Here barbarians shall be  
Your Aristotle and Saint Thomas. Mute  
Before those teachers you shall take your lessons.  
What of the winter? Half the year is winter.  
Inside your cabins will be smoke so thick  
You may not read your Breviary for days.  
Around your fireplace at mealtime arrive  
The uninvited guests with whom you share  
Your stint of food. And in the fall and winter,  
You tramp unbeaten trails to reach the missions,  
Carrying your luggage on your back. Your life  
Hangs by a thread. Of all calamities

You are the cause—the scarcity of game,  
A fire, famine or an epidemic.  
There are no natural reasons for a drought  
And for the earth's sterility. You are  
The reasons, and at any time a savage  
May burn your cabin down or split your head.  
I tell you of the enemies that live  
Among our Huron friends. I have not told  
You of the Iroquois our constant foes.  
Only a week ago in open fight  
They killed twelve of our men at Contarea,  
A day's march from the village where we live.  
Treacherous and stealthy in their ambushades,  
They terrorize the country, for the Hurons  
Are very slothful in defence, never  
On guard and always seeking flight for safety.

“Wherein the gain, you ask, of this acceptance?  
There is no gain but this—that what you suffer  
Shall be of God: your loneliness in travel  
Will be relieved by angels overhead;  
Your silence will be sweet for you will learn  
How to commune with God; rapids and rocks  
Are easier than the steeps of Calvary.  
There is a consolation in your hunger  
And in abandonment upon the road,  
For once there was a greater loneliness  
And deeper hunger. As regards the soul  
There are no dangers here, with means of grace  
At every turn, for if we go outside  
Our cabin, is not heaven over us?  
No buildings block the clouds. We say our prayers  
Freely before a noble oratory.  
Here is the place to practise faith and hope  
And charity where human art has brought  
No comforts, where we strive to bring to God  
A race so unlike men that we must live  
Daily expecting murder at their hands,  
Did we not open up the skies or close  
Them at command, giving them sun or rain.  
So if despite these trials you are ready  
To share our labours, come; for you will find  
A consolation in the cross that far outweighs  
Its burdens. Though in many an hour your soul  
Will echo—‘Why hast Thou forsaken me,’  
Yet evening will descend upon you when,  
Your heart too full of holy exultation,  
You call like Xavier—‘Enough, O Lord!’ ”

This letter was to loom in history,  
For like a bulletin it would be read  
In France, and men whose bones were bound for dust  
Would find that on those jagged characters  
Their names would rise from their oblivion  
To flame on an eternal Calendar.  
Already to the field two young recruits  
Had come—Pijart, Le Mercier; on their way  
Were Chastellain with Garnier and Jogues  
Followed by Ragueneau and Du Peron.

On many a night in lonely intervals,  
The priest would wander to the pines and build  
His oratory where celestial visions  
Sustained his soul. As unto Paul and John  
Of Patmos and the martyr multitude  
The signs were given—voices from the clouds,  
Forms that illumined darkness, stabbed despair,  
Turned dungeons into temples and a brand  
Of shame into the ultimate boast of time—  
So to Brébeuf had Christ appeared and Mary.  
One night at prayer he heard a voice command—  
“Rise, Read!” Opening the *Imitatio Christi*,  
His eyes “without design” fell on the chapter,  
*Concerning the royal way of the Holy Cross*,  
Which placed upon his spirit “a great peace”.  
And then, day having come, he wrote his vow—  
“My God, my Saviour, I take from thy hand  
The cup of thy sufferings. I invoke thy name;  
I vow never to fail thee in the grace  
Of martyrdom, if by thy mercy, Thou  
Dost offer it to me. I bind myself,  
And when I have received the stroke of death,  
I will accept it from thy gracious hand  
With all pleasure and with joy in my heart;  
To thee my blood, my body and my life.”

[A] French assistants.

[B] *Echon*—he who pulls the heavy load.



The labourers were soon put to their tasks,—  
The speech, the founding of new posts, the sick:  
Ihonatiria, a phantom town,  
Through plague and flight abandoned as a base,  
The Fathers chose the site—Teanaostayé,  
To be the second mission of St. Joseph.  
But the prime hope was on Ossossané,  
A central town of fifty cabins built  
On the east shore of Nottawasaga Bay.  
The native council had approved the plans.  
The presence of the priests with their lay help  
Would be defence against the Iroquois.  
Under the supervision of Pijart  
The place was fortified, ramparts were strengthened,  
And towers of heavy posts set at the angles.  
And in the following year the artisans  
And labourers from Quebec with Du Peron,  
Using broad-axe and whipsaw built a church,  
The first one in the whole Huronian venture  
To be of wood. Close to their lodge, the priests  
Dug up the soil and harrowed it to plant  
A mere handful of wheat from which they raised  
A half a bushel for the altar bread.  
From the wild grapes they made a cask of wine  
For the Holy Sacrifice. But of all work  
The hardest was instruction. It was easy  
To strike the Huron sense with sound and colour—  
The ringing of a bell; the litanies  
And chants; the surplices worn on the cassocks;  
The burnished ornaments around the altar;  
The pageant of the ceremonial.  
But to drive home the ethics taxed the brain  
To the limit of its ingenuity.  
Brébeuf had felt the need to vivify  
His three main themes of God and Paradise  
And Hell. The Indian mind had let the cold  
Abstractions fall: the allegories failed  
To quicken up the logic. Garnier  
Proposed the colours for the homilies.  
The closest student of the Huron mind,



He had observed the fears and prejudices  
Haunting the shadows of their racial past;  
Had seen the flaws in Brébeuf's *points*; had heard  
The Indian comments on the moral law  
And on the Christian scheme of Paradise.  
Would Iroquois be there? Yes, if baptized.  
Would there be hunting of the deer and beaver?  
No. Then starvation. War? And Feasts? Tobacco?  
No. Garnier saw disgust upon their faces,  
And sent appeals to France for pictures—one  
*Only* of souls in bliss: of *âmes damnées*  
Many and various—the horned Satan,  
His mastiff jaws champing the head of Judas;  
The plummet fall of the unbaptized pursued  
By demons with their fiery forks; the lick  
Of flames upon a naked Saracen;  
Dragons with scarlet tongues and writhing serpents  
In ambush by the charcoal avenues  
Just ready at the Judgment word to wreak  
Vengeance upon the unregenerate.  
The negative unapprehended forms  
Of Heaven lost in the dim canvas oils  
Gave way to glows from brazier pitch that lit  
The visual affirmatives of Hell.

Despite the sorcerers who laid the blame  
Upon the French for all their ills—the plague,  
The drought, the Iroquois—the Fathers counted  
Baptisms by the hundreds, infants, children  
And aged at the point of death. Adults  
In health were more intractable, but here  
The spade had entered soil in the conversion  
Of a Huron in full bloom and high in power  
And counsel, Tsiouendaentaha  
Whose Christian name—to aid the tongue—was Peter.  
Being the first, he was the Rock on which  
The priests would build their Church. He was baptized  
With all the pomp transferable from France  
Across four thousand miles combined with what  
A sky and lake could offer, and a forest  
Strung to the *aubade* of the orioles.  
The wooden chapel was their Rheims Cathedral.  
In stole and surplice Lalemant intoned—  
“If therefore thou wilt enter into life,  
Keep the commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord  
Thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul,  
With all thy might, and thy neighbour as thyself.”  
With salt and water and the holy chrism,  
And through the signs made on his breast and forehead  
The Huron was exorcised, sanctified,  
And made the temple of the Living God.

The holy rite was followed by the Mass  
Before the motliest auditory known  
In the annals of worship. Oblates from Quebec,  
Blackrobes, mechanics, soldiers, labourers,  
With almost half the village packed inside,  
Or jammed with craning necks outside the door.  
The warriors lean, lithe, and elemental,  
“As naked as your hand”<sup>[C]</sup> but for a skin  
Thrown loosely on their shoulders, with their hair  
Erect, boar-brushed, matted, glued with the oil  
Of sunflower larded thickly with bear’s grease;  
Papooses yowling on their mothers’ backs,  
The squatting hags, suspicion in their eyes,  
Their nebulous minds relating in some way  
The smoke and aromatics of the censer,  
The candles, crucifix and Latin murmurs  
With vapours, sounds and colours of the Judgment.

<sup>[C]</sup> Lalemant’s phrase.

## V

*(The Founding of Fort Sainte Marie)*

The migrant habits of the Indians  
With their desertion of the villages  
Through pressure of attack or want of food  
Called for a central site where undisturbed  
The priests with their attendants might pursue  
Their culture, gather strength from their devotions,  
Map out the territory, plot the routes,  
Collate their weekly notes and write their letters.  
The roll was growing—priests and colonists,  
Lay brothers offering services for life.  
For on the ground or on their way to place  
Themselves at the command of Lalemant,  
Superior, were Claude Pijart, Poncet,  
Le Moyne, Charles Raymbault, René Menard  
And Joseph Chaumonot: as oblates came  
Le Coq, Christophe Reynaut, Charles Boivin,  
Couture and Jean Guérin. And so to house  
Them all the Residence—Fort Sainte Marie!  
Strategic as a base for trade or war  
The site received the approval of Quebec,  
Was ratified by Richelieu who saw  
Commerce and exploration pushing west.  
Fulfilling the long vision of Champlain—  
“Greater New France beyond those inland seas.”  
The fort was built, two hundred feet by ninety,  
Upon the right bank of the River Wye:  
Its north and eastern sides of masonry,  
Its south and west of double palisades,  
And skirted by a moat, ran parallel  
To stream and lake. Square bastions at the corners,  
Watch-towers with magazines and sleeping posts,  
Commanded forest edges and canoes  
That furtively came up the Matchedash,  
And on each bastion was placed a cross.  
Inside, the Fathers built their dwelling house,  
No longer the bark cabin with the smoke  
Ill-trained to work its exit through the roof,  
But plank and timber—at each end a chimney  
Of lime and granite field-stone. Rude it was  
But clean, capacious, full of twilight calm.

Across the south canal fed by the river,  
Ringed by another palisade were buildings  
Offering retreat to Indian fugitives  
Whenever war and famine scourged the land.

The plans were supervised by Lalemant,  
Assigning zones of work to every priest.  
He made a census of the Huron nation;  
Some thirty villages—twelve thousand persons.  
Nor was this all: the horizon opened out  
On larger fields. To south and west were spread  
The unknown tribes—the Petuns and the Neutrals.

## VI

*(The mission to the Petuns and Neutrals)*

In late November Jogues and Garnier  
Set out on snow-obliterated trails  
Towards the Blue Hills south of the Nottawasaga,  
A thirty mile journey through a forest  
Without a guide. They carried on their backs  
A blanket with the burden of the altar.  
All day confronting swamps with fallen logs,  
Tangles of tamarack and juniper,  
They made detours to avoid the deep ravines  
And swollen creeks. Retreating and advancing,  
Ever in hope their tread was towards the south,  
Until, “surprised by night in a fir grove”,  
They took an hour with flint and steel to nurse  
A fire from twigs, birch rind and needles of pine;  
And flinging down some branches on the snow,  
They offered thanks to God, lay down and slept.  
Morning—the packs reshouldered and the tramp  
Resumed, the stumble over mouldering trunks  
Of pine and oak, the hopeless search for trails,  
Till after dusk with cassocks torn and “nothing  
To eat all day save each a morsel of bread”,  
They saw the smoke of the first Indian village.

1640-1641

And now began a labour which for faith  
And triumph of the spirit over failure  
Was unsurpassed in records of the mission.  
Famine and pest had struck the Neutral tribes,  
And fleeing squaws and children had invaded  
The Petun villages for bread and refuge,  
Inflicting on the cabins further pest  
And further famine. When the priests arrived,  
They found that their black cassocks had become  
The symbols of the scourge. Children exclaimed—  
“Disease and famine are outside.” The women  
Called to their young and fled to forest shelters,  
Or hid them in the shadows of the cabins.  
The men broke through a never-broken custom,  
Denying the strangers right to food and rest.  
Observing the two priests at prayer, the chief  
Called out in *council voice*—“What are these demons  
Who take such unknown postures, what are they  
But spells to make us die—to finish those  
Disease had failed to kill inside our cabins?”  
Driven from town to town with all doors barred,  
Pursued by storms of threats and flying hatchets,  
The priests sought refuge through the forest darkness  
Back to the palisades of Sainte Marie.

As bleak an outlook faced Brébeuf when he  
And Chaumonot took their November tramp—  
Five forest days—to the north shores of Erie,  
Where the most savage of the tribes—the Neutrals—  
Packed their twelve thousand into forty towns.  
Evil report had reached the settlements  
By faster routes, for when upon the eve  
Of the new mission Chaumonot had stated  
The purpose of the journey, Huron chiefs,  
Convinced by their own sorcerers that Brébeuf  
Had laid the epidemic on the land,  
Resolved to make the Neutral leaders agents  
Of their revenge: for it was on Brébeuf,  
The chieftain of the robes, that hate was centred.  
They had the reason why the drums had failed  
The hunt, why moose and deer had left the forest,  
And why the Manitou who sends the sun  
And rain upon the corn, lures to the trap  
The beaver, trains the arrow on the goose,  
Had not responded to the chants and cries.  
The magic of the “breathings” had not cured  
The sick and dying. Was it not the prayers  
To the new God which cast malignant spells?  
The rosary against the amulet?  
The Blackrobes with that water-rite performed  
Upon the children—with that new sign  
Of wood or iron held up before the eyes  
Of the stricken? Did the Indian not behold  
Death following hard upon the offered Host?  
Was not *Echon* Brébeuf the evil one?  
Still, all attempts to kill him were forestalled,  
For awe and fear had mitigated fury:  
His massive stature, courage never questioned,  
His steady glance, the firmness of his voice,  
And that strange nimbus of authority,  
In some dim way related to their gods,  
Had kept the bowstrings of the Hurons taut  
At the arrow feathers, and the javelin poised  
And hesitant. But now cunning might do  
What fear forbade. A brace of Huron runners  
Were sped to the Neutral country with rich bribes

To put the priests to death. And so Brébeuf  
And his companion entered the first town  
With famine in their cheeks only to find  
Worse than the Petun greetings—corn refused,  
Whispers of death and screams of panic, flight  
From incarnated plague, and while the chiefs  
In closest council on the Huron terms  
Voted for life or death, the younger men  
Outside drew nearer to the priests, cursed them,  
Spat at them while convulsive hands were clutching  
At hatchet helms, waiting impatiently  
The issue of that strident rhetoric  
Shaking the cabin bark. The council ended,  
The feeling strong for death but ruled by fears,  
For if those foreign spirits had the power  
To spread the blight upon the land, what could  
Their further vengeance not exact? Besides,  
What lay behind those regimental colours  
And those new drums reported from Quebec?  
The older men had qualified the sentence—  
The priests at once must leave the Neutral land,  
All cabins to be barred against admission,  
No food, no shelter, and return immediate.  
Defying threats, the Fathers spent four months,  
Four winter months, besieging half the towns  
In their pursuit of souls, for days their food  
Boiled lichens, ground-nuts, star-grass bulbs and roots  
Of the wild columbine. Met at the doors  
By screams and blows, they would betake themselves  
To the evergreens for shelter over-night.  
And often, when the body strength was sapped  
By the day's toil and there were streaks of blood  
Inside the moccasins, when the last lodge  
Rejected them as lepers and the welts  
Hung on their shoulders, then the Fathers sought  
The balm that never failed. Under the stars,  
Along an incandescent avenue  
The visions trembled, tender, placid, pure,  
More beautiful than the doorway of Rheims  
And sweeter than the Galilean fields.  
For what was hunger and the burn of wounds



In those assuaging, healing moments when  
The clearing mists revealed the face of Mary  
And the lips of Jesus breathing benedictions?

At dawn they came back to the huts to get  
The same rebuff of speech and club. A brave  
Repulsed them at the palisade with axe  
Uplifted—"I have had enough," he said,  
"Of the dark flesh of my enemies. I mean  
To kill and eat the white flesh of the priests."  
So close to death starvation and assault  
Had led them and so meagre of result  
Were all their ministrations that they thought  
This was the finish of the enterprise.  
The winter ended in futility.  
And on their journey home the Fathers took  
A final blow when March leagued with the natives  
Unleashed a northern storm, piled up the snow-drifts,  
Broke on the ice the shoulder of Brébeuf,  
And stumbled them for weeks before she sent  
Them limping through the postern of the fort.  
Upon his bed that night Brébeuf related  
A vision he had seen—a moving cross,  
Its upright beam arising from the south—  
The country of the Iroquois: the shape  
Advanced along the sky until its arms  
Cast shadow on the Huron territory,  
"And huge enough to crucify us all".

## VII

*(The story of Jogues)*

Bad days had fallen on Huronia.

A blight of harvest, followed by a winter  
In which unusual snowfall had thinned out  
The hunting and reduced the settlements  
To destitution, struck its hardest blow  
At Sainte Marie. The last recourse in need,  
The fort had been a common granary  
And now the bins were empty. Altar-ware,  
Vessels, linens, pictures lost or damaged;  
Vestments were ragged, writing paper spent.  
The Eucharist requiring bread and wine,  
Quebec eight hundred miles away, a war  
Freshly renewed—the Iroquois (Dutch-armed  
And seething with the memories of Champlain)  
Arrayed against the French and Huron allies.  
The priests assessed the perils of the journey,  
And the lot fell on Jogues to lead it. He,  
Next to Brébeuf, had borne the heaviest brunt—  
The Petun mission, then the following year,  
The Ojibway where, after a hundred leagues,  
Canoe and trail, accompanied by Raymbault,  
He reached the shores of Lake Superior,  
“And planted a great cross, facing it west”.  
The soundest of them all in legs, he gathered  
A band of Huron traders and set out,  
His task made double by the care of Raymbault  
Whose health was broken mortally. He reached  
Quebec with every day of the five weeks  
A miracle of escape. A few days there,  
With churches, hospitals, the Indian school  
At Sillery, pageant and ritual,  
Making their due impression on the minds  
Of the Huron guides, Jogues with his band of forty  
Packed the canoes and started back. Mohawks,  
Enraged that on the east-bound trip the party  
Had slipped their hands, awaited them, ambushed  
Within the grass and reeds along the shore.

1642

*(The account of Jogues' capture and enslavement by the Mohawks  
as taken from his letter to his Provincial, Jean Filleau, dated*

*August 5, 1643.)*

“Unskilled in speech, in knowledge and not knowing  
The precious hour of my visitation,  
I beg you, if this letter chance to come  
Unto your hands that in your charity  
You aid me with your Holy Sacrifices  
And with the earnest prayers of the whole Province,  
As being among a people barbarous  
In birth and manners, for I know that when  
You will have heard this story you will see  
The obligation under which I am  
To God and my deep need of spiritual help.  
Our business finished at Quebec, the feast  
Of Saint Ignatius celebrated, we  
Embarked for the Hurons. On the second day  
Our men discovered on the shore fresh tracks  
Thought by Eustache, experienced in war,  
To be the footprints of our enemies.  
A mile beyond we met them, twelve canoes  
And seventy men. Abandoning the boats,  
Most of the Hurons fled to a thick wood,  
Leaving but twelve to put up the best front  
We could, but seeing further Iroquois  
Paddling so swiftly from the other shore,  
We ceased from our defence and fled to cover  
Of tree and bulrush. Watching from my shelter  
The capture of Goupil and Indian converts,  
I could not find it in my mind to leave them;  
But as I was their comrade on the journey,  
And should be made their comrade in the perils,  
I gave myself as prisoner to the guard.  
Likewise Eustache, always devoted, valiant,  
Returned, exclaiming ‘I praise God that He  
Has granted me my prayer—that I should live  
And die with you.’ And then Guillaume Couture  
Who, young and fleet, having outstripped his foe,  
But finding flight intolerable came back  
Of his free will, saying ‘I cannot leave  
My father in the hands of enemies.’  
On him the Iroquois let loose their first  
Assault for in the skirmish he had slain  
A chief. They stripped him naked; with their teeth

They macerated his finger tips, tore off  
The nails and pierced his right hand with a spear,  
Couture taking the pain without a cry.  
Then turning on Goupil and me they beat  
Us to the ground under a flurry of fists  
And knotted clubs, dragging us up half-dead  
To agonize us with the finger torture.  
And this was just the foretaste of our trials:  
Dividing up as spoils of war our food,  
Our clothes and books and vessels for the church,  
They led or drove us on our six weeks' journey,  
Our wounds festering under the summer sun.  
At night we were the objects of their sport—  
They mocked us by the plucking of our hair  
From head and beard. And on the eighth day meeting  
A band of warriors from the tribe on march  
To attack the Richelieu fort, they celebrated  
By disembarking all the captives, making  
Us run the line beneath a rain of clubs.  
And following that they placed us on the scaffolds,  
Dancing around us hurling jests and insults.  
Each one of us attempted to sustain  
The other in his courage by no cry  
Or sign of our infirmities. Eustache,  
His thumbs wrenched off, withstood unconquerably  
The probing of a stick which like a skewer  
Beginning with the freshness of a wound  
On the left hand was pushed up to the elbow.  
And yet next day they put us on the route  
Again—three days on foot and without food.  
Through village after village we were led  
In triumph with our backs shedding the skin  
Under the sun—by day upon the scaffolds,  
By night brought to the cabins where, cord-bound,  
We lay on the bare earth while fiery coals  
Were thrown upon our bodies. A long time  
Indeed and cruelly have the wicked wrought  
Upon my back with sticks and iron rods.  
But though at times when left alone I wept,  
Yet I thanked Him who always giveth strength  
To the weary (I will glory in the things

Concerning my infirmity, being made  
A spectacle to God and to the angels,  
A sport and a contempt to the barbarians)  
That I was thus permitted to console  
And animate the French and Huron converts,  
Placing before their minds the thought of Him  
Who bore against Himself the contradiction  
Of sinners. Weak through hanging by my wrists  
Between two poles, my feet not touching ground,  
I managed through His help to reach the stage,  
And with the dew from leaves of Turkish corn  
Two of the prisoners I baptized. I called  
To them that in their torment they should fix  
Their eyes on me as I bestowed the sign  
Of the last absolution. With the spirit  
Of Christ, Eustache then in the fire entreated  
His Huron friends to let no thought of vengeance  
Arising from this anguish at the stake  
Injure the French hope for an Iroquois peace.  
Onnonhoaraton, a youthful captive,  
They killed—the one who seeing me prepared  
For torture interposed, offering himself  
A sacrifice for me who had in bonds  
Begotten him for Christ. Couture was seized  
And dragged off as a slave. René Goupil,  
While placing on a child's forehead the sign  
Of the Cross was murdered by a sorcerer,  
And then, a rope tied to his neck, was dragged  
Through the whole village and flung in the River.”

*(The later account)*

A family of the Wolf Clan having lost  
A son in battle, Jogues as substitute  
Was taken in, half-son, half-slave, his work  
The drudgery of the village, bearing water,  
Lighting the fires, and clad in tatters made  
To join the winter hunt, bear heavy packs  
On scarred and naked shoulders in the trade  
Between the villages. His readiness  
To execute his tasks, uncomplaining,  
His courage when he plunged into a river  
To save a woman and a child who stumbled  
Crossing a bridge made by a fallen tree,  
Had softened for a time his master's harshness.  
It gained him scattered hours of leisure when  
He set his mind to work upon the language  
To make concrete the articles of Faith.  
At intervals he stole into the woods  
To pray and meditate and carve the Name  
Upon the bark. Out of the Mohawk spoils  
At the first battle he had found and hid  
Two books—*The Following of Christ* and one  
Of Paul's *Epistles*, and with these when "weary  
Even of life and pressed beyond all measure  
Above his strength" he followed the "running waters"  
To quench his thirst. But often would the hate  
Of the Mohawk foes flame out anew when Jogues  
Was on his knees muttering the magic words,  
And when a hunting party empty-handed  
Returned or some reverse was met in battle,  
Here was the victim ready at their door.  
Believing that a band of warriors  
Had been destroyed, they seized the priest and set  
His day of death, but at the eleventh hour,  
With the arrival of a group of captives,  
The larger festival of torture gave  
Him momentary reprieve. Yet when he saw  
The holocaust and rushed into the flames  
To save a child, a heavy weight laid hold  
Upon his spirit lasting many days—  
"My life wasted with grief, my years with sighs;  
Oh wherefore was I born that I should see

The ruin of my people! Woe is me!  
But by His favour I shall overcome  
Until my change is made and He appear.”



This story of enslavement had been brought  
To Montmagny, the Governor of Quebec,  
And to the outpost of the Dutch, Fort Orange.  
Quebec was far away and, short of men,  
Could never cope with the massed Iroquois,  
Besides, Jogues' letter begged the Governor  
That no measures "to save a single life"  
Should hurt the cause of France. To the Provincial  
He wrote—"Who in my absence would console  
The captives? Who absolve the penitent?  
Encourage them in torments? Who baptize  
The dying? On this cross to which our Lord  
Has nailed me with Himself am I resolved  
To live and die."

And when the commandant  
Of the Dutch fort sent notice that a ship  
At anchor in the Hudson would provide  
Asylum, Jogues delayed that he might seek  
Counsel of God and satisfy his conscience,  
Lest some intruding self-preserving thought  
Conflict with duty. Death was certain soon.  
He knew it—for that mounting tide of hate  
Could not be checked: it had engulfed his friends;  
'Twould take him next. How close to suicide  
Would be refusal? Not as if escape  
Meant dereliction: no, his early vows  
Were still inviolate—he would return.  
He pledged himself to God there on his knees  
Before two bark-strips fashioned as a cross  
Under the forest trees—his oratory.  
And so, one night, the Indians asleep,  
Jogues left the house, fumbling his darkened way,  
Half-walk, half-crawl, a lacerated leg  
Making the journey of one-half a mile  
The toil of half a night. By dawn he found  
The shore, and, single-handed, pushed a boat  
Stranded by ebb-tide, down the slope of sand  
To the river's edge and rowed out to the ship,  
Where he was lifted up the side by sailors  
Who, fearful of the risk of harbouring  
A fugitive, carried him to the hatch

And hid him with the cargo in the hold,  
The outcry in the morning could be heard  
Aboard the ship as Indians combed the cabins,  
Threatened the guards and scoured the neighbouring woods,  
And then with strong suspicion of the vessel  
Demanded of the officers their captive.  
After two days Jogues with his own consent  
Was taken to the fort and hid again  
Behind the barrels of a store. For weeks  
He saw and heard the Mohawks as they passed,  
Examining cordage, prying into casks,  
At times touching his clothes, but missing him  
As he lay crouched in darkness motionless.  
With evidence that he was in the fort,  
The Dutch abetting the escape, the chiefs  
Approached the commandant—"The prisoner  
Is ours. He is not of your race or speech.  
The Dutch are friends: the Frenchmen are our foes.  
Deliver up this priest into our hands."  
The cries were countered by the officer—  
"He is like us in blood if not in tongue.  
The Frenchman here is under our protection.  
He is our guest. We treat him as you treat  
The strangers in your cabins, for you feed  
And shelter them. That also is our law,  
The custom of our nation." Argument  
Of no avail, a ransom price was offered,  
Refused, but running up the bargain scale,  
It caught the Mohawks at three hundred livres,  
And Jogues at last was safely on the Hudson.

The tale of Jogues' first mission to the Hurons  
Ends on a sequel briefly sung but keyed  
To the tune of the story, for the stretch  
Home was across a wilderness, his bed  
A coil of rope on a ship's open deck  
Swept by December surge. The voyage closed  
At Falmouth where, robbed by a pirate gang,  
He wandered destitute until picked up  
By a French crew who offered him tramp fare.  
He landed on the shore of Brittany  
On Christmas Eve, and by New Year he reached  
The Jesuit establishment at Rennes.

The trumpets blew once more, and Jogues returned  
With the spring expedition to Quebec.  
Honoured by Montmagny, he took the post  
Of peace ambassador to hostile tribes,  
And then the orders came from Lalemant  
That he should open up again the cause  
Among the Mohawks at Ossernenon.  
Jogues knew that he was travelling to his death,  
And though each hour of that former mission  
Burned at his finger stumps, the wayward flesh  
Obeyed the summons. Lalemant as well  
Had known the peril—had he not re-named  
Ossernenon, the Mission of the Martyrs?  
So Jogues, accompanied by his friend Lalande  
Departed for the village—his last letter  
To his Superior read: "I will return  
Cost it a thousand lives. I know full well  
That I shall not survive, but He who helped  
Me by His grace before will never fail me  
Now when I go to do His holy will."  
And to the final consonant the vow  
Was kept, for two days after they had struck  
The town, their heads were on the palisades,  
And their dragged bodies flung into the Mohawk.

(*Bressani*)

The western missions waiting Jogues' return  
Were held together by a scarlet thread.  
The forays of the Iroquois had sent  
The fugitive survivors to the fort.  
Three years had passed—and where was Jogues? The scant  
Supplies of sagamite could never feed  
The inflow from the stricken villages.  
The sparse reports had filtered to Quebec  
And the command was given to Bressani  
To lead the rescue band to Sainte Marie.  
Leaving Three Rivers in the spring when ice  
Was on the current, he was caught like Jogues,  
With his six Hurons and a French oblate,  
A boy of twelve; transferred to Iroquois'  
Canoes and carried up the Richelieu;  
Disbarked and driven through the forest trails  
To Lake Champlain; across it; and from there  
Around the rocks and marshes to the Hudson.  
And every time a camp was built and fires  
Were laid the torment was renewed; in all  
The towns the squaws and children were regaled  
With evening festivals upon the scaffolds.  
Bressani wrote one day when vigilance  
Relaxed and his split hand was partly healed—  
“I do not know if your Paternity  
Will recognize this writing for the letter  
Is soiled. Only one finger of the hand  
Is left unburned. The blood has stained the paper.  
My writing table is the earth; the ink  
Gunpowder mixed with water.” And again—  
This time to his Superior—“I could  
Not have believed it to be possible  
That a man's body was so hard to kill.”  
The earlier fate of Jogues was his—enslaved,  
But ransomed at Fort Orange by the Dutch;  
Restored to partial health; sent to Rochelle  
In the autumn, but in April back again  
And under orders for the Huron mission,  
Where he arrived this time unscathed to take  
A loyal welcome from his priestly comrades.

Bressani's presence stimulated faith  
Within the souls of priests and neophytes.  
The stories burned like fuel of the faggots—  
Jogues' capture and his rock stability,  
And the no less triumphant stand Eustache  
Had made showing the world that native metal  
Could take the test as nobly as the French.  
And Ragueneau's letter to his General stated—  
"Bressani ill-equipped to speak the Huron  
Has speech more eloquent to capture souls:  
It is his scars, his mutilated hands.  
'Only show us,' the neophytes exclaim,  
'The wounds, for they teach better than our tongues  
Your faith, for you have come again to face  
The dangers. Only thus we know that you  
Believe the truth and would have us believe it.' "

## IX

In those three years since Jogues' departure doubts  
Though unexpressed had visited the mission.  
For death had come to several in the fold—  
Raymbault, Goupil, Eustache, and worse than death  
To Jogues, and winter nights were bleaker, darker  
Without the company of Brébeuf. Lion  
Of limb and heart, he had entrenched the faith,  
Was like a triple palisade himself.  
But as his broken shoulder had not healed,  
And ordered to Quebec by Lalemant,  
He took the leave that seven years of work  
Deserved. The city hailed him with delight.  
For more than any other did he seem  
The very incarnation of the age—  
Champlain the symbol of exploring France,  
Tracking the rivers to their lairs, Brébeuf  
The token of a nobler chivalry.  
He went the rounds of the stations, saw the gains  
The East had made in converts—Sillery  
For Indians and Notre Dame des Anges  
For the French colonists; convents and schools  
Flourished. Why should the West not have the same  
Yield for the sowing? It was labourers  
They needed with supplies and adequate  
Defence. St. Lawrence and the Ottawa  
Infested by the Iroquois were traps  
Of death. Three bands of Hurons had been caught  
That summer. Montmagny had warned the priest  
Against the risk of unprotected journeys.  
So when the reinforcements came from France,  
Brébeuf set out under a guard of soldiers  
Taking with him two young recruits—Garreau  
And Chabanel—arriving at the fort  
In the late fall. The soldiers wintered there  
And supervised defensive strategy.  
Replaced the forlorn feelings with fresh hopes,  
And for two years the mission enterprise  
Renewed its lease of life. Rumours of treaties  
Between the French and Mohawks stirred belief  
That peace was in the air, that other tribes

Inside the Iroquois Confederacy  
Might enter—with the Hurons sharing terms.  
This was the pipe-dream—was it credible?  
The ranks of missionaries were filling up:  
At Sainte Marie, Brébeuf and Ragueneau,  
Le Mercier, Chastellain and Chabanel;  
St. Joseph—Garnier and René Menard;  
St. Michel—Chaumonot and Du Peron;  
The others—Claude Pijart, Le Moyne, Garreau  
And Daniel.

What validity the dream  
Possessed was given by the seasonal  
Uninterrupted visits of the priests  
To their loved home, both fort and residence.  
Here they discussed their plans, and added up  
In smiling rivalry their tolls of converts:  
They loitered at the shelves, fondled the books,  
Running their fingers down the mellowed pages  
As if they were the faces of their friends.  
They stood for hours before the saints or knelt  
Before the Virgin and the crucifix  
In mute transfiguration. These were hours  
That put the bandages upon their hurts,  
Making their spirits proof against all ills  
That had assailed or could assail the flesh,  
Turned winter into spring and made return  
To their far mission posts an exaltation.  
The bell each morning called the neophytes  
To Mass, again at evening, and the tones  
Lured back the memories across the seas.  
And often in the summer hours of twilight  
When Norman chimes were ringing, would the priests  
Forsake the fort and wander to the shore  
To sing the *Gloria* while hermit thrushes  
Rivalled the rapture of the nightingales.



The native register was rich in name  
And number. Earlier years had shown results  
Mainly among the young and sick and aged,  
Where little proof was given of the root  
Of faith, but now the Fathers told of deeds  
That flowered from the stems. Had not Eustache  
Bequeathed his record like a Testament?  
The sturdiest warriors and chiefs had vied  
Among themselves within the martyr ranks:—  
Stories of captives led to sacrifice,  
Accepting scaffold fires under the rites,  
Enduring to the end, had taken grip  
Of towns and clans. St. Joseph had its record  
For Garnier reported that Totiri,  
A native of high rank, while visiting  
St. Ignace when a torture was in progress,  
Had emulated Jogues by plunging through  
The flaming torches that he might apply  
The Holy Water to an Iroquois.  
Garreau and Pijart added lists of names  
From the Algonquins and the Nipissings,  
And others told of Pentecostal meetings  
In cabins by the Manitoulin shores.

Not only was the faith sustained by hopes  
Nourished within the bosom of their home  
And by the wish-engendered talk of peace,  
But there outside the fort was evidence  
Of tenure for the future. Acres rich  
In soil extended to the forest fringe.  
Each year they felled the trees and burned the stumps,  
Pushing the frontier back, clearing the land,  
Spading, hoeing. The stomach's noisy protest  
At sagamite and wild rice found a rest  
With bread from wheat, fresh cabbages and pease,  
And squashes which when roasted had the taste  
Of Norman apples. Strawberries in July,  
October beechnuts, pepper roots for spice,  
And at the bottom of a spring that flowed  
Into a pond shaded by silver birches  
And ringed by marigolds was water-cress  
In chilled abundance. So, was this the West?  
The Wilderness? That flight of tanagers;  
Those linguals from the bobolinks; those beeches,  
Roses and water-lilies; at the pools  
Those bottle-gentians! For a time the fields  
Could hypnotize the mind to scenes of France.  
Within five years the change was wrought. The cocks  
Were crowing in the yards, and in the pasture  
Were sheep and cows and pigs that had been brought  
As sucklings that immense eight hundred miles  
In sacks—canoed, and portaged on the shoulders.  
The traders, like the soldiers, too, had heard  
Of a great ocean larger than the Huron.  
Was it the western gateway to Cathay?  
The Passage? Master-theme of song and ballad;  
The *myth* at last resolved into the *fact*!  
Along that route, it was believed, French craft  
Freighted with jewels, spices, tapestries,  
Would sail to swell the coffers of the Bourbons.  
Such was the dream though only buffalo roamed  
The West and autumn slept upon the prairies.

This dream was at its brightest now, Quebec  
Was building up a western citadel  
In Sainte Marie. With sixty Frenchmen there,  
The eastern capital itself had known  
Years less auspicious. Might the fort not be  
The bastion to one-half the continent,  
New France expanding till the longitudes  
Staggered the daring of the navigators?  
The priests were breathless with another space  
Beyond the measure of the astrolabe—  
A different empire built upon the pulses,  
Where even the sun and moon and stars revolved  
Around a Life and a redemptive Death.  
They pushed their missions to the north and west  
Further into Algonquin territories,  
Among the Ottawas at Manitoulin,  
And towards the Ojibways at Sault Sainte Marie.  
New village groups were organized in stations—  
St. Magdalen, St. Jean, and St. Matthias.  
Had Chabanel, ecstatic with success,  
Not named one fort the Village of Believers?  
Brébeuf was writing to his General—  
“Peace, union and tranquillity are here  
Between the members of our Order. We need  
More workers for the apostolic field,  
Which more than ever whitens for the harvest.”  
And to this call came Gabriel Lalemant,  
Bonin, Daran, Greslon, besides a score  
Of labourers and soldiers. In one year  
Twelve hundred converts, churches over-crowded,  
With Mass conducted in the open air!

And so the seasons passed. When the wild ducks  
Forsook the Huron marshes for the south,  
It was the signal for the priests to pack  
Their blankets. Not until the juncos came,  
And flickers tapped the crevices of bark,  
And the blood-root was pushing through the leaf-mould,  
Would they reset their faces towards their home.

While Ragueneau's *Relations* were being sent  
Homeward, picturing the promise of the west,  
The thunder clouds were massing in the east  
Under the pounding drums. The treaty signed  
Between the Iroquois and Montmagny  
Was broken by the murder of Lalande  
And Jogues. The news had drifted to the fort—  
The prelude only to the heavier blows  
And deeper treachery. The Iroquois,  
Infesting lake and stream, forest and shore,  
Were trapping soldiers, traders, Huron guides:  
The whole confederacy was on the march.  
Both waterways were blocked, the quicker route—  
St. Lawrence, and the arduous Ottawa.  
They caught the Hurons at their camps, surprised  
Canoe-fleets from the reeds and river bends  
And robbed them, killed them on the portages.  
So widespread were their forays, they encountered  
Bands of Algonquins on the hunt, slew them,  
Dispersed them from their villages and sent  
Survivors to the northern wilderness.  
So keen their lust for slaughter, they enticed  
The Huron chieftains under pledge of truce  
And closed negotiations with their scalps.

As the months passed the pressure of attack  
Moved grimly towards the west, making complete  
The isolation of Huronia.  
No commerce with Quebec—no traveller  
For a whole year came to the Residence.  
But constant was the stream of fugitives  
From smaller undefended villages,  
Fleeing west and ever west. The larger towns,  
The deluge breaking down their walls, drove on  
The surplus to their neighbours which, in turn,  
Urged on the panic herd to Sainte Marie.  
This mother of the missions felt the strain  
As one by one the buffers were destroyed,  
And the flocks came nearer for their pasturage.  
There could be only one conclusion when  
The priests saw the migration of the missions—  
That of St. Jean four times abandoning  
Its stations and four times establishing  
New centres with a more improved defence;  
That of St. Ignace where a double raid  
That slaughtered hundreds, lifted bodily  
Both town and mission, driving to their last  
Refuge the ragged remnants. Yet Ragueneau  
Was writing—“We are here as yet intact  
But all determined to shed blood and life  
If need be. In this Residence still reigns  
The peace and love of Heaven. Here the sick  
Will find a hospital, the travellers  
A place of rest, the fugitives, asylum.  
During the year more than three thousand persons  
Have sought and found shelter under our roof.  
We have dispensed the Bread of Life to all  
And we have fed their bodies, though our fare  
Is down to one food only, crushed corn boiled  
And seasoned with the powder of smoked fish.”

Despite the perils, Sainte Marie was sending  
Her missionaries afield, revisiting  
The older sites, establishing the new,  
With that same measure of success and failure  
Which tested courage or confirmed a faith.  
Garreau, sick and expecting death, was brought  
By Pijart and a French assistant back  
From the Algonquin wastes, for thirteen days  
Borne by a canoe and by his comrades' shoulders.  
Recovering even after the last rites  
Had been administered, he faced the task  
Again. Fresh visits to the Petun tribes  
Had little yield but cold and starving days,  
Unsheltered nights, the same fare at the doors,  
Savoured by Jogues and Garnier seven years  
Before. And everywhere the labourers worked  
Under a double threat—the Iroquois,  
And the Huron curse inspired by sorcerers  
Who saw black magic in the Jesuit robes  
And linked disaster with their ritual.  
Between the hammer and the anvil now  
Huronian was laid and the first priest  
To take the blow was Daniel.

Fourteen years

This priest had laboured at the Huron mission.  
Following a week of rest at Sainte Marie  
He had returned to his last post, St. Joseph,  
Where he had built his church and for the year  
Just gone had added to his charge the hundreds  
Swarming from villages stormed by the foe.  
And now in that inexorable order,  
Station by station, town by town, it was  
St. Joseph's turn. Aware that the main force  
Of Huron warriors had left the town,  
The Iroquois had breached the palisade  
And, overwhelming the defenders, sacked  
And burned the cabins. Mass had just been offered,  
When the war yells were heard and Daniel came  
Outside. Seeing the panic, fully knowing  
Extinction faced the town with this invasion,  
And that ten precious minutes of delay

Might give his flock the refuge of the woods,  
He faced the vanguard of the Iroquois,  
And walked with firm selective dignity  
As in the manner of a parley. Fear  
And wonder checked the Indians at the sight  
Of a single dark-robed, unarmed challenger  
Against arrows, muskets, spears and tomahawks.  
That momentary pause had saved the lives  
Of hundreds as they fled into the forest,  
But not the life of Daniel. Though afraid  
At first to cross a charmed circumference  
To take a struggle hand-to-hand, they drove  
Their arrows through him, then in frenzied rush  
Mastering their awe, they hurled themselves upon  
The body, stripped it of its clothes and flung it  
Into the burning church. By noon nothing  
Remained but ashes of the town, the fort,  
The cabins and their seven hundred dead.

July 1648

Ragueneau was distraught. He was shepherd-priest.  
Daniel was first to die under his care,  
And nigh a score of missionaries were lost  
In unprotected towns. Besides, he knew  
He could not, if he would, resist that mob  
That clamoured at the stockades, day by day.  
His moral supervision was bound up  
With charity that fed and warmed and healed.  
And through the winter following Daniel's death  
Six thousand Indians sought shelter there.  
The season's crops to the last grain were garnered  
And shared. "Through the kind Providence of God,  
We managed, as it were, to draw both oil  
And honey from the very stones around us.  
The obedience, patience of our missionaries  
Excel reward—all with one heart and soul  
Infused with the high spirit of our Order;  
The servants, boys, and soldiers day and night  
Working beyond their strength! Here is the service  
Of joy, that we will take whatever God  
Ordains for us whether it be life or death."  
The challenge was accepted, for the spring  
Opened upon the hardest tragic blows  
The iron in the human soul could stand.



St. Louis and St. Ignace still remained  
The flying buttresses of Sainte Marie.  
From them the Residence received reports  
Daily of movements of the Iroquois.  
Much labour had been spent on their defence.  
Ramparts of pine fifteen feet high enclosed  
St. Louis. On three sides a steep ravine  
Topped by the stakes made nigh impregnable  
St Ignace; then the palisaded fourth,  
Subject alone to a surprise assault,  
Could rally the main body of defenders.  
The Iroquois, alert as eagles, knew  
The weakness of the Hurons, the effect  
On the morale of unexpected raids  
Committing towns to fire and pushing back  
The eastern ramparts. Piece by piece, the rim  
Was being cracked and fissures driven down  
The bowl: and stroke by stroke the strategy  
Pointed to Sainte Marie. Were once the fort  
Now garrisoned by forty Frenchmen taken,  
No power predicted from Quebec could save  
The Huron nation from its doom. St. Ignace  
Lay in the path but during the eight months  
After St. Joseph's fall the enemy  
Had leisurely prepared their plans. Their scouts  
Reported that one-half of the town's strength  
Was lost by flight and that an apathy,  
In spite of all the priests could do to stem it,  
Had seized the invaded tribes. They knew that when  
The warriors were hunting in the forest  
This weaker palisade was scalable.  
And the day came in March when the whole fate  
That overtook St. Joseph in July  
Swept on St. Ignace—sudden and complete.  
The Mohawks and the Senecas uniting,  
A thousand strong, the town bereft of fighters,  
Four hundred old and young inside the stakes,  
The assault was made two hours before the dawn.  
But half-aroused from sleep, many were killed  
Within their cabins. Of the four hundred three  
Alone managed to reach the woods to scream

The alarm to the drowsed village of St. Louis.

At nine o'clock that morning—such the speed  
Of the pursuit—a guard upon the hill  
Behind the Residence was watching whiffs  
Of smoke to the south, but a league away.  
Bush fires? Not with this season's depth of snow.  
The Huron bivouacs? The settlements  
Too close for that. Camps of the Iroquois?  
Not while cunning and stealth controlled their tactics.  
The smoke was in the town. The morning air,  
Clearing, could leave no doubt of that, and just  
As little that the darkening pall could spring  
Out of the vent-holes from the cabin roofs.  
Ragueneau rushed to the hill at the guard's call;  
Summoned Bressani; sheets and tongues of flame  
Leaping some fifty feet above the smoke  
Meant to their eyes the capture and the torch—  
St. Louis with Brébeuf and Lalemant!

Less than two hours it took the Iroquois  
To capture, sack and garrison St. Ignace,  
And start then for St. Louis. The alarm  
Sounded, five hundred of the natives fled  
To the mother fort only to be pursued  
And massacred in the snow. The eighty braves  
That manned the stockades perished at the breaches;  
And what was seen by Ragueneau and the guard  
Was smoke from the massed fire of cabin bark.

Brébeuf and Lalemant were not numbered  
In the five hundred of the fugitives.  
They had remained, infusing nerve and will  
In the defenders, rushing through the cabins  
Baptizing and absolving those who were  
Too old, too young, too sick to join the flight.  
And when, resistance crushed, the Iroquois  
Took all they had not slain back to St. Ignace,  
The vanguard of the prisoners were the priests.  
Three miles from town to town over the snow,  
Naked, laden with pillage from the lodges,  
The captives filed like wounded beasts of burden,  
Three hours on the march, and those that fell  
Or slowed their steps were killed.

March 16  
1649

Three days before

Brébeuf had celebrated his last mass.  
And he had known it was to be the last.  
There was prophetic meaning as he took  
The cord and tied the alb around his waist,  
Attached the maniple to his left arm  
And drew the seamless purple chasuble  
With the large cross over his head and shoulders,  
Draping his body: every vestment held  
An immediate holy symbol as he whispered—  
“Upon my head the helmet of Salvation.  
So purify my heart and make me white;  
With this cincture of purity gird me,  
O Lord.

May I deserve this maniple  
Of sorrow and of penance.

Unto me

Restore the stole of immortality.  
My yoke is sweet, my burden light.

Grant that

I may so bear it as to win Thy grace.”

Entering, he knelt before as rude an altar  
As ever was reared within a sanctuary,  
But hallowed as that chancel where the notes  
Of Palestrina's score had often pealed  
The *Assumpta est Maria* through Saint Peter's.  
For, covered in the centre of the table,  
Recessed and sealed, a hollowed stone contained  
A relic of a charred or broken body  
Which perhaps a thousand years ago or more  
Was offered as a sacrifice to Him  
Whose crucifix stood there between the candles.  
And on the morrow would this prayer be answered:—  
“Eternal Father, I unite myself  
With the affections and the purposes  
Of Our Lady of Sorrows on Calvary.  
And now I offer Thee the sacrifice  
Which Thy Beloved Son made of Himself  
Upon the Cross and now renews on this,  
His holy altar . . .

Graciously receive

My life for His life as he gave His life  
For mine . . .

This is my body.

In like manner . . .

Take ye and drink—the chalice of my blood.”

## XII

No doubt in the mind of Brébeuf that this was the last  
Journey—three miles over the snow. He knew  
That the margins as thin as they were by which he escaped  
From death through the eighteen years of his mission toil  
Did not belong to this chapter: not by his pen  
Would this be told. He knew his place in the line,  
For the blaze of the trail that was cut on the bark by Jogues  
Shone still. He had heard the story as told by writ  
And word of survivors—of how a captive slave  
Of the hunters, the skin of his thighs cracked with the frost,  
He would steal from the tents to the birches, make a rough cross  
From two branches, set it in snow and on the peel  
Inscribe his vows and dedicate to the Name  
In “litanies of love” what fragments were left  
From the wrack of his flesh; of his escape from the tribes;  
Of his journey to France where he knocked at the door of the College  
Of Rennes, was gathered in as a mendicant friar,  
Nameless, unknown, till he gave for proof to the priest  
His scarred credentials of faith, the nail-less hands  
And withered arms—the signs of the Mohawk fury.  
Nor yet was the story finished—he had come again  
Back to his mission to get the second death.  
And the comrades of Jogues—Goupil, Eustache and Couture,  
Had been stripped and made to run the double files  
And take the blows—one hundred clubs to each line—  
And this as the prelude to torture, leisured, minute,  
Where thorns on the quick, scallop shells to the joints of the thumbs,  
Provided the sport for children and squaws till the end.  
And adding salt to the blood of Brébeuf was the thought  
Of Daniel—was it months or a week ago?  
So far, so near, it seemed in time, so close  
In leagues—just over there to the south it was  
He faced the arrows and died in front of his church.

But winding into the greater artery  
Of thought that bore upon the coming passion  
Were little tributaries of wayward wish  
And reminiscence. Paris with its vespers  
Was folded in the mind of Lalemant,  
And the soft Gothic lights and traceries  
Were shading down the ridges of his vows.  
But two years past at Bourges he had walked the cloisters,  
Companioned by Saint Augustine and Francis,  
And wrapped in quiet holy mists. Brébeuf,  
His mind a moment throwing back the curtain  
Of eighteen years, could see the orchard lands,  
The *cidreries*, the peasants at the Fairs,  
The undulating miles of wheat and barley,  
Gardens and pastures rolling like a sea  
From Lisieux to Le Havre. Just now the surf  
Was pounding on the limestone Norman beaches  
And on the reefs of Calvados. Had dawn  
This very day not flung her surplices  
Around the headlands and with golden fire  
Consumed the silken argosies that made  
For Rouen from the estuary of the Seine?  
A moment only for that veil to lift—  
A moment only for those bells to die  
That rang their matins at Condé-sur-Vire.

By noon St. Ignace! The arrival there  
The signal for the battle-cries of triumph,  
The gauntlet of the clubs. The stakes were set  
And the ordeal of Jogues was re-enacted  
Upon the priests—even with wilder fury,  
For here at last was trapped their greatest victim,  
*Echon*. The Iroquois had waited long  
For this event. Their hatred for the Hurons  
Fused with their hatred for the French and priests  
Was to be vented on this sacrifice,  
And to that camp had come apostate Hurons,  
United with their foes in common hate  
To settle up their reckoning with *Echon*.

. . . . .

Now three o'clock, and capping the height of the passion,  
Confusing the sacraments under the pines of the forest,  
Under the incense of balsam, under the smoke  
Of the pitch, was offered the rite of the font. On the head,  
The breast, the loins and the legs, the boiling water!  
While the mocking paraphrase of the symbols was hurled  
At their faces like shards of flint from the arrow heads—  
“We baptize thee with water . . .

That thou mayest be led

To Heaven . . .

To that end we do anoint thee.

We treat thee as a friend: we are the cause  
Of thy happiness; we are thy priests; the more  
Thou sufferest, the more thy God will reward thee,  
So give us thanks for our kind offices.”

The fury of taunt was followed by fury of blow.  
Why did not the flesh of Brébeuf cringe to the scourge,  
Respond to the heat, for rarely the Iroquois found  
A victim that would not cry out in such pain—yet here  
The fire was on the wrong fuel. Whenever he spoke,  
It was to rally the soul of his friend whose turn  
Was to come through the night while the eyes were uplifted in prayer,  
Imploring the Lady of Sorrows, the mother of Christ,  
As pain brimmed over the cup and the will was called  
To stand the test of the coals. And sometimes the speech  
Of Brébeuf struck out, thundering reproof to his foes,  
Half-rebuke, half-defiance, giving them roar for roar.  
Was it because the chancel became the arena,  
Brébeuf a lion at bay, not a lamb on the altar,  
As if the might of a Roman were joined to the cause  
Of Judaea? Speech they could stop for they girdled his lips,  
But never a moan could they get. Where was the source  
Of his strength, the home of his courage that topped the best  
Of their braves and even out-fabled the lore of their legends?  
In the bunch of his shoulders which often had carried a load  
Extorting the envy of guides at an Ottawa portage?  
The heat of the hatchets was finding a path to that source.  
In the thews of his thighs which had mastered the trails of the Neutrals?  
They would gash and beribbon those muscles. Was it the blood?  
They would draw it fresh from its fountain. Was it the heart?  
They dug for it, fought for the scraps in the way of the wolves.  
But not in these was the valour or stamina lodged;  
Nor in the symbol of Richelieu's robes or the seals  
Of Mazarin's charters, nor in the stir of the *lilies*  
Upon the Imperial folds; nor yet in the words  
Loyola wrote on a table of lava-stone  
In the cave of Manresa—not in these the source—  
But in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing  
Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered  
By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.



The wheel had come full circle with the visions  
In France of Brébeuf poured through the mould of St. Ignace.  
Lalemant died in the morning at nine, in the flame  
Of the pitch belts. Flushed with the sight of the bodies, the foes  
Gathered their clans and moved back to the north and west  
To join in the fight against the tribes of the Petuns.  
There was nothing now that could stem the Iroquois blast.  
However undaunted the souls of the priests who were left,  
However fierce the sporadic counter attacks  
Of the Hurons striking in roving bands from the ambush,  
Or smashing out at their foes in garrison raids,  
The villages fell before a blizzard of axes  
And arrows and spears, and then were put to the torch.

The days were dark at the fort and heavier grew  
The burdens on Ragueneau's shoulders. Decision was his.  
No word from the east could arrive in time to shape  
The step he must take. To and fro—from altar to hill,  
From hill to altar, he walked and prayed and watched.  
As governing priest of the Mission he felt the pride  
Of his Order whipping his pulse, for was not St. Ignace  
The highest test of the Faith? And all that torture  
And death could do to the body was done. The Will  
And the Cause in their triumph survived. Loyola's mountains,  
Sublime at their summits, were scaled to the uttermost peak.  
Ragueneau, the Shepherd, now looked on a battered fold.  
In a whirlwind of fire St. Jean, like St. Joseph, crashed  
Under the Iroquois impact. Firm at his post,  
Garnier suffered the fate of Daniel. And now  
Chabanel, last in the roll of the martyrs, entrapped  
On his knees in the woods met death at apostate hands.  
The drama was drawing close to its end. It fell  
To Ragueneau's lot to perform a final rite—  
To offer the fort in sacrificial fire!  
He applied the torch himself. "Inside an hour,"  
He wrote, "we saw the fruit of ten years' labour  
Ascend in smoke,—then looked our last at the fields,  
Put altar-vessels and food on a raft of logs,  
And made our way to the island of St. Joseph."  
But even from there was the old tale retold—  
Of hunger and the search for roots and acorns;  
Of cold and persecution unto death  
By the Iroquois; of Jesuit will and courage  
As the shepherd-priest with Chaumonot led back  
The remnant of a nation to Quebec.

## THE MARTYRS' SHRINE

Three hundred years have passed, and the winds of God  
Which blew over France are blowing once more through the pines  
That bulwark the shores of the great Fresh Water Sea.  
Over the wastes abandoned by human tread,  
Where only the bittern's cry was heard at dusk;  
Over the lakes where the wild ducks built their nests,  
The skies that had banked their fires are shining again  
With the stars that guided the feet of Jogues and Brébeuf.  
The years as they turned have ripened the martyrs' seed,  
And the ashes of St. Ignace are glowing afresh.  
The trails, having frayed the threads of the cassocks, sank  
Under the mould of the centuries, under fern  
And brier and fungus—there in due time to blossom  
Into the highways that lead to the crest of the hill  
Which havened both shepherd and flock in the days of their trial.  
For out of the torch of Ragueneau's ruins the candles  
Are burning to-day in the chancel of Sainte Marie.  
The Mission sites have returned to the fold of the Order.  
Near to the ground where the cross broke under the hatchet,  
And went with it into the soil to come back at the turn  
Of the spade with the carbon and calcium char of the bodies,  
The shrines and altars are built anew; the *Aves*  
And prayers ascend, and the Holy Bread is broken.

# BEFORE AN ALTAR

(After Gueudecourt)

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.

## TO AN ENEMY

Some passionate hour before my own deep stripe  
Has taken on its healing, I shall trace  
Him out, and with clean linen I shall wipe  
The stain from that raw cut upon his face;  
And with the hand that smote him I shall turn  
The audit strong against him, offering  
Once more a wound for wound and burn for burn  
Out of the heart's own codeless bargaining.

And he, with wound adjuring wound, shall draw  
His equal measure to the sacrament  
From an old well to which some mortals went  
When, with their thirsts ablaze, they looked and saw  
An Orient form uplifted in the skies,  
And quenched their hate in his forgiving eyes.

## THE EMPTY ROOM

I know that were my soul to-night  
Strung to the silence of this room,  
I'd hear remembered footfalls light  
As wayward drift of lotus bloom.

Nor would it just be make-believe,  
Were I to find her in this chair,  
Or catch the rustle of her sleeve,  
Or note the glint upon her hair.

Say, would you blame me if I knelt  
To put faith to its enterprise?  
So surely must her touch be felt  
In liquid coolness on my eyes.

Now listen! If the veil should part  
Within this holy ritual,  
You'll hear a voice call to my heart  
More lovely than a madrigal.

## FIRE

Wiser than thought, more intimate than breath,  
More ancient than the plated rust of Mars,  
Beyond the light geometry of stars,  
Yet closer than our web of life and death—  
This sergeant of the executing squads  
Calls night from dawn no less than dawn from night;  
This groom that teams the wolf and hare for flight  
Is obstetrician at the birth of gods.  
Around this crimson source of human fears,  
Where rites and myths have built their scaffoldings,  
With smoke of hecatombs upon her wings,  
And chased by shadows of the coming years,  
Our planet-moth tries blindly to survive  
Her spinning vertigo as fugitive.

But stronger than its terror is the deep  
Allurement, primary to our blood, which holds  
Safety and warmth in unimpassioned folds,  
Night and the candle-quietness of sleep;  
With the day's bugles silent, when the will,  
That feeds the tumult of our natures, rests  
Along the broken arteries of its quests.  
So, let the yellowing world revolve until  
The old Sun's ultimate expatriate  
On this exotic hearth leans forth to claim  
Promethean virtue from a dying flame,  
His fingers tapered—less to mitigate  
The chilling accident of his sojourn  
Than to invoke his ultimate return.

# THE TITANIC

The hammers silent and the derricks still,  
And high-tide in the harbour! Mind and will  
In open test with time and steel had run  
The first lap of a schedule and had won.  
Although a shell of what was yet to be  
Before another year was over, she,  
Poised for the launching signal, had surpassed  
The dreams of builder or of navigator.  
The Primate of the Lines, she had out-classed  
That rival effort to eliminate her  
Beyond the North Sea where the air shots played  
The laggard rhythms of their fusilade  
Upon the rivets of the *Imperator*.  
The wedges in, the shores removed, a girl's  
Hand at a sign released a ribbon braid;  
Glass crashed against the plates; a wine cascade,  
Netting the sunlight in a shower of pearls,  
Baptized the bow and gave the ship her name;  
A slight push of the rams as a switch set free  
The triggers in the slots, and her proud claim  
On size—to be the first to reach the sea—  
Was vindicated, for whatever fears  
Stalked with her down the tallow of the slips  
Were smothered under by the harbour cheers,  
By flags strung to the halyards of the ships.

Harland &  
Wolff  
Works,  
Belfast,  
May 31,  
1911



March 31,  
1912

Completed! Waiting for her trial spin—  
Levers and telegraphs and valves within  
Her intercostal spaces ready to start  
The power pulsing through her lungs and heart.  
An ocean life-boat in herself—so ran  
The architectural comment on her plan.  
No wave could sweep those upper decks—unthinkable!  
No storm could hurt that hull—the papers said so.  
The perfect ship at last—the first unsinkable,  
Proved in advance—had not the folders read so?  
Such was the steel strength of her double floors  
Along the whole length of the keel, and such  
The fine adjustment of the bulkhead doors  
Geared to the rams, responsive to a touch,  
That in collision with iceberg or rock  
Or passing ship she could survive the shock,  
Absorb the double impact, for despite  
The bows stove in, with forward holds aleak,  
Her aft compartments buoyant, watertight,  
Would keep her floating steady for a week.  
And this belief had reached its climax when,  
Through wireless waves as yet unstaled by use,  
The wonder of the ether had begun  
To fold the heavens up and reinduce  
That ancient *hubris* in the dreams of men,  
Which would have slain the cattle of the sun,  
And filched the lightnings from the fist of Zeus.  
What mattered that her boats were but a third  
Of full provision—caution was absurd;  
Then let the ocean roll and the winds blow  
While the risk at Lloyds remained a record low.

Calved from a glacier near Godhaven coast,  
It left the fiord for the sea—a host  
Of white flotillas gathering in its wake,  
And joined by fragments from a Behring floe,  
Had circumnavigated it to make  
It centre of an archipelago.  
Its lateral motion on the Davis Strait  
Was casual and indeterminate,  
And each advance to southward was as blind  
As each recession to the north. No smoke  
Of steamships nor the hoist of mainsails broke  
The polar wastes—no sounds except the grind  
Of ice, the cry of curlews and the lore  
Of winds from mesas of eternal snow;  
Until caught by the western undertow,  
It struck the current of the Labrador  
Which swung it to its definite southern stride.  
Pressure and glacial time had stratified  
The berg to the consistency of flint,  
And kept inviolate, through clash of tide  
And gale, façade and columns with their hint  
Of inward altars and of steeped bells  
Ringing the passage of the parallels.  
But when with months of voyaging it came  
To where both streams—the Gulf and Polar—met,  
The sun which left its crystal peaks aflame  
In the sub-arctic noons, began to fret  
The arches, flute the spires and deform  
The features, till the batteries of storm,  
Playing above the slow-eroding base,  
Demolished the last temple touch of grace.  
Another month, and nothing but the brute  
And palaeolithic outline of a face  
Fronted the transatlantic shipping route.  
A sloping spur that tapered to a claw  
And lying twenty feet below had made  
It lurch and shamble like a plantigrade;  
But with an impulse governed by the raw  
Mechanics of its birth, it drifted where  
Ambushed, fog-gray, it stumbled on its lair,  
North forty-one degrees and forty-four,

Fifty and fourteen west the longitude,  
Waiting a world-memorial hour, its rude  
Corundum form stripped to its Greenland core.

An omen struck the thousands on the shore—  
A double accident! And as the ship  
Swung down the river on her maiden trip,  
Old sailors of the clipper decades, wise  
To the sea's incantations, muttered fables  
About careening vessels with their cables  
Snapped in their harbours under peaceful skies.  
Was it just suction or fatality  
Which caused the *New York* at the dock to turn,  
Her seven mooring ropes to break at the stern  
And writhe like anacondas on the quay,  
While tugs and fenders answered the collision  
Signals with such trim margin of precision?  
And was it backwash from the starboard screw  
Which, tearing at the big *Teutonic*, drew  
Her to the limit of her hawser strain,  
And made the smaller tethered craft behave  
Like frightened harbour ducks? And no one knew  
For many days the reason to explain  
The rise and wash of one inordinate wave,  
When a sunken barge on the Southampton bed  
Was dragged through mire eight hundred yards ahead.  
As the *Titanic* passed above its grave.  
But many of those sailors wise and old,  
Who pondered on this weird mesmeric power,  
Gathered together, lit their pipes and told  
Of portents hidden in the natal hour,  
Told of the launching of some square-rigged ships,  
When water flowed from the inverted tips  
Of a waning moon, of sun-hounds, of the shrieks  
Of whirling shags around the mizzen peaks.  
And was there not this morning's augury  
For the big one now heading for the sea?  
So long after she passed from landsmen's sight,  
They watched her with their Mother Carey eyes  
Through Spithead smoke, through mists of Isle of Wight,  
Through clouds of sea-gulls following with their cries.

Southampton,  
Wednesday,  
April 10,  
1912

Electric elements were glowing down  
In long galley passages where scores  
Of white-capped cooks stood at the oven doors  
To feed the population of a town.  
Cauldrons of stock, purées and consommés,  
Simmered with peppercorns and marjoram.  
The sea-shore smells from bisque and crab and clam  
Blended with odours from the fricassées.  
Refrigerators, hung with a week's toll  
Of the stockyards, delivered sides of lamb  
And veal, beef quarters to be roasted whole,  
Hundreds of capons and halibut. A shoal  
Of Blue-Points waited to be served on shell.  
The boards were loaded with pimolas, pails  
Of lobster coral, jars of Béchamel,  
To garnish tiers of rows of chilled timbales  
And aspics. On the shelves were pyramids  
Of truffles, sprigs of thyme and water-cress,  
Bay leaf and parsley, savouries to dress  
Shad roes and sweetbreads broiling on the grids.  
And then in diamond, square, crescent and star,  
Hors d'oeuvres were fashioned from the toasted bread,  
With paste of anchovy and caviare,  
Paprika sprinkled and pimento spread,  
All ready, for the hour was seven!

Meanwhile,

Rivalling the engines with their steady tread,  
Thousands of feet were taking overhead  
The fourth lap round the deck to make the mile.  
Squash racquet, shuffle board and quoits; the cool  
Tang of the plunge in the gymnasium pool,  
The rub, the crisp air of the April night,  
The salt of the breeze made by the liner's rate,  
Worked with an even keel to stimulate  
Saliva for an ocean appetite;  
And like storm troops before a citadel,  
At the first summons of a bugle, soon  
The army massed the stairs towards the saloon,  
And though twelve courses on the cards might well  
Measure themselves against Falstaffian juices,  
But few were found presenting their excuses,

When stewards offered on the lacquered trays  
The Savoy chasers and the canapés.

The dinner gave the sense that all was well:  
That touch of ballast in the tanks; the feel  
Of peace from ramparts unassailable,  
Which, added to her seven decks of steel,  
Had constituted the *Titanic* less  
A ship than a Gibraltar under heel.  
And night had placed a lazy lusciousness  
Upon a surfeit of security.

Science responded to a button press.

The three electric lifts that ran through tiers  
Of decks, the reading lamps, the brilliancy  
Of mirrors from the tungsten chandeliers,  
Had driven out all phantoms which the mind  
Had loosed from ocean closets, and assigned  
To the dry earth the custody of fears.

The crowds poured through the sumptuous rooms and halls,  
And tapped the tables of the Regency;  
Smirked at the caryatids on the walls;  
Talked Jacobean-wise; canvassed the range  
Of taste within the Louis dynasty.

Gray-templed Cæsars of the world's Exchange  
Swallowed liqueurs and coffee as they sat  
Under the Georgian carved mahogany,  
Dictating wireless hieroglyphics that  
Would on the opening of the Board Rooms rock  
The pillared dollars of a railroad stock.

A group had gathered round a mat to watch  
The pressure of a Russian hammerlock,  
A Polish scissors and a German crotch,  
Broken by the toe-hold of Frank Gotch;  
Or listened while a young Y.M.C.A.  
Instructor demonstrated the left-hook,  
And that right upper-cut which Jeffries took  
From Johnson in the polished Reno way.  
By midnight in the spacious dancing hall,  
Hundreds were at the Masqueraders' Ball,  
The high potential of the liner's pleasures,  
Where mellow lights from Chinese lanterns glowed  
Upon the scene, and the *Blue Danube* flowed  
In andantino rhythms through the measures.

By three the silence that proceeded from  
The night-caps and the soporific hum  
Of the engines was far deeper than a town's:  
The starlight and the low wash of the sea  
Against the hull bore the serenity  
Of sleep at rural hearths with eiderdowns.

The quiet on the decks was scarcely less  
Than in the berths: no symptoms of the toil  
Down in the holds; no evidence of stress  
From gears drenched in the lubricating oil.  
She seemed to swim in oil, so smooth the sea.  
And quiet on the bridge: the great machine  
Called for laconic speech, close-fitting, clean,  
And whittled to the ship's economy.  
Even the judgment stood in little need  
Of reason, for the Watch had but to read  
Levels and lights, meter or card or bell  
To find the pressures, temperatures, or tell  
Magnetic North within a binnacle,  
Or gauge the hour of docking; for the speed  
Was fixed abaft where under the Ensign,  
Like a flashing trolling spoon, the log rotator  
Transmitted through a governor its fine  
Gradations on a dial indicator.

Morning of Sunday promised cool and clear,  
Flawless horizon, crystal atmosphere;  
Not a cat's paw on the ocean, not a guy  
Rope murmuring: the steamer's columned smoke  
Climbed like extensions of her funnels high  
Into the upper zones, then warped and broke  
Through the resistance of her speed—blue sky,  
Blue water rifted only by the wedge  
Of the bow where the double foam line ran  
Diverging from the beam to join the edge  
Of the stern wake like a white unfolding fan.  
Her maiden voyage was being sweetly run,  
Adding a half-knot here, a quarter there,  
Gliding from twenty into twenty-one.  
She seemed so native to her thoroughfare,  
One turned from contemplation of her size,  
Her sixty thousand tons of sheer flotation,  
To wonder at the human enterprise  
That took a gamble on her navigation—  
Joining the mastiff strength with whippet grace  
In this head-strained, world-watched Atlantic race:  
Her less than six days' passage would combine  
Achievement with the architect's design.

A message from *Caronia*: advice  
*From ships proceeding west; sighted field ice  
And growlers; forty-two north; forty-nine  
To fifty-one west longitude. S.S.  
Mesaba of Atlantic Transport Line  
Reports encountering solid pack: would guess  
The stretch five miles in width from west to east,  
And forty-five to fifty miles at least  
In length.*

9 a.m.

*Amerika* obliged to slow  
Down: warns all steamships in vicinity  
Presence of bergs, especially of three  
Upon the southern outskirts of the floe.

1 p.m.



The *Baltic* warns *Titanic*: so *Tourraine*;  
Reports of numerous icebergs on the Banks,  
The floe across the southern traffic lane.

1.42 p.m.

The *Californian* and *Baltic* again  
Present their compliments to Captain.

5 p.m.

“Titanic”

*Thanks.*

“That spark’s been busy all the afternoon—  
Warnings! The Hydrographic charts are strewn  
With crosses showing bergs and pack-ice all  
Along the routes, more south than usual  
For this time of the year.”

Three men  
talking on  
deck

“She’s hitting a clip

Instead of letting up while passing through  
This belt. She’s gone beyond the twenty-two.”

“Don’t worry—Smith’s an old dog, knows his ship,  
No finer in the mercantile marine  
Than Smith with thirty years of service, clean  
Record, honoured with highest of all commands,  
*Majestic*, than *Olympic* on his hands,  
Now the *Titanic*.”

“ ’Twas a lucky streak  
That at Southampton dock he didn’t lose her,  
And the *Olympic* had a narrow squeak  
Some months before rammed by the British Cruiser,  
The *Hawke*.”

“Straight accident. No one to blame:  
’Twas suction—Board absolved them both. The same  
With the *Teutonic* and *New York*. No need  
To fear she’s trying to out-reach her speed.  
There isn’t a sign of fog. Besides by now  
The watch is doubled at crow’s nest and bow.”

“People are talking of that apparition,  
When we were leaving Queenstown—that head showing  
Above the funnel rim, and the fires going!  
A stoker’s face—sounds like a superstition.  
But he was there within the stack, all right;  
Climbed up the ladder and grinned. The explanation  
Was given by an engineer last night—  
A dummy funnel built for ventilation.”

“That’s queer enough, but nothing so absurd  
As the latest story two old ladies heard  
At a rubber o’ bridge. They nearly died with fright;  
Wanted to tell the captain—of all things!  
The others sneered a bit but just the same  
It did the trick of breaking up the game.  
A mummy from The Valley of the Kings  
Was brought from Thebes to London. Excavators  
Passed out from cholera, black plague or worse.  
Egyptians understood—an ancient curse  
Was visited on all the violators.  
One fellow was run over, one was drowned,  
And one went crazy. When in time it found  
Its way to the Museum, the last man  
In charge—a mothy Aberdonian—  
Exploding the whole legend with a laugh,  
Lost all his humour when the skeleton  
Appeared within the family photograph,  
And leered down from a corner just like one  
Of his uncles.”

“Holy Hades!”

“The B.M.

Authorities themselves were scared and sold  
It to New York. That’s how the tale is told.”  
“The joke is on the Yanks.”

“No, not on them,  
Nor on The Valley of the Kings. What’s rummy  
About it is—we’re carrying the mummy.”

*Green Turtle!*

7.30 p.m.

e Star

Is out this time to press Cunarders close,  
Got them on tonnage—fifty thousand gross.  
Preferred has never paid a dividend.  
The common’s down to five—one hundred par.  
The double ribbon—size and speed—would send  
Them soaring.”

“Speed is not in her design,  
But comfort and security. The Line  
Had never advertised it—’twould be mania  
To smash the record of the *Mauretania*.”  
*Sherry!*

“The rumour’s out.”

“There’s nothing in it.”

“Bet you she docks on Tuesday night.”

“I’ll take it.”

“She’s hitting twenty-two this very minute.”

“That’s four behind—She hasn’t a chance to make it.”

*Brook Trout!*

*Fried Dover Sole!*

“Her rate will climb

From twenty-two to twenty-six in time.  
The Company’s known never to rush their ships  
At first or try to rip the bed-bolts off.  
They run them gently half-a-dozen trips,  
A few work-outs around the track to let  
Them find their breathing, take the boiler cough  
Out of them. She’s not racing for a cup.”  
*Claret!*

“Steamships like sprinters have to get  
Their second wind before they open up.”

“That group of men around the captain’s table,  
Look at them, count the aggregate—the House  
Of Astor, Guggenheim, and Harris, Strauss,  
That’s Frohman, isn’t it? Between them able  
To halve the national debt with a cool billion!  
Sir Hugh is over there, and Hays and Stead.  
That woman third from captain’s right, it’s said,  
Those diamonds round her neck—a quarter million!”  
*Mignon of Beef!*

*Quail!*

“I heard Phillips say

He had the finest outfit on the sea;  
The new Marconi valve; the range by day,  
Five hundred miles, by night a thousand. Three  
Sources of power. If some crash below  
Should hit the engines, flood the dynamo,  
He had the batteries: in emergency,  
He could switch through to the auxiliary  
On the boat deck.”

*Woodcock and Burgundy!*

“Say waiter, I said *rare*, you understand.”  
*Escallope of Veal!*

*Roast Duckling!*

*Snipe! More Rhine!*

“Marconi made the sea as safe as land:  
Remember the *Republic*—White Star Line—  
Rammed off Nantucket by the *Florida*,  
One thousand saved—the *Baltic* heard the call.  
Two steamers answered the *Slavonia*,  
Disabled off the Azores. They got them all,  
And when the *Minnehaha* ran aground  
Near Bishop’s Rock, they never would have found  
Her—not a chance without the wireless. Same  
Thing happened to that boat—what was her name?  
The one that foundered off the Alaska Coast—  
Her signals brought a steamer in the nick  
Of time. Yes, sir—Marconi turned the trick.”

The *Barcelona salad*; no, *Beaucaire*;  
That *Russian dressing*;

*Avocado pear*;

“They wound her up at the Southampton dock,  
And then the tugs gave her a push to start  
Her off—as automatic as a clock.”

*Moselle!*

“For all the hand work there’s to do  
Aboard this liner up on deck, the crew  
Might just as well have stopped ashore. Apart  
From stokers and the engineers, she’s run  
By gadgets from the bridge—a thousand and one  
Of them with a hundred miles of copper wire.  
A filament glows at the first sign of fire,  
A buzzer sounds, a number gives the spot,  
A deck-hand makes a coupling of the hose.  
That’s all there’s to it; not a whistle; not  
A passenger upon the ship that knows  
What’s happened. The whole thing is done without  
So much as calling up the fire brigade.  
They don’t need even the pumps—a gas is sprayed,  
Carbon dioxide—and the blaze is out.”

*A Cherry Flan!*

*Champagne!*

*Chocolate parfait!*

“How about a poker crowd to-night?  
Get Jones, an awful grouch—no good to play,  
But has the coin. Get hold of Larry.”

“Right.”

“You fetch Van Raalte; I’ll bring in MacRae.  
In Cabin D, one hundred seventy-nine.  
In half-an-hour we start playing.”

“Fine.”

The sky was moonless but the sea flung back  
With greater brilliance half the zodiac.  
As clear below as clear above, the Lion  
Far on the eastern quarter stalked the Bear:  
Polaris off the starboard beam—and there  
Upon the port the Dog-star trailed Orion.  
Capella was so close, a hand might seize  
The sapphire with the silver Pleiades.  
And further to the south—a finger span,  
Swam Betelgeuse and red Aldebaran.  
Right through from east to west the ocean glassed  
The billions of that snowy caravan  
Ranging the highway which the Milkmaid passed.

On deck

*I say, old man, we're stuck fast in this place,  
More than an hour. Field ice for miles about.*

9.05 p.m.  
"Californian  
" flashing

*Say, Californian, shut up, keep out,  
You're jamming all my signals with Cape Race.*

"Titanic"

A group of boys had gathered round a spot  
Upon the rail where a dial registered  
The speed, and waiting each three minutes heard  
The taffrail log bell tallying off a knot.

10 p.m.

First act to fifth act in a tragic plan,  
Stage time, real time—a woman and a man,  
Entering a play within a play, dismiss  
The pageant on the ocean with a kiss.  
Eleven-twenty curtain! Whether true  
Or false the pantomimic vows they make  
Will not be known till at the *fifth* they take  
Their mutual exit twenty after two.

11.20 p.m.  
Behind a  
deck house

Position half-a-mile from edge of floe,  
 Hove-to for many hours, bored with delay,  
 The *Californian* fifteen miles away,  
 And fearful of the pack, has now begun  
 To turn her engines over under slow  
 Bell, and the operator, his task done,  
 Unclamps the 'phones and ends his dullest day.

The ocean sinuous, half-past eleven;  
 A silence broken only by the seven  
 Bells and the look-out calls, the log-book showing  
 Knots forty-five within two hours—not quite  
 The expected best as yet—but she was going  
 With all her bulkheads open through the night,  
 For not a bridge induction light was glowing.  
 Over the stern zenith and nadir met  
 In the wash of the reciprocating set.  
 The foam in bevelled mirrors multiplied  
 And shattered constellations. In between,  
 The pitch from the main drive of the turbine  
 Emerged like tuna breaches to divide  
 Against the rudder, only to unite  
 With the converging wake from either side.  
 Under the counter, blending with the spill  
 Of stars—the white and blue—the yellow light  
 Of Jupiter hung like a daffodil.

“Ace full! A long time since I had a pot.”

D-179

“Good boy, Van Raalte. That’s the juiciest haul  
 To-night. Calls for a round of roodles, what?  
 Let’s whoop her up. Double the limit. All  
 In.” (Jones, heard muttering as usual,  
 Demurs, but over-ruled.) “Jones sore again.”

“Ten dollars and all in!

The sea’s like glass

To-night. That fin-keel keeps her steady.”

Van Raalte  
 (dealer)



(Not looking at his hand.)	“Pass.”	Jones
	“Pass.”	Larry
(Holding a pair of aces.) “Say, who won The sweep to-day?”	“Open for ten.”	Cripps
“A Minnesota guy With olive-coloured spats and a mauve tie. Five hundred and eighty miles—Beat last day’s run.”		
“My ten.”		Mac
(Taking a gamble on his four Spades for a flush) “I’ll raise the bet ten more.”		Harry
(Two queens) “ <i>And</i> ten.”		Van R.
(Discovering three kings)		Jones
“Raise you to forty” (face expressing doubt.)		
(Looking hard at a pair of nines) “I’m out.”		Larry
(Flirts for a moment with his aces, flings His thirty dollars to the pot.)		Cripps
	(The same.)	
		Mac
“My twenty. Might as well stay with the game.”		Harry
“I’m in. Draw! Jones, how bloody long you wait.”		Van R.
(Withholds an eight) “One.” (And then draws an eight.)		Jones
“Three.” (Gets another pair.)		Cripps
	“How many, Mac?”	
“Guess I’ll take two, no, three.” (Gets a third Jack.)		Mac

“One.” (Draws the ace of spades.)		Harry
	“Dealer takes three.”	Van R.
(Throws in a dollar chip.)		Cripps (the opener)
	(The same.)	Mac
	“I’ll raise	
You ten.”		Harry
	“I’ll see you.”	Van R.
	(Hesitates, surveys	
The chips.) “Another ten.”		Jones
	“I’ll call you.”	Cripps
	“See.”	
		Mac
“White livers! Here she goes to thirty.”		Harry
	“Just	
The devil’s luck.” (Throws cards down in disgust.)		Van R.
“Might as well raise.” (Counts twenty sluggishly, Tosses them to the centre.)		Jones
	“Staying, Cripps?”	
“No, and be damned to it.”		Cripps
	“My ten.” (With groans.)	Mac
(Looks at the pyramid and swears at Jones, Then calls, pitching ten dollars on the chips.)		Harry
(Cards down.) “A full house tops the flush.” (He spreads His arms around the whites and blues and reds.)		Jones

“As the Scotchman once said to the Sphinx,  
I’d like just to know what he thinks,  
I’ll ask him, he cried,  
And the Sphinx—he replied,  
It’s the hell of a time between drinks.”

Mac

“Time? Eleven forty-four, to be precise.”

Cripps  
(watch in  
hand)

“Jones—that will fatten up your pocket-book.  
My throat’s like charcoal. Ring for soda and ice.”

Harry

“Ice: God! Look—take it through the port-hole—look!”

Van R.

A signal from the crow’s nest. Three bells pealed:  
The look-out telephoned—*Something ahead,  
Hard to make out, sir; looks like . . . . iceberg dead  
On starboard bow!*

11.45 p.m.

Murdoch  
holding the  
bridge-  
watch

*Starboard your helm:* ship heeled  
To port. From bridge to engine-room the clang  
Of the telegraph. *Danger. Stop.* A hand sprang  
To the throttle; the valves closed, and with the churn  
Of the reverse the sea boiled at the stern.  
Smith hurried to the bridge and Murdoch closed  
The bulkheads of the ship as he supposed,  
But could not know that with those riven floors  
The electro-magnets failed upon the doors.  
No shock! No more than if something alive  
Had brushed her as she passed. The bow had missed.  
Under the vast momentum of her drive  
She went a mile. But why that ominous five  
Degrees (within five minutes) of a list?

“What was that, steward?”

In a cabin

“Seems like she hit a sea, sir.”

“But there’s no sea; calm as a landlocked bay  
It is; lost a propeller blade?”

“Maybe, sir.”

“She’s stopped.”

“Just cautious like, feeling her way,  
There’s ice about. It’s dark, no moon to-night,  
Nothing to fear, I’m sure, sir.”

For so slight

The answer of the helm, it did not break  
The sleep of hundreds: some who were awake  
Went up on deck, but soon were satisfied  
That nothing in the shape of wind or tide  
Or rock or ice could harm that huge bulk spread  
On the Atlantic, and went back to bed.

“We’ve struck an iceberg—glancing blow: as yet  
Don’t know extent; looks serious; so get  
Ready to send out general call for aid;  
I’ll tell you when—having inspection made.”

Captain in  
wireless  
room

A starboard cut three hundred feet or more  
From foremast to amidships. Iceberg tore  
Right at the bilge turn through the double skin:  
Some boiler rooms and bunkers driven in;  
The forward five compartments flooded—mail  
Bags floating. Would the engine power avail  
To stem the rush?

Report of  
ship’s  
carpenter  
and fourth  
officer

*Titanic, C.Q.D.*

*Collision: iceberg: damaged starboard side:  
Distinct list forward. (Had Smith magnified  
The danger? Over-anxious certainly.)  
The second (joking)—“Try new call, maybe  
Last chance you’ll have to send it.”*

Wireless  
room, First  
officer  
Phillips at  
key

*S.O.S.*

Then back to older signal of distress.

On the same instant the *Carpathia* called,  
The distance sixty miles—*Putting about,*  
*And heading for you; Double watch installed*  
*In engine-room, in stokehold and look-out.*  
*Four hours the run, should not the ice retard*  
*The speed; but taking chances: Coming hard!*

As leaning on her side to ease a pain,  
The tilted ship had stopped the captain's breath:  
The inconceivable had stabbed his brain,  
This thing unfelt—her visceral wound of death?  
Another message—this time to report her  
Filling, taxing the pumps beyond their strain.  
Had that blow rent her from the bow to quarter?  
Or would the aft compartments still intact  
Give buoyancy enough to counteract  
The open forward holds?

The Bridge

The carpenter's

Second report had offered little chance,  
And panic—heart of God—the passengers,  
The fourteen hundred—seven hundred packed  
In steerage—seven hundred immigrants!  
Smith thought of panic clutching at their throats,  
And feared that Balkan scramble for the boats.

No call from bridge, no whistle, no alarm  
Was sounded. Have the stewards quietly  
Inform the passengers: no vital harm,  
Precautions merely for emergency;  
Collision? Yes, but nature of the blow  
Must not be told: not even the crew must know:  
Yet all on deck with life-belts, and boats ready,  
The sailors at the falls, and all hands steady.

The lilac spark was crackling at the gap,  
Eight ships within the radius of the call  
From fifteen to five hundred miles, and all  
But one answering the operator's tap.  
*Olympic* twenty hours away had heard;  
The *Baltic* next and the *Virginian* third;  
*Frankfurt* and *Burma* distant one-half day;  
*Mount Temple* nearer, but the ice-field lay  
Between the two ships like a wall of stone;  
The *Californian* deaf to signals though  
Supreme deliverer an hour ago:  
The hope was on *Carpathia* alone.

Wireless  
room

So suave the fool-proof sense of life that fear  
Had like the unforeseen become a mere  
Illusion—vanquished by the towering height  
Of funnels pouring smoke through thirty feet  
Of bore; the solid deck planks and the light  
From a thousand lamps as on a city street;  
The feel of numbers; the security  
Of wealth; the placid surface of the sea,  
Reflecting on the ship the outwardness  
Of calm and leisure of the passengers;  
Deck-hands obedient to their officers;  
Pearl-throated women in their evening dress  
And wrapped in sables and minks; the silhouettes  
Of men in dinner jackets staging an act  
In which delusion passed, deriding fact  
Behind the cupped flare of the cigarettes.

On the  
decks

Women and children first! Slowly the men  
Stepped backward from the rails where number ten,  
Its cover off, and lifted from the chocks,  
Moved outward as the Welin davits swung.  
The new ropes creaking through the unused blocks,  
The boat was lowered to B deck and hung  
There while her load of sixty stepped inside,  
Convinced the order was not justified.

*Rockets, one, two, God! Smith—what does he mean?*  
The sounding of the bilges could not show  
This reason for alarm—the sky serene  
And not a ripple on the water—no  
Collision. What report came from below?  
No leak accounts for this—looks like a drill,  
A bit of exhibition play—but still  
Stopped in mid-ocean! and those rockets—*three!*  
More urgent even than a tapping key  
And more immediate as a protocol  
To a disaster. *There!* An arrow of fire,  
A fourth sped towards the sky, its bursting spire  
Topping the foremast like a parasol  
With fringe of fuschia,—more a parody  
Upon the tragic summons of the sea  
Than the real script of unacknowledged fears  
Known to the bridge and to the engineers.

Midnight! The Master of the ship presents  
To the Master of the Band his compliments,  
Desiring that the Band should play right through;  
No intermission.

“Bad?”

Conductor

“Yes, bad enough,

Officer

The half not known yet even to the crew;  
For God’s sake, cut the sentimental stuff,  
The *Blue Bells* and Kentucky lullabies.  
Murdoch will have a barrel of work to do,  
Holding the steerage back, once they get wise;  
They’re jumpy now under the rockets’ glare;  
So put the ginger in the fiddles—Zip  
Her up.”

“Sure, number forty-seven:” *E-Yip*

Conductor

*I Addy-I-A, I Ay . . . I don’t care . . .*

Full noon and midnight by a weird design  
Both met and parted at the median line.  
Beyond the starboard gunwale was outspread  
The jet expanse of water islanded  
By fragments of the berg which struck the blow.  
And further off towards the horizon lay  
The loom of the uncharted parent floe,  
Merging the black with an amorphous gray.  
On the port gunwale the meridian  
Shone from the terraced rows of decks that ran  
From gudgeon to the stem nine hundred feet;  
And as the boat now tilted by the stern,  
Or now resumed her levels with the turn  
Of the controlling ropes at block and cleat,  
How easy seemed the step and how secure  
Back to the comfort and the warmth—the lure  
Of sheltered promenade and sun decks starred  
By hanging bulbs, amber and rose and blue,  
The trellis and palms lining an avenue  
With all the vista of a boulevard:  
The mirror of the ceilings with festoon  
Of pennants, flags and streamers—and now through  
The leaded windows of the grand saloon,  
Through parted curtains and the open doors  
Of vestibules, glint of deserted floors  
And tables, and under the sorcery  
Of light excelling their facsimile,  
The periods returning to relume  
The panels of the lounge and smoking room,  
Holding the mind in its abandonment  
During those sixty seconds of descent.  
*Lower away!* The boat with its four tons  
Of freight went down with jerks and stops and runs  
Beyond the glare of the cabins and below  
The slanting parallels of port-holes, clear  
Of the exhaust from the condenser flow:  
But with the uneven falls she canted near  
The water line; the stern rose; the bow dipped;  
The crew groped for the link-releasing gear;  
The lever jammed; a stoker's jack-knife ripped  
The aft ropes through, which on the instant brought her

Number ten  
goes over  
the side



With rocking keel though safe upon the water.

Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—three  
Full knots beyond her running limit, she  
Was feeling out her port and starboard points,  
And testing rivets on her boiler joints.  
The needle on the gauge beyond the red,  
The blow-offs feathered at the funnel head.  
The draught-fans roaring at their loudest, now  
The quarter-master jams the helm hard-over,  
As the revolving searchlight beams uncover  
The columns of an iceberg on the bow,  
Then compensates this loss by daring gains  
Made by her passage through the open lanes.

The  
“Carpathia”

*East side, West side, all around the town,  
The tots sang “Ring-a-Rosie”  
“London Bridge is falling down”,  
Boys and girls together . . . .*

The Band

The cranks turn and the sixth and seventh swing  
Over and down, the “tiller” answering  
“Aye, Aye, sir” to the shouts of officers—  
“Row to the cargo ports for passengers.”  
The water line is reached, but the ports fail  
To open, and the crews of the boats hail  
The decks; receiving no response they pull  
Away from the ship’s side, less than half full.  
The eighth caught in the tackle foul is stuck  
Half-way. With sixty-five capacity,  
Yet holding twenty-four goes number three.

The sharp unnatural deflection, struck  
By the sea-level with the under row  
Of dipping port-holes at the forward, show  
How much she’s going by the head. Behind  
The bulkheads, sapping out their steel control,  
Is the warp of the bunker press inclined  
By many thousand tons of shifting coal.

The smoothest, safest passage to the sea  
Is made by number one—the next to go—  
Her space is forty—twelve her company:  
“Pull like the devil from her—harder—row!  
The minute that she founders, not a boat  
Within a mile around that will not follow.  
What nearly happened at Southampton? So  
Pull, pull, I tell you—not a chip afloat,  
God knows how far, her suction will not swallow.”

*Alexander's rag-time band. . . .*  
*It's the best band in the land. . . .*

“There goes the Special with the toffs. You'll make  
New York to-night rowing like that. You'll take  
Your death o' cold out there with all the fish  
And ice around.”

“Make sure your butlers dish  
You up your toddies now, and bring hot rolls  
For breakfast.”

“Don't forget the finger bowls.”

Voices from  
the deck

The engineering staff of thirty-five  
Are at their stations: those off-duty go  
Of their free will to join their mates below  
In the grim fight for steam, more steam, to drive  
The pressure through the pumps and dynamo.  
Knee-deep, waist-deep in water they remain,  
Not one of them seen on the decks again.  
The under braces of the rudder showing,  
The wing propeller blades began to rise,  
And with them, through the hawse-holes, water flowing—  
The angle could not but assault the eyes.  
A fifteen minutes, and the fo’c’sle head  
Was under. And five more, the sea had shut  
The lower entrance to the stairs that led  
From C deck to the boat deck—the short cut  
For the crew. Another five, the upward flow  
Had covered the wall brackets where the glow  
Diffusing from the frosted bulbs turned green  
Uncannily through their translucent screen.

White Star—Cunarder, forty miles apart,  
Still eighteen knots! From coal to flame to steam—  
Decision of a captain to redeem  
Errors of brain by hazards of the heart!  
Showers of sparks danced through the funnel smoke,  
The firemen’s shovels, rakes and slice-bars broke  
The clinkers, fed the fires, and ceaselessly  
The hoppers dumped the ashes on the sea.

On the  
“Carpathia”

As yet no panic, but none might foretell  
The moment when the sight of that oblique  
Breath-taking lift of the taffrail and the sleek  
And foamless undulation of the swell  
Might break in meaning on those diverse races,  
And give them common language. As the throng  
Came to the upper decks and moved along  
The incline, the contagion struck the faces  
With every lowering of a boat and backed  
Them towards the stern. And twice between the hush  
Of fear and utterance the gamut cracked,  
When with the call for women and the flare  
Of an exploding rocket, a short rush  
Was made for the boats—fifteen and two.  
'Twas nearly done—the sudden clutch and tear  
Of canvas, a flurry of fists and curses met  
By swift decisive action from the crew,  
Supported by a quartermaster's threat  
Of three revolver shots fired on the air.

But still the fifteenth went with five inside,  
Who, seeking out the shadows, climbed aboard  
And, lying prone and still, managed to hide  
Under the thwarts long after she was lowered.

*Jingle bells, jingle bells,  
Jingle all the way,  
O what fun. . . .*

“Some men in number two, sir!”

The boat swung

Back.

“Chuck the fellows out.”

Grabbed by the feet,

The lot were pulled over the gunwale and flung  
Upon the deck.

“Hard at that forward cleat!

A hand there for that after fall. Lower  
Away—port side, the second hatch, and wait.”

With six hands of his watch, the bosun's mate,  
Sent down to open up the gangway door,  
Was trapped and lost in a flooded alley way,  
And like the seventh, impatient of delay,  
The second left with room for twenty more.

The fidley leading from a boiler room  
Lay like a tortuous exit from a tomb.  
A stoker climbed it, feeling by the twist  
From vertical how steep must be the list.  
He reached the main deck where the cold night airs  
Enswathed his flesh with steam. Taking the stairs,  
He heard the babel by the davits, faced  
The forward, noticed how the waters raced  
To the break of the fo'c'sle and lapped  
The foremast root. He climbed again and saw  
The resolute manner in which Murdoch's rapped  
Command put a herd instinct under law;  
No life-preserver on, he stealthily  
Watched Phillips in his room, bent at the key,  
And thinking him alone, he sprang to tear  
The jacket off. He leaped too soon. "Take that!"  
The second stove him with a wrench. "Lie there,  
Till hell begins to singe your lids—you rat!"

But set against those scenes where order failed,  
Was the fine muster at the fourteenth where,  
Like a zone of calm along a thoroughfare,  
The discipline of sea-worn laws prevailed.  
No women answering the repeated calls,  
The men filled up the vacant seats: the falls  
Were slipping through the sailors' hands.  
When a steerage group of women, having fought  
Their way over five flights of stairs, were brought  
Bewildered to the rails. Without commands  
Barked from the lips of officers; without  
A protest registered in voice or face,  
The boat was drawn up and the men stepped out  
Back to the crowded stations with that free  
Barter of life for life done with the grace  
And air of a Castilian courtesy.

*I've just got here through Paris,  
From the sunny Southern shore,  
I to Monte Carlo went. . . .*

At the sixteenth—a woman wrapped her coat  
Around her maid and placed her in the boat;  
Was ordered in but seen to hesitate  
At the gunwale, and more conscious of her pride  
Than of her danger swiftly took her fate  
With open hands, and without show of tears  
Returned un murmuring to her husband's side;  
“We've been together now for forty years,  
Whither you go, I go.”

Isador and  
Ida Strauss

A boy of ten,  
Ranking himself within the class of men,  
Though given a seat, made up his mind to waive  
The privilege of his youth and size, and piled  
The inches on his stature as he gave  
Place to a Magyar woman and her child.

And men who had in the world's run of trade,  
Or in pursuit of the professions, made  
Their reputation, looked upon the scene  
Merely as drama in a life's routine:  
Millet was studying eyes as he would draw them  
Upon a canvas; Butt, as though he saw them  
In the ranks; Astor, social, debonair,  
Waved "Good-bye" to his bride—"See you to-morrow",  
And tapped a cigarette on a silver case;  
Men came to Guggenheim as he stood there  
In evening suit, coming this time to borrow  
Nothing but courage from his calm, cool face.

And others unobserved, of unknown name  
And race, just stood behind, pressing no claim  
Upon priority but rendering proof  
Of their oblation, quiet and aloof  
Within the maelstrom towards the rails. And some  
Wavered a moment with the panic urge,  
But rallied to attention on the verge  
Of flight as if the rattle of a drum  
From quarters faint but unmistakable  
Had put the stiffening in the blood to check  
The impulse of the feet, leaving the will  
No choice between the life-boats and the deck.

The four collapsibles, their lashings ripped,  
Half-dragged, half-lifted by the hooks, were slipped  
Over the side. The first two luckily  
Had but the forward distance to the sea.  
Its canvas edges crumpled up, the third  
Began to fill with water and transferred  
Its cargo to the twelfth, while number four,  
Abaft and higher, nose-dived and swamped its score.

The wireless cabin—Phillips in his place,  
Guessing the knots of the Cunarder's race.  
Water was swirling up the slanted floor  
Around the chair and sucking at his feet.  
*Carpathia's* call—the last one heard complete—  
*Expect to reach position half-past four.*  
The operators turned—Smith at the door  
With drawn incredulous face. “Men, you have done  
Your duty. I release you. Everyone  
Now for himself.” They stayed ten minutes yet,  
The power growing fainter with each blue  
Crackle of flame. Another stammering jet—  
*Virginian* heard “a tattering C.Q.”  
Again a try for contact but the code's  
Last jest had died between the electrodes.



Even yet the spell was on the ship: although  
The last life-boat had vanished, there was no  
Besieging of the heavens with a crescendo  
Of fears passing through terror into riot—  
But on all lips the strange narcotic quiet  
Of an unruffled ocean's innuendo.  
In spite of her deformity of line,  
Emergent like a crag out of the sea,  
She had the semblance of stability,  
Moment by moment furnishing no sign,  
So far as visible, of that decline  
Made up of inches crawling into feet.  
Then, with the electric circuit still complete,  
The miracle of day displacing night  
Had worked its fascination to beguile  
Direction of the hours and cheat the sight.  
Inside the recreation rooms the gold  
From Arab lamps shone on the burnished tile.  
What hindered the return to shelter while  
The ship clothed in that irony of light  
Offered her berths and cabins as a fold?  
And, was there not the *Californian*?  
Many had seen her smoke just over there,  
But two hours past—it seemed a harbour span—  
So big, so close, she could be hailed, they said;  
She must have heard the signals, seen the flare  
Of those white stars and changed at once her course.  
There under the *Titanic*'s foremast head,  
A lamp from the look-out cage was flashing Morse.  
No ship afloat unless deaf, blind and dumb  
To those three sets of signals but would come.  
And when the whizz of a rocket bade men turn  
Their faces to each other in concern  
At shattering facts upon the deck, they found  
Their hearts take reassurance with the sound  
Of the violins from the gymnasium, where  
The bandsmen in their blithe insouciance  
Discharged the sudden tension of the air  
With the fox-trot's sublime irrelevance.

The fo'c'sle had gone under the creep  
Of the water. Though without a wind, a lop  
Was forming on the wells now fathoms deep.  
The seventy feet—the boat deck's normal drop,  
Was down to ten. Rising, falling, and waiting,  
Rising again, the swell that edged and curled  
Around the second bridge, over the top  
Of the air-shafts, backed, resurged and whirled  
Into the stokehold through the fidley grating.

Under the final strain the two wire guys  
Of the forward funnel tugged and broke at the eyes:  
With buckled plates the stack leaned, fell and smashed  
The starboard wing of the flying bridge, went through  
The lower, then tilting at the davits crashed  
Over, driving a wave aboard that drew  
Back to the sea some fifty sailors and  
The captain with the last of the bridge command.

Out on the water was the same display  
Of fear and self-control as on the deck—  
Challenge and hesitation and delay,  
The quick return, the will to save, the race  
Of snapping oars to put the realm of space  
Between the half-filled life-boats and the wreck.  
The swimmers whom the waters did not take  
With their instant death-chill struck out for the wake  
Of the nearer boats, gained on them, hailed  
The steersmen and were saved: the weaker failed  
And fagged and sank. A man clutched at the rim  
Of a gunwale, and a woman's jewelled fist  
Struck at his face: two others seized his wrist,  
As he released his hold, and gathering him  
Over the side, they staunched the cut from the ring.  
And there were many deeds envisaging  
Volitions where self-preservation fought  
Its red primordial struggle with the "ought",  
In those high moments when the gambler tossed  
Upon the chance and uncomplaining lost.

Aboard the ship, whatever hope of dawn  
Gleamed from the *Carpathia's* riding lights was gone,  
For every knot was matched by each degree  
Of list. The stern was lifted bodily  
When the bow had sunk three hundred feet, and set  
Against the horizon stars in silhouette  
Were the blade curves of the screws, hump of the rudder.  
The downward pull and after buoyancy  
Held her a minute poised but for a shudder  
That caught her frame as with the upward stroke  
Of the sea a boiler or a bulkhead broke.

Climbing the ladders, gripping shroud and stay,  
Storm-rail, ringbolt or fairlead, every place  
That might befriend the clutch of hand or brace  
Of foot, the fourteen hundred made their way  
To the heights of the aft decks, crowding the inches  
Around the docking bridge and cargo winches.  
And now that last salt tonic which had kept  
The valour of the heart alive—the bows  
Of the immortal seven that had swept  
The strings to outplay, outdie their orders, ceased.  
Five minutes more, the angle had increased  
From eighty on to ninety when the rows  
Of deck and port-hole lights went out, flashed back  
A brilliant second and again went black.  
Another bulkhead crashed, then following  
The passage of the engines as they tore  
From their foundations, taking everything  
Clean through the bows from 'midships with a roar  
Which drowned all cries upon the deck and shook  
The watchers in the boats, the liner took  
Her thousand fathoms journey to her grave.

\* \* \* \* \*

And out there in the starlight, with no trace  
Upon it of its deed but the last wave  
From the *Titanic* fretting at its base,  
Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,  
The gray shape with the palaeolithic face  
Was still the master of the longitudes.

## THE 6000

For creatures of this modern breed,  
Reared from the element of flame,  
Designed to match a storm for speed,  
Ionia would have found a name,  
Like Mercury or Bucephalus—  
Some picturesque immortal label  
That lifts a story into fable,  
Out of the myths of Uranus;  
Then changed its root to demonize  
The nature of its strength and size  
With fictions out of Tartarus.

Those giants of Vulcan, leather-skinned,  
Whose frightful stare monocular  
Made mad the coursers of the wind,  
And chased the light of the morning star  
Away from the Sicilian shore,  
Would have been terror-blind before  
This forehead which, had it been known  
In Greek or Scandinavian lore,  
Had turned the hierarchs to stone,  
Had battered down the Martian walls,  
Reduced to dust Jove's arsenals,  
Or rammed the battlements of Thor.

His body black as Erebus  
Accorded with the hue of night;  
His central eye self-luminous  
Threw out a cone of noon-day light,  
Which split the gloom and then flashed back  
The diamond levels of the track.  
No ancient poet ever saw  
Just such a monster as could draw  
The Olympian tonnage of a load  
Like this along an iron road;  
Or ever thought that such a birth—  
The issue of an inventor's dream—  
With breath of fire and blood of steam,  
Could find delivery on this earth.  
In his vast belly was a pit,  
Which even Homer would admit,  
Or Dante, searching earth and hell,  
Possessed no perfect parallel.  
Evolved from no Plutonian forge,  
The tender, like a slave, that followed,  
Conveyed bitumen to his gorge,  
Which on the instant it was swallowed  
Ran black through crimson on to white.  
Above the mass floated a swirl  
Of crystal shapes, agate and pearl  
And rose, like imps a-chase, and light  
As thistledown, while the blast roared  
With angry temperatures that soared  
To seven hundred Fahrenheit.  
Outside, the engine's dorsal plate,  
Above the furnace door ajar,  
Revealed the boiler's throbbing rate,  
By dial fingers animate,  
Like pulses at the jugular.

For every vital inch of steel,  
A vibrant indicator read  
Two hundred pounds plus twenty-five,  
Waiting for the hour to drive  
Their energy upon the wheel  
In punches from the piston head.

And there another one supplied  
The measure of the irrigation,  
Whereby the lubricating tide,  
Through linear runs and axle curves,  
Made perfect his articulation.  
And ramifying copper wire  
Made up the system of his nerves,  
In keeping with his lungs of fire.

Now with his armoured carapace  
On head and belly, back and breast,  
The Taurian prepared to face  
The blurring stretches of the west.  
To him it was of no concern  
The evening gale was soon to turn  
To the full stature of a storm  
That would within an hour transform  
The ranges for a thousand miles,  
Close up all human thoroughfares,  
Sweep down through canyons and defiles,  
And drive the cougars to their lairs.

A lantern flashed out a command,  
A bell was ringing as a hand  
Clutched at a throttle, and the bull,  
At once obedient to the pull,  
Began with bellowing throat to lead  
By slow accelerating speed  
Six thousand tons of caravan  
Out to the spaces—there to toss  
The blizzard from his path across  
The prairies of Saskatchewan.

## THE BRAWLER IN *WHO'S WHO*

The doctors claimed they never had  
A case to handle quite so bad—  
A record weight, abnormal girth,  
And such disturbance at a birth.  
The infant murdered his twin brother  
And shortly after that his mother,  
To celebrate his debut on the earth.

Defying pedagogic rules,  
He made a Bedlam of his schools,  
And wrecked them from the floor to rafter,  
As one by one, with insane laughter,  
Harrowed in soul and gaunt in feature,  
His nurse, his father, and his teacher  
Wasted, and passed into the great Hereafter.

Then came the War! and soon his name  
Was but a synonym for fame;  
The allied armies and their foes  
Alike were stricken by his blows.  
And, peace declared, he took the thanks  
Of both; returned high in the ranks—  
Lieutenant-Colonel with two D.S.O.s.

He married and his three young wives  
In quick succession lost their lives—  
A Gaul, a Teuton, and a Briton.  
Just how those marital blooms were smitten,  
The colonel never would confess:  
They say the tale, now with the Press,  
Remains by order of the Court unwritten.



Thence to a fortress—whereupon  
He rounded up the garrison,  
Heading that great historic riot  
Concerning roaches in the diet.  
A witness swore a brigadier  
Gave him the bayonet from the rear  
Which laid the brawler flat and strangely quiet.

For one whole day an undertaker  
Worked hard upon this mischief-maker  
To soften down the muscle twists,  
Then called in two evangelists  
Who managed somehow to erase  
The indentations of his face  
But failed to straighten out his knotted fists.

They buried him. That very night  
With his left hook and lethal right  
He put a dozen shades to rout.  
The devil refereed the bout  
And spread the rumour—so I'm told,  
That Death failing to get him cold,  
Had fouled him with a technical knock-out.

## THE DYING EAGLE

A light had gone out from his vanquished eyes;  
His head was cupped within the hunch of his shoulders;  
His feathers were dull and bedraggled; the tips  
Of his wings sprawled down to the edge of his tail.  
He was old, yet it was not his age  
Which made him roost on the crags  
Like a rain-drenched raven  
On the branch of an oak in November.  
Nor was it the night, for there was an hour  
To go before sunset. An iron had entered  
His soul which bereft him of pride and of realm,  
Had struck him to-day; for up to noon  
That crag had been his throne.  
Space was his empire, bounded only  
By forest and sky and the flowing horizons.  
He had outfought, outlived all his rivals,  
And the eagles that now were poised over glaciers  
Or charting the coastal outlines of clouds  
Were his by descent: they had been tumbled  
Out of their rocky nests by his mate,  
In the first trial of their fledgeling spins.

Only this morning the eyes of the monarch  
Were held in arrest by a silver flash  
Shining between two peaks of the ranges—  
A sight which galvanized his back,  
Bristled the feathers on his neck,  
And shot little runnels of dust where his talons  
Dug recesses in the granite.  
Partridge? Heron? Falcon? Eagle?  
Game or foe? He would reconnoitre.

Catapulting from the ledge.  
He flew at first with rapid beat,  
Level, direct: then with his grasp  
Of spiral strategy in fight,  
He climbed the orbit  
With swift and easy undulations,  
And reached position where he might  
Survey the bird—for bird it was;  
But such a bird as never flew  
Between the heavens and the earth  
Since pterodactyls, long before  
The birth of condors, learned to kill  
And drag their carrion up the Andes.

The eagle stared at the invader,  
Marked the strange bat-like shadow moving  
In leagues over the roofs of the world,  
Across the passes and moraines,  
Darkening the vitriol blue of the mountain lakes.  
Was it a flying dragon? Head,  
Body and wings, a tail fan-spread  
And taut like his own before the strike;  
And there in front two whirling eyes  
That took unshuttered  
The full blaze of the meridian.  
The eagle never yet had known  
A rival that he would not grapple,  
But something in this fellow's length  
Of back, his plated glistening shoulders,  
Had given him pause. And did that thunder  
Somewhere in his throat not argue  
Lightning in his claws? And then  
The speed—was it not double his own?  
But what disturbed him most, angered  
And disgraced him was the unconcern  
With which this supercilious bird  
Cut through the aquiline dominion,  
Snubbing the ancient suzerain  
With extra-territorial insolence,  
And disappeared.

So evening found him on the crags again,  
This time with sloven shoulders  
And nerveless claws.  
Dusk had outridden the sunset by an hour  
To haunt his unhorizoned eyes.  
And soon his flock flushed with the chase  
Would be returning, threading their glorious curves  
Up through the crimson archipelagoes  
Only to find him there—  
Deaf to the mighty symphony of wings,  
And brooding  
Over the lost empire of the peaks.

## THE *ROOSEVELT* AND THE *ANTINOE*

Her high freeboard towering above the pier,  
She lay beneath the lift of spars and blocks:  
Her port life month by month and year by year  
Knew nothing but the humdrum of the docks;—  
The rumble of trucks along the warehouse floors,  
The blare of sirens, shout of stevedores,  
The play of tackle under the gruff mood  
Of winches, clatter of hooks and booms, subdued  
To the credit balance that must never fail  
The ledgers of Hoboken Lines—so she,  
Built for the tides of commerce on the sea,  
Was under schedule in an hour to sail.

In the Commissioner's room it was agreed  
*Between the Master and the mariners,*  
That as the men received *per month or run*  
Their wage in dollars and were guaranteed  
By statutes of the State that they might draw  
Their scale of rations—*bread and meat and water,*  
*Lemon and lime* and such *prescribed by law,*  
With *means of warmth in weather;* they, the crew,  
Should pledge themselves to conduct, *faithful, true,*  
*And orderly, in honest, sober manner;*  
*At all times in their duties diligent;*  
*To the Master's lawful word obedient,*  
*In everything relating to the vessel—*  
*Safety of passengers, cargo and store,*  
*Whether on board, in boats, or on the shore.*

And with the reading thus concluded, both  
The parties to the contract gave their oath  
Of signature. Items of birthplace, age,  
Height and description then were written in,  
Each sailor's time of service with his wage-  
Allotment, and address of Next-of-Kin.  
So, with their sea-bags on their backs, the crew  
Went up the gangway to the foc's'le; threw  
Their dunnage on the bunks; soon to be lined,  
Two hundred of them, on the deck; assigned  
Stations and duties, as the bos'n drew  
The *likeliest* man, his mate the next; and then,  
Alternately the Watches claimed the men,  
In that renowned and tacit lottery  
Full of the hoary savour of the sea.

The mooring cables splashing from the bollards,  
Three stern and bow tugs moved her to the stream,  
And slowly swung her head round with the ebb-tide;  
Were cast off; when the liner on her steam  
Proceeded down the channels of the Hudson,  
Into the outer harbour, to the sea,  
And on past Sandy Hook where finally  
She set her course which led her to the *Great  
Circle Track* for Queenstown, Plymouth, Cherbourg  
(Service of passenger and mail), thence straight  
To Bremen with the body of her freight.

Thursday morning rose without a sun,  
Sleet in the air: the wind was westerly:  
The river breeze of Wednesday had begun  
To stiffen to a whole gale on the sea.  
By noon the stations at the coast were flashing  
Warnings, making smaller ships delay  
Their date of sailing. Vessels under canvas,  
Attempting shorter trips in gulf or bay,  
Crawled back to harbour double-reefed, while others,  
Still further to the east, that could not make  
Return,—sails blown to ribbons from the gaskets—  
Were forced to scud under bare poles to take  
The luck ahead. Long threat lay in the signals.  
The charts traced not a cyclone's come-and-go,—  
The fury soon begun and as soon ended—  
But those broad areas on which storms grow,  
Northern and Oceanic, where each hour,  
Feeding on the one before, transmits  
In turn its own inheritance of power  
Unto the next until the hammer hits  
A hemisphere.

Along the eastern sea-board,  
And inland to one-half the continent,  
Thousands of dials in studio and station  
Were “off the air” by an ungrudged consent—  
That the six-hundred-metre-wave might keep  
Upon the sea that night its high command  
For the great business that was nigh at hand,  
With deep already calling unto deep.

Friday evening, with Cape Race reporting  
Big seas with thickening fog followed by snow,  
Barometer still falling, very low.

Morning of Saturday! the gale now rising  
To the dimensions of a hurricane,  
With gusts that boxed the compass of a vane,  
Sweeping around the headlands to contest  
The arrogated highway from the West.

Evening again, and in its power to smite  
The snowy cordon with its warning light,  
The Cape's revolving beacon was as sick  
As the guttering limit of a candle-wick.  
And never—it was claimed—had tides so climbed  
A slope of shoal from such a depth to feed  
The tumult of the upper waves; so timed  
Direction with their volume and their speed,  
To meet both wave and wind that all might lock  
In foam above so high a line of rock.

South of this Cape within these hours, the *Roosevelt*  
Was driving East by North, with her decks stripped;  
Her lower ventilator cowls unshipped,  
The shafts plugged; battened and wedged the hatches;  
Bell-mouths full-bore discharging from the bilge-pumps  
Under the straining hull; thirty degrees  
Measuring her roll within the heavier seas.  
The facing of the 'midship house was spattered  
At seventy feet. Captain and quarter-master  
Saw nothing legible upon the face  
Of day or night: the sextant in its case,  
The navigators guessed the ship's position.



Abaft—the smoke came out, to be driven back  
In eddies low and fierce against the white  
Salt crust upon the surface of the stack,  
Then, split in billows to the left and right,  
Dispersed before it found a line of flight.  
The double lines of life-boats lay like rows  
Of mastodons asleep in polar snows.  
Ahead—appeared under the steamer's light  
Truncated day between two walls of night.  
Sometimes the for'ard derrick-posts were blotted  
Out; the hooded shapes of winches squatted  
Upon the deck; and with each long roll, patches  
Of white laggin' from the steampipes swirled  
And blended with the foam around the hatches.  
The sea itself was gone save when it hurled  
The body of a wave across the bow;  
Soon even this was lost to the bridge, and now  
Behind the weather-cloth it seemed the world  
Was carried with the last gust to the void.

Fried stepped inside the Pilot House to get  
Another reading from the aneroid.  
An hour ago the adjusting hand was set  
At twenty-nine—the low foul weather mark,  
And the indicator for that hour had stood  
Directly underneath as though it were glued  
To the card. He came nearer, full of dark  
Conjecture, tapped the glass, and the hand fell,  
The barest fraction but perceptible.  
Entering by slow, inexorable rate,  
The tragic ranges of the *twenty-eight*.  
Later he returned; the oracle  
Yielded this time a record to appal  
The heart. Muttering “twenty-eight (point) three,”  
He shot a glance to the right where on the wall  
He found, in confirmation, the line drawn  
To the same level on the mercury.  
'Twas four o'clock on a North Atlantic sea,  
Three hours before a January dawn.  
The wind having slipped the gale's leash was soon  
To match the wing-shod speed of a typhoon:  
The storm of nineteen twenty-six was on.

Somewhere far-off in that unwavering gloom,  
Cramped in the quarters of a wireless room,  
A boy was seated, tapping at a key.  
Water ran along the floor: his knee  
Was braced against a table to resist  
The dangerous angle of a starboard list.  
Upon his right a wireless log-chart lay  
With many entries for so young a day.  
He reached and pushed a button and the drone  
Of a generator started. A switch thrown,  
He rapped the key, then instantly transferred  
To the receiving set; listened with keen  
Thrust of his face; and with no answer heard,  
Changed over, going through the same routine.  
But once when on the panel a blue flame,  
Crackling like tearing linen at the gap,  
Responded to a more than hectic tap  
Of the finger, dumb and drowsy symbols came  
To life. Through aërials screaming like curlews,  
Magnetic messengers carried the name  
Of a disabled vessel with the news  
Of water in the stokehold and a crew's  
Vigil upon a flooded deck. Legions  
Unnumbered moving at the rate of light,  
Pushed out beyond all navigated regions,  
Exploring every cranny of the night,  
Reaching out through dusky corridors  
Above the sea to uninhabited shores,  
Or taking undecoded human cries  
Below the keel to the Atlantic crypts.  
And millions undulated to the skies,  
Through snow and vapour and the cloud eclipse,  
Past day and night and the terrestrial air,  
To add their wasted sum to a plethora  
Of speed and power in those void spaces where  
Light-years go drifting by Andromeda.  
And yet in all that sterile plenitude  
A few were harnessed to a human mood.

The cabin of the *Roosevelt* radio!  
Three dots, three dashes, and the dots again—  
(The call sign) *British freighter, Antinoe.*  
*Don't know position. Sixteen hours ago,*  
*Rough latitude—North forty-six and ten,*  
*Rough longitude—thirty-nine, five-eight.*  
*Been hove-to ever since; the present rate*  
*Of drift to East, two knots (approximate).*

Fried took the message, reading nothing more  
Than that a ship was sending out a call  
For help, and that since noon the day before  
She had not known her bearings. This was all  
The cryptogram surrendered for a clue.  
A fresh despatch was brought two minutes later,  
The *Aquitania* calling—“Which of two  
Should undertake location of the freighter?”  
Their own positions given, 'twas agreed—  
Cunarder farther off by hours, pressed  
To the muzzle of the storm and moving West,—  
The job might therefore be assigned to Fried.

Orders were given to the wireless chief  
To bring the direction-finder into play,  
Capture the signals and report at brief  
Periods—and the ship was on her way.  
Taking his station at the binnacle,  
The head-phones on, he listened while he swung  
The handwheel slowly to the right until  
The loop above the Pilot House that hung  
The wires came broadside to the signal cry.  
The sounds grew fainter, faded out, came back  
With further revolution but to die  
Again with the reversal of the track.  
Underneath, the hair-line on the face  
Of the dummy compass card had kept its pace  
With every move, faithful to every trial,  
And like a dogma that might take denial  
From neither sense nor reason, pointed *There*,  
At a figure stamped in black upon the dial:  
For when it moved to either side with the wheel,  
It came back ever with the aerial square  
To the source of the signal like a steadying keel  
Demanding its position. How far? Where,  
Along this line, now tossing like a chip  
Upon those crests and hollows, lay the ship,  
It could not tell—one hundred miles or two  
It might have been for all the seamen knew.

Back in the wireless room the call came in  
With the staccato of a bulletin;  
Triads of notes spare and reiterant,  
A whistle shot with burr and sibilant—  
The international prelude which the sea  
Beats out in storm from human veins to express  
The fever pulses of its own distress.  
Whether it was the sharp economy  
Of pauses in the breaks, or some known trick  
Of the ear to catch the timbre of a click,  
A pressure or a crotchet in the tapping,  
The operator felt someone was rapping  
A message out with white intensity,  
In life-death finger action on a key,  
Within the cabin of the *Antinoe*.

*Tarpaulins ripped. Another hatch let go.  
Bad list. Grain swelling fast. Seams loosening now.  
All life-boats gone from starboard davits. How  
Many knots are you making? How far away  
Do you reckon you are?*

*Ten knots: now eight:*

*Now ten—top speed allowed by sea.*

*You say*

*That we sound nearer to you? Cannot wait  
Much longer.*

*Twelve.*

*Find it hard to steer,*

*Ice-chest has crashed into the steering gear.*

*Coming.*

Six o'clock. Now seven. The dots  
Of the freighter answered by the liner's knots,  
Followed by danger when the sea would turn  
And test the rivets from the stem to stern  
With longitudinal blows, hurling cascades  
Upon the bow, till with a burial wave  
The engines instantly would stop to save  
The tail-shaft from the racing of the blades.

A longer silence; and a deep suspicion.  
Destruction of the ship? or loss of power?  
Blindness was coming with the light of morning,  
Ten minutes, twenty, now a half-an-hour.  
*Where are you, Antinoe?*—The keys kept rapping,  
But the receiving phones were dumb to space,  
And in the Pilot House there came no signal,  
The hand lay palsied on the compass face.

The operator meantime on the wreck  
Had left his room and crossed a slushing deck,  
Reporting to his captain. When he tried  
Return, a wave upon the weather side  
Reached and caught the last port life-boat; smashed  
It from the davits down the incline; crashed  
The forward wall of the wireless cabin; sheared  
It clean. Matching death with strategy,  
The sailors took their chance with each spent sea;  
The fragments were removed; the way was cleared;  
The set put in emergency repairs  
And human speech again was on the air.

Eleven o'clock. Fried knowing that he neared  
The ship's position by the growing power  
Of the signals slowed the *Roosevelt* down to scour  
The closer plotted area, fighting squall  
On top of storm, boring through a pall  
Of snow, till at the heart of the wave-zone,  
With Jack reversed, the freighter like a lone  
Sea-mallard with a broken wing was seen  
Ahead, lee-rail awash, taking it green  
At the bow.

*Do you wish to abandon?*

*Not just yet;*

*Endeavouring to fix steering gear, and get  
Hatches secured. Water in stokehold. Grain  
Cargo shifted. Trying to maintain  
Sufficient steam to heave-to and survive  
Till weather moderate. Crew twenty-five.  
Can you spread oil to windward? Please stand-by.*

But hard as the three engineers might try,  
The leaks outraced the pumps. The daylight grew  
To dusk, the hatches opened and the crew  
Signalled for rescue. Fried, a quarter mile  
To windward, poured his fuel oil on the sea.  
Giving, that distance, what the *Roosevelt* lee  
Afforded, edging in and backing while  
He waited for a sign of the wind's subsiding,  
Watching the scud of the waves, the darkening sky,  
The drifting snow and the freighter heavily riding.

Then suddenly at nine as the squall increased,  
With a smother of black hail the *Roosevelt's* light  
Could not pierce through, the bridge look-out lost sight  
Of the *Antinoe* and the wireless contact ceased.



*Dead Slow!* The *Roosevelt* took a risk as great  
As if the air shook with the roar of reefs.  
The wireless and the navigating chiefs  
Fried summoned to the flying bridge to debate  
The course. What with the hammer of the sea  
To windward, and that anvil on the lee,  
Judgment and will were warped by doubt. Suspend  
Pursuit? Keep steerage-way and just hold on?  
For at this hour with sight and hearing gone,  
All felt within their blood they could depend  
On nothing but an elemental trust  
In bulkheads; in the physics of a dark  
Equation, where with each remorseless thrust  
Down to the starboard limits of the arc,  
The ship should take under unheard commands  
The port recoil, a pivoted keel, and then,  
At the crux of the port roll find again  
The firm up-heave of Atlantean hands.  
On such a faith, borne in by night and snow,  
Rested the riddle of the *Antinoe*.

Was she beyond that scurrying barricade,  
To come back on a wave-lift, as a score  
Of doubtful moments she had done before  
When gusts had passed? Or had the *Roosevelt* strayed  
Beyond the vernier of her calculation,  
Caught suddenly by a winter vertigo,  
After reaching the *Antinoe's* location  
By a straight miracle of navigation?  
But why no message? Flooded dynamo?  
Followed by exhausted batteries?  
The wireless room demolished by the seas?  
Or aerials blown off like a wind-swept kite  
From a wallowing ship beam-to and rudderless?  
Or had she foundered? This the likelier guess.

The ship with unremitting search despite  
The chances stacked against her, steamed on far  
Into the night, past midnight and the slow  
Hours, blindly heading into snow;  
Not a sextant reading off a star;  
No radio now with subtle fingering  
Untied the snarl of the freighter's wayward course.  
Nothing but log and the dead reckoning,  
And the *Roosevelt's* instruments stating the force  
Of wind, direction and the tidal stress,  
Nothing but these and the wheel's luck to trail her,—  
Unless there might be added to the sum  
Of them an unexplored residuum—  
The bone-and-marrow judgment of a sailor.

But all this time signals were streaming through  
The ship's antennae; *Solvang in collision,*  
*Bulkheads crushed, and sinking; the Curlew*  
*A-leak, and under jury-rig, Carlstad*  
*Searching; Carlotta helping Orebro;*  
*The Bremen hastening to the Laristan,*  
*Engine trouble, serious, twenty-two*  
*Aboard. No record of the Antinoe.*

Each hour the searchlight moving on its swivel,  
Traced but a wide circumference of yeast,  
Bounding the clash of forces on the ocean,  
With endless lorries heading for the east.  
At times the sea would snow the *Roosevelt* under,  
As shearing a wave, her bow came to the luff,  
Or as she turned with sharp careening angle  
To avoid a shadow, putting beam to trough.  
The scent was cold by now. Few words were spoken  
Between the officer-on-watch and captain;  
The *Antinoe* was sunk by every token  
And every law known to the wind and weather.

“With such a list, no shift or pumps could right her.”

“A dollar flashlight! All she’s got to signal.”

“If she’s afloat, ’twould take a hawk to sight her.”

“A flash upon the weather quarter?”

“No.

Her power gone, that handlight wouldn’t show

A hundred yards.”

“A dog’s chance for a boat

To get across . . . assuming she’s afloat.”

“What do you reckon her drift?”

“Port easy! Hold her!

Let her take that one on her starboard shoulder.”

Feeling her shifted courses over-run,  
And yet uncertain whether she should tack  
Upon a chosen port or starboard track,  
The baffled liner like a water-dog  
Would dip her nose to the sea and then up-rear  
Her head with black hawse nostrils keen to flair  
A flying quarry covered by a fog.  
Dawn and noon and now the afternoon.  
“We picked her up”—so ran the captain’s log—  
“One point upon the starboard bow at four  
O’clock, with nineteen hours of delay,  
And sixty miles from her last known position.”  
Her navigating bridge was swept away;  
Flooded, steam off, lights out, a closing day,—  
The time again awaited Fried’s decision.  
To pour fuel upon the sea to assuage  
Its fury; make a high-decked vessel ride  
Steady; maintain sufficient weather gage,  
Four hundred tons of pressure at the side,  
To avoid the crisis when a wave should toss  
Her like a dinghy on the smaller ship,  
Beam against beam, or stem to rail, to rip  
The plates like cardboard to a double loss;  
And yet mindful of this first charge, to crawl  
Within a narrow margin to the hulk,  
To take advantage of the liner’s bulk,  
As windbreak for a life-boat, and forestall  
The second disappearance in a squall  
Of the *Antinoe*;—in fine, to run a race  
For a crew’s life with the storm laps in advance;  
To outstare Death to his salt countenance,  
Made up the grim agenda on his face.

Fried took a turn upon the weather deck,  
Saw little of assurance in the sky,  
Came back to the lee-wing, gauging with his eye  
The span his boat must cover to the wreck;  
Made up his mind alone on the degree  
Of risk; issued a call; in such a sea  
And cause the order needed no command,  
Only the heart's assent unto the hand.

The men answering the summons with a will,  
Came aft; were picked for hardihood and skill.  
Their names as on the shipping register:—  
Robert Miller, the first officer,  
Commanding; Ernest Heitman, bos'n's mate,  
No relative; Uno Wertanen,  
Master-at-arms, aged twenty-eight, a Finn,  
His mother (Helsingfors), the next of kin;  
Sam Fisher; Franelich, an Austrian;  
Bauer, a naturalized American;  
Maurice Jacobowitz of New York State;  
And a Dane named Alexander Fugelsang—  
Made up the life-boat complement of eight.

A dozen orders from the bos'n rang—  
“Stand by and clear the falls for running; man  
The cranks; let go the gripes.” Winch ropes began  
To move, winding through the leading blocks;  
Slowly the boat was lifted from the chocks.  
The crew holding suspended lines that ran  
Along the spring-stay, freeboards from the stern  
To bow were jacked to gunwales; at a turn  
Of the quadrant screw both boat and davit swung  
Outboard. The oars and boat-hooks kept her free.  
With painters taut at fore and aft, she hung  
For her sixty feet of journey to the sea.  
Below, like creatures of a fabled past,  
From their deep hidings in unlighted caves,  
The long processions of great-bellied waves  
Cast forth their monstrous births which with grey fang  
Appeared upon the leeward side, ran fast  
Along the broken crests, then coiled and sprang  
For the boat impatient of its slow descent  
Into their own inviolate element.  
A shout or instant gesture of the hand  
Was answered by the double roar of winches.  
The ropes ran through the iron cleats by inches,  
Straining, checking, running on demand  
Of the fore-and-after levels. “Lower away!”  
A steady longer roar, then a moment clear.  
Of the side. “Avast! Let go releasing gear!”  
The blocks shot from the slip-links evenly,  
And number one had settled on the sea.

Here was a trial far beyond her training;  
Her tests had been accorded her in weather,  
And in blue water where there was no danger,—  
Where, governed by the stroke, all pull together,  
And every rhythmic blade falls to the feather  
Against the breeze. Now like a colt untried,  
She bucked control and though she carried well  
The top of the shorter waves, she plunged and shied  
The moment that she reached the top of a swell,  
And went down sidling to the trough and flung  
The crew in the water. Under discipline  
Of many a drill, they struggled back and clung  
To the running loops and cork-grips, clambered in,  
And started for the wreck; but with recall  
From the bridge, they brought her to the wind and tried  
Over a wave-barrel to reach the side  
Of the ship when, twenty feet away, a squall  
Combined with tide-rip caught the boat and threw  
The men back to the waves. Six of the crew  
Clutching ladders and lines which might afford  
A toe or finger hold were drawn aboard.  
Heitman, crushed between the ship and boat,  
Slipped from a life-buoy and was seen to float  
Senseless away, down by the liner's stern,  
Where he was lost under the wave and churn  
Of the propeller. Wertanen, who twice  
And willingly released his own firm grip  
To take within his teeth a rope eye-splice,  
Swam fifteen yards to leeward of the ship  
To help an exhausted mate, and paid his price  
In drifting past the adventure of return.  
By help of current and by desperate swim,  
A wave pitched him against the life-boat stern.  
He clutched the running-line and then the rim  
Of the gunwale; tried to get his weight athwart,  
But oil had greased his hands and he fell short.  
The crew could see him grab and plunge and cling,  
Using his legs as rudders so to swing  
Her head around to the wreck and with the sheer  
Abandon of his youth to try to steer  
His open, wilful, single-handed craft

So close to the side that wind might bear it aft,  
And round the freighter's stern to where he knew  
Life-belts and lines were waiting, with the crew  
Gathered at the lee taffrail. Jockeying the boat  
Within three fathoms length he tried to grip  
A belt, but oil had made his fingers slip,  
And oil was in his eyes and in his throat,  
And the last thing sighted from the liner's deck,  
Near to the close of an hour's futile searching,  
Were tossing oars and a frenzied life-boat lurching  
From wave to wave, a gunshot from the wreck,  
And here and there as far as might be scanned  
Within the spindrift, a tide-revolving speck—  
A belt perhaps or human head or hand.

From every quarter came the night confounding  
The unhorizoned sea with sky and air,  
And to the crew of the *Antinoe*—despair.  
At ten o'clock the *Roosevelt* bugle sounding  
From the saloon stairway a call to prayer!  
With separated phrase and smothered word  
An immemorial psalm became a blurred  
Bulwark under erosion by the sea.  
Beneath the maddening crashes of the wind  
Crumbled the grammar of the liturgy.



*God of all comfort . . . .*

*humbly beseeching thee . . .*

*We do acknowledge . . . . . sinned . . .*

*Most merciful . . . confess . . . grievously . . .*

*Who spreadest out the heavens, crownest the years.*

*. . . . . Grant us we pray thee . . . . .*

*Who commandest the seas and they do obey thee.*

*Nigh unto all . . . . .*

*. . . . . our distresses and fears.*

*. . . . . A father to the fatherless.*

*Followed the fragments of great passages:*

*I am the Resurrection . . . . . We*

*. . . . . commit . . . . . bodies to the deep . . .*

*Corruptible . . . . . Of those who sleep . . .*

*. . . . . shall put on immortality.*

And then brief tributes to the seamen drowned,  
While Miller and his men were ranged around,  
Bandaged in head and wrist, with arms in sling,  
And others who had come, despite the warning,  
To take their places were envisaging  
The job that lay before them in the morning.

Meanwhile outside, echoing the ritual—  
*Now unto Him who is able to do . . . .*  
*Exceeding abundantly . . .* a wild antiphonal  
Of shriek and whistle from the shrouds broke through,  
Blending with thuds as though some throat had laughed  
In thunder down the ventilating shaft;  
And the benediction ended with the crack  
Of a stanchion on the starboard beam, the beat  
Of a loose block, with the fast run of feet,  
Where a flying guy careered about the stack;  
Then following the omen of a lull,  
The advent of a wave which like a wall  
Crashed down in volleys flush against the hull,  
Lifting its white and shafted spume to fall  
Across the higher decks; and through it all,  
As on the dial of the telegraph,  
Governed by derelict and hurricane,  
*Rang Stop, Full Speed Astern or Slow or Half,*  
The irregular pulse and cough of the engine strain,  
The quick smite of the blades against a wave,  
And always threat, escape, threat, then the brave  
Lift of the keel, and still that breathless sink,  
Dividing up the seconds, nearing the brink  
Of a grey, unplumbed precipice and grave.

Within this hour a priest clothed with the whole  
Habiliment and dignity of office—  
Black cassock, surplice white and purple stole—  
Feeling that from an older faith would come  
The virtue of a rubric yet unspoken  
For the transition of a soul, a crumb  
Of favour from a cupboard not bereft  
Of all by the night's intercessions, left  
His room; climbed up the stairs; pushed through a door  
Storm-wedged, and balancing along the floor  
Of the deck to where a davit stood, he placed  
His grip securely on a guy rope there.  
Lifting up a crucifix, he faced  
The starboard quarter, looking down the waste  
Of the waters casting back the flickering light  
Of the steamer, where two bodies without wrap  
Of shroud, deprived of their deck funeral rite,  
Swung to the rune of the sea's stern foster-lap.

*Ego vos absolvo . . . . . ab omnibus  
Peccatis et censuris . . . . .  
. . . . . in nomine  
Patris et Filii et Spiritus . . . . .  
Sancti . . . . . Attende Domine  
. . . . . et miserere  
Hear . . . O stella maris . . . Mary.*

But no Gennesaret of Galilee  
Conjured to its level by the sway  
Of a hand or a word's magic was this sea,  
Contesting with its iron-alien mood,  
Its pagan face, its own primordial way,  
The pale heroic suasion of a rood.  
And the absolving Father, when the ship  
Righted her keel between two giant rolls,  
Recrossed himself, and letting go his hold,  
Returned to berth, murmuring *God rest their souls*.

And now throughout the middle of the night,  
The *Roosevelt* took the hurricane, hove-to.  
Into her own defence the captain knew  
Must enter all the sinews of her fight—  
Her searchlight ripping fissures as through dark  
Parchment where at times the freighter, set  
In a frame of tossing silver, showed the stark  
And streaming edges of her silhouette,  
Battered but yet miraculously afloat,  
Heaving, subsiding with her lathered flank,  
Like a bison smitten from the loin to shank,  
Surrendering to the wolves about her throat.

And every hour in the wireless room,  
The shards of cries as by an incantation,  
Were joined to an Atlantic orchestration;  
Epic and drama rising to illumine  
Disaster—now the call and now reply;  
The *Bremen* radio—“still standing by  
The *Laristan*. Six rescued. Will resume  
At daylight.”

“*Solvang* lost. All saved but two.”

“*Sparta* reported foundering. Left no clue.”  
Daylight and wreckage. *Bremen* calling still—  
“The *Laristan* gone down with rest of crew.”  
With every tap of key, the *Roosevelt* knew  
How little would the game depend on skill  
Of hand or resolution of the will,  
How much would all the morrow’s gain and loss  
Turn on the unknown chances of a toss.

At four o'clock the *Roosevelt* moved to windward,  
And drew again upon her fuel tanks;  
Only the whitened edges left the combers,  
Like a growth of harvest stubble from the banks  
Of rolling prairies that a fire had gleaned.  
Still black and dangerous stretches intervened.  
At six o'clock the flag at the mast-head  
Was lowered half-high in token of her dead,  
And the Red Ensign on the freighter went  
To the same place in mute acknowledgement.  
Then back to their full height the flags were run,  
To snap out like the folds of a toreador:  
With so much on the boards still to be done,  
'Twas fitting that they should, in that same breath  
With which the storm took the salute, restore  
The colours to their stations, baiting death.

At noon the starboard list began to assume  
The final margin for the *Antinoe*,  
The signal flags reporting that below  
The sea was filling up the engine room.

The next attempt was with the Lyle gun.  
Fried edged his vessel nearer to the wreck,  
Trying for the safest, shortest run  
To get a line across the after-deck.  
But once again an adverse hand conspired  
Against the chance, checkmated the design,  
For at the muzzle as the gun was fired,  
The steel projectile snapped the messenger line.  
The second did the same, the third, and so  
The fourth; the six succeeding carriers trailed  
Their lines midway; the last, the eleventh failed;  
Only the iron passed the *Antinoe*.

The store of rockets next—but what availed  
Their slender shafts and powder charges scaled  
Against the weight of vapour, wind and snow?

An empty cask was lowered with the hope  
The wind might carry it to the ship's side.  
It sank beneath its sagging weight of rope.

Another stroke of rescue was devised.  
A life-boat was trailed off without a crew;  
It climbed, zigzagged and floundered, plunging through,  
But pitched against the freighter and capsized.

Fried tried again, placing his ship to *looard*  
Less than a hundred yards. The next boat moored  
By a line rove through the high block of the kingpost  
On the quarter-deck, was towed close to the stern  
Of the *Antinoe*, but with the luff of the *Roosevelt*  
To the weather side, the rope sagged at the turn;  
Went underneath and fouled, and number three  
Started to drift beyond recovery.

Another night, the third, confronted Fried,  
When the last remnant of the sky was blown  
Out, with the ocean like a pampas stirred  
To the confusion of a great stampede—  
Riot of lariat and hoof, of spurred  
Horses, and the *Antinoe* a thrown  
Spent rider overtaken by the herd.

Wednesday morning! and the twenty-five  
Huddled on the aft deck—still alive.  
One hundred hours had passed since the men had known  
The wool-warmth of a bunk, or stood the cold  
With nourished veins; and sleep had taken hold  
Of tired bodies salt-drugged to the bone.  
And in that hundred hours eternity  
Had ticked its lazy seconds on the sea,  
Timing the wind and surge and the defeat  
Of day by night; of night by day; the slow  
Unreasoned alternation of the sleet  
With hurrying phantoms of the hail and snow,  
The same rotation on the deck—the grey  
Sterility of hope with each life-boat gone,  
Dusk followed by the night, and every dawn  
A slattern offering dust instead of day.

During the night the fact was plain the gun  
Would by such lavish firing soon outrun  
The standard stock of carriers and consume  
The packing cord; so in the engine room  
A humming lathe was making up arrears,  
In cutting blocks of steel; in fashioning  
Projectiles and their rods; and engineers,  
Following a passenger's design,  
Were busy in construction of a spring,  
A spiral coil to graduate the strain  
Of the steel rod upon the carrying line  
At the initial instant of the shots.  
And knowing how the day ahead would drain  
Resources, men began to overhaul  
The cordage, making loops for arms and knots  
For hand-grips, culling big stuff from the small  
For nets and heaving-lines and ladders,—all  
Which might be spared out of the essential store,  
From cargo-slings to the stout rope from the fall  
Of a wrecked life-boat davit. Others toiled  
For hours, whaler-fashion, over the four  
Containing tubs, undid the twists, and coiled  
The messenger line many thousand feet,  
From vertical core to the end-loop with neat  
Precision. So when morning came it seemed  
Defaulted effort now might be redeemed,  
For though the seventh shot burst free and sped  
Away beyond the wreck, it carried true,  
Trailing sufficient line to lay it dead  
On the poop deck in centre of the crew.



A heavier rope made fast was pulled aboard,  
And when the *Roosevelt's* boat was safely lowered,  
Another paying off through fair-leads gave  
What help it could to the wavering bow control.  
The boat without a load mounted each wave,  
Righting herself from every plunge and roll,  
Covered the stretch of water like a gull,  
Until within five fathoms of the hull,  
She turned broadside in an attempt to scale  
A sea, the bow line chafed against the rail  
And snapped, the stern line gave, and number four  
Followed her sisters of the day before.

And so the latter half of the fourth day  
Came with the ocean well astride its prey:  
The storm in front like a shifty pugilist,  
Watching for some slight turn of luck to slay  
The rescuer with an iron-knuckled fist.  
'Twas useless for the *Roosevelt* to await  
The issue of the struggle by debate.  
For nothing in those skies favoured a sign  
That by manoeuvre could the fight be won—  
By floating cask or breeches-buoy or line,  
Mere parleying with rockets and a gun.  
The hour had called for argument more rife  
With the gambler's sacrificial bids for life,  
The final manner native to the breed  
Of men forging decision into deed—  
Of getting down again into the sea,  
And testing rowlocks in an open boat,  
Of grappling with the storm-king bodily,  
And placing Northern fingers on his throat.

The call again, and number five was ready.  
The men were chosen and the davits swung;  
The boat moved outward easily and hung  
Level and snug to leeward but unsteady  
In the capricious pockets of the squall.  
Another order and the falls began  
To move—eight men inside her; Alfred Wall,  
Araneda, Diaz, Albertz, Hahn,  
Upton, Roberts, Miller in command.  
The gunwale fended off with oar and hand  
At every lurch, she managed luckily  
To clear the steamer's side, covering the steep  
Descent, and then undamaged took the sea.  
Three oars aside and with a steering sweep,  
The boat pulled out from the immediate lee  
Into the eddies where the waters met  
From stern and bow,—where the last ounces put  
On the oars, even with the wind abaft, could yet  
Advance them only by the inch and foot.  
They followed down the beam-path of the searchlight,  
The *Roosevelt* all the while manoeuvring,  
Now drawing in, now clawing off, and now  
Dead close, beam to the wind, just shadowing  
The brute drive of the freighter, to allow  
The boat with heavy lateral drift to steer  
With wider berth into the wind and clear  
The danger of the surge around the bow.  
A swamping moment caught her, but each blade  
Flexed to the curve of snapping, Miller made  
The turn and came down sharp broadside to gain  
A point amidships that he might obtain  
Such shelter as this windbreak could afford.  
But the wells were under water and the lee  
Was like the surf of breakers, for the sea,  
Contemptuous of this man-made sunken mole,  
Threatened each time to hurl the boat aboard,  
And reach the funnel with resurgent roll.  
Escaping this disaster, Miller drew  
His boat back in the sea, and tried to creep  
Forward to higher freeboard where the crew  
Near the First Hatch might have the shortest leap.

Backwatering and staving off the hull,  
And crawling in again with a slight lull  
Of the wind, or with recession of the surge,  
He took three men who on the perishing verge  
Of sleep fell from the rail to the thwarts and slumped  
To the floor-boards. Out and back once more  
With slow manoeuvring, and another four  
Secure. Others of tougher sinew jumped  
To the stern sheets from the rail. The task was done  
With sudden moves and checks like a strange play  
Which starts, is forced to stop, and then begun  
Afresh on unknown ground but under sway  
Of old Olympian rules. So one by one  
The lives were scored, and those who missed their aim,  
And fell into the sea, were grabbed and pulled  
Over the gunwale; counted with the same  
Slow chalking up as of advances bulled  
Out of the fiery scrimmage of a game.

Miller tried to close again but failed.  
With water shipped as fast as it was bailed,  
Seams leaking, twelve half-dead men barely stowed,  
And with his crew of eight he did not dare  
To give his boat a more unstable load;  
So pushed away and with the wind and tide  
In favour, forced her water-logged to where  
The *Roosevelt*, now round to leeward, showed  
A maze of lines and ladders on her side.  
The first instalment of the crew too numb  
To lay their hands on heaving-lines were placed  
Within the cargo-nets and drawn up plumb;  
The others taking ropes, with their feet braced  
Against the hull went up with the sheer lift  
Of their mates, till all were safe aboard, and now  
The life-boat number five with damaged bow  
And broken hoisting hooks was cast adrift.

The pitch of the storm, late night and still the snow,  
Two hundred yards between of yawning space,  
And thirteen sailors on the *Antinoe*.  
Three nights upon the bridge behind the shield  
Of the canvas dodger, his accustomed place,  
Fried doubtful, peering with his blizzard face.  
Now one o'clock, and a slight rift revealed  
A spatter of light above the running seas—  
The freighter's lantern jabbing out in Morse  
That the ship's list had reached fifty degrees.  
The last hour was on with no recourse  
Except another summons to the crew.  
Miller commanding for the third time drew  
From the line-up of forty volunteers  
Of every rank—deck-hand to passenger,  
His four uninjured veterans and five new  
Hands: Thomas Sloan, the third officer;  
Reidel; Wilke; Deck Yeoman Wilson Beers;  
And Caldwell, messman to the engineers.

The sixth life-boat was ready on the lee.  
The others stood a moment in review;  
Three hundred passengers, two hundred crew;  
The cut was getting near the artery.  
The men, lowered without mishap, once more  
Brought round the boat to the lee bow of the freighter,  
And ranged her off the First Hatch as before.  
The risk this time for boat and ship was greater;  
The growing list could take no steeper verge,  
And all the boatmanship could not avail  
At first against the backwash of the surge;  
For there was peril in the sunken rail,  
When at uncertain moments the ship tried  
For balance, lifting up a wounded side  
To ease a wave that struck amidships, cleaving  
Her port; and peril in those hours of doubt  
For strengthless men that watched their comrades leaving,  
And long the galley fires had been out.  
Fried shortened up his weather gage to try  
To give a double shelter to the life-boat:  
The message later read—"Had to rely  
Upon the final power of my engines,  
For had a revolution failed,—'twas either  
*Roosevelt* or *Antinoe* with odds on neither."  
The revolution did not fail, and Miller  
Secured his men, and though with cracked air-tank,  
And all the spare oars rent in hull-collision,  
The boat came down the wind to the lee flank  
Of the liner where the remnant with their clothes  
Sodden and shrunk were, like drowsed children, gathered  
To the cargo hammocks, twelve of them, then Tose,  
The captain, who had worn his buttons well.  
His bread had now returned upon the waters,  
For ten years back, as later stories tell,  
He had while master of another vessel,  
Rescued a Philadelphian bark in seas  
And winds only less full of death than these.

Now open throttles! Now my lads, YOHO!  
The *twenty-five*, by Neptune, every one!  
Captain to deck-hand, every mother's son  
Aboard! GOOD-BYE, GOOD-BYE, The *ANTINOE*!  
The sea had closed on forward deck and bow;  
Let flag and mast and funnel settle now.  
Frost-bitten, thinned in blood, gnarled to the bone,  
But everyone surviving. All were brought  
Below where ocean miracles are wrought,  
Where the hearts' furnaces are stoked and blown,  
Where men are shepherded in the old way  
Of the sea, where drowned men come to life, they say.  
Under such calls to breathe as never come  
To those that roam the uplands of this earth:—  
The hearty comradeship of a foc's'le berth,  
With treble-folded blankets on their numb  
Bodies, with balsam thawing out the brain,  
Hot milk and coffee piping down their dumb  
Constricted throats and mustard scattering pain,—  
When cold half-foundered bellies steam again  
Under the red authority of rum.

The siren! Never did a whistle blow  
Upon a ship at sea like this before.  
The notes came from a silver throat aglow  
With life and triumph. Steady blast to roar  
Rising to pitch and volume that would crow  
The daybreak in. A shorter blast,  
A mimic of halloo, followed by fast  
Merry little runs in tremolo,  
And then again with open throat the long  
Insistent call with pauses, trills and strong  
Leaping crescendos.

Vital, sound and steady,  
For the first hour in days was heard to start  
The normal rhythm of the liner's heart;  
Her bearings bathed, her boilers breathed and ready  
For the ports of England. The fifth morning found her  
With high gales still and white seas all around her,  
But clean in every valve and with the main  
Play of her steam free on each turbine-vane.

Another day and the back of the storm was broken.  
The snow and hail had ceased; the clouds rode high;  
And though the wind remained, the glass gave token  
Of fairer weather. Through a rift of sky  
A level shaft, the first one for the week,  
Quivered on an edge of cloud, then struck  
A line of foam making for the grey peak  
Of a kingpost, then to water-line from truck,  
Till from the starboard taffrail up the span  
Of the hull, it reached the lettering where it ran  
In crimson coronation of her name,  
As if a god might thus salute the deed,  
And ratify the venture with the screed  
Of an aurora milled in solar flame.

The Lizard Point, and now the Eddystone!

Meanwhile a nation which was never spared  
The discipline of waters, had prepared  
Her subjects' hearts from foc's'le to throne  
With this Atlantic record to attest  
The valour of the eagle from the west,  
In bringing home her brood of castaways.  
For there had come through radiogram and wire  
As high romance as any since the days,  
When Grecian sails and the triremes of Tyre  
Hailed Carthaginian ships upon the bays  
Of the Aegean. So she entered Plymouth,  
With crusted funnel, twisted rails, scoured clean  
By salt on every deck, and overdue;  
Yet with the bearing of a Viking Queen,—  
Prerogative of life within her hand.  
She anchored in the roadstead, while the crew  
Of the wrecked ship were taken to the land.  
The nation gave its thanks on board; and she,  
Soon ready for completion of her run,  
Swung out the Sound, with her day's work well done,  
And in an hour was on the Channel sea.



NEWFOUNDLAND  
REMINISCENCES

## 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.

*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 harbours,  
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.*

# THE CACHALOT

I

A thousand years now had his breed  
Established the mammalian lead;  
The founder (in cetacean lore)  
Had followed Leif to Labrador;  
The eldest-born tracked all the way  
Marco Polo to Cathay;  
A third had hounded one whole week  
The great Columbus to Bahama;  
A fourth outstripped to Mozambique  
The flying squadron of de Gama;  
A fifth had often crossed the wake  
Of Cortez, Cavendish and Drake;  
The great grandsire—a veteran rover—  
Had entered once the strait of Dover,  
In a naval fight, and with his hump  
Had stove a bottom of Van Tromp;  
The grandsire at Trafalgar swam  
At the *Redoubtable* and caught her,  
With all the tonnage of his ram,  
Deadly between the wind and water;  
And his granddam herself was known  
As fighter and as navigator,  
The mightiest mammal in the zone  
From Baffin Bay to the Equator.  
From such a line of conjugate sires  
Issued his blood, his lumbar fires,  
And from such dams imperial-loined  
His Taurian timbers had been joined,  
And when his time had come to hasten  
Forth from his deep sub-mammary basin,  
Out on the ocean tracts, his mama  
Had, in a North Saghalien gale,  
Launched him, a five-ton healthy male,  
Between Hong Kong and Yokohama.  
Now after ninety moons of days,  
Sheltered by the mammoth fin,  
He took on adolescent ways  
And learned the habits of his kin;  
Ransacked the seas and found his mate,  
Established his dynastic name,

Reared up his youngsters, and became  
The most dynamic vertebrate  
(According to his Royal Dame)  
From Tonga to the Hudson Strait.  
And from the start, by fast degrees,  
He won in all hostilities;  
Sighted a hammerhead and followed him,  
Ripped him from jaw to ventral, swallowed him;  
Pursued a shovelnose and mangled him;  
Twisted a broadbill's neck and strangled him;  
Conquered a rorqual in full sight  
Of a score of youthful bulls who spurred  
Him to the contest, and the fight  
Won him the mastery of the herd.  
Another ninety moons and Time  
Had cast a marvel from his hand,  
Unmatched on either sea or land—  
A sperm whale in the pitch of prime.  
A hundred feet or thereabout  
He measured from the tail to snout,  
And every foot of that would run  
From fifteen hundred to a ton.  
But huge as was his tail or fin,  
His bulk of forehead, or his hoists  
And slow subsidences of jaw,  
He was more wonderful within.  
His iron ribs and spinal joists  
Enclosed the sepulchre of a maw.  
The bellows of his lungs might sail  
A herring skiff—such was the gale  
Along the wind-pipe; and so large  
The lymph-flow of his active liver,  
One might believe a fair-sized barge  
Could navigate along the river;  
And the islands of his pancreas  
Were so tremendous that between 'em  
A punt would sink; while a cart might pass  
His bile-duct to the duodenum  
Without a peristaltic quiver.  
And cataracts of red blood stormed  
His heart, while lower down was formed

That fearful labyrinthine coil  
Filled with the musk of ambergris;  
And there were reservoirs of oil  
And spermaceti; and renal juices  
That poured in torrents without cease  
Throughout his grand canals and sluices.  
And hid in his arterial flow  
Were flames and currents set aglow  
By the wild pulses of the chase  
With fighters of the Saxon race.  
A tincture of an iron grain  
Had dyed his blood a darker stain;  
Upon his coat of toughest rubber  
A dozen cicatrices showed  
The place as many barbs were stowed,  
Twisted and buried in his blubber,  
The mute reminders of the hours  
Of combat when the irate whale  
Unlimbered all his massive powers  
Of head-ram and of caudal flail,  
Littering the waters with the chips  
Of whaleboats and vainglorious ships.



Where Cape Delgado strikes the sea,  
A cliff ran outward slantingly  
A mile along a tossing edge  
Of water towards a coral ledge,  
Making a sheer and downward climb  
Of twenty fathoms where it ended,  
Forming a jutting scaur suspended  
Over a cave of murk and slime.  
A dull reptilian silence hung  
About the walls, and fungus clung  
To knots of rock, and over boles  
Of lime and basalt poisonous weed  
Grew rampant, covering the holes  
Where crayfish and sea-urchins breed.  
The upper movement of the seas  
Across the reefs could not be heard;  
The nether tides but faintly stirred  
Sea-nettles and anemones.  
A thick festoon of lichens crawled  
From crag to crag, and under it  
Half-ridden in a noisome pit  
Of bones and shells a kraken sprawled.  
Moveless, he seemed, as a boulder set  
In pitch, and dead within his lair,  
Except for a transfixing stare  
From lidless eyes of burnished jet,  
And a hard spasm now and then  
Within his viscous centre, when  
His scabrous feelers intertwined  
Would stir, vibrate, and then unwind  
Their ligatures with easy strength  
To tap the gloom, a cable length;  
And finding no life that might touch  
The mortal radius of their clutch,  
Slowly relax, and shorten up  
Each tensile tip, each suction cup,  
And coil again around the head  
Of the mollusc on its miry bed,  
Like a litter of pythons settling there  
To shutter the Gorgonian stare.  
But soon the squid's antennæ caught

A murmur that the waters brought—  
No febrile stirring as might spring  
From a puny barracuda lunging  
At a tuna's leap, some minor thing,  
A tarpon or a dolphin plunging—  
But a deep consonant that rides  
Below the measured beat of tides  
With that vast, undulating rhythm  
A sounding sperm whale carries with him.  
The kraken felt that as the flow  
Beat on his lair with plangent power,  
It was the challenge of his foe,  
The prelude to a fatal hour;  
Nor was there given him more than time,  
From that first instinct of alarm,  
To ground himself in deeper slime,  
And raise up each enormous arm  
Above him, when, unmeasured, full  
On the revolving ramparts, broke  
The hideous rupture of a stroke  
From the forehead of the bull.  
And when they interlocked, that night—  
Cetacean and cephalopod—  
No Titan with Olympian god  
Had ever waged a fiercer fight;  
Tail and skull and teeth and maw  
Met sinew, cartilage, and claw,  
Within those self-engendered tides,  
Where the Acherontic flood  
Of sepia, mingling with the blood  
Of whale, befouled Delgado's sides.  
And when the cachalot out-wore  
The squid's tenacious clasp, he tore  
From frame and socket, shred by shred,  
Each gristled, writhing tentacle,  
And with serrated mandible  
Sawed cleanly through the bulbous head;  
Then gorged upon the fibrous jelly  
Until, finding that six tons lay  
Like Vulcan's anvil in his belly,  
He left a thousand sharks his prey,

And with his flukes, slow-labouring, rose  
To a calm surface, where he shot  
A roaring geyser, steaming hot,  
From the blast-pipe of his nose.  
One hour he rested, in the gloom  
Of the after-midnight; his great back  
Prone with the tide, and, in the loom  
Of the Afric coast, merged with the black  
Of the water; till a rose shaft, sent  
From Madagascar far away,  
Etched a ripple, eloquent  
Of a freshening wind and a fair day.

Flushed with the triumph of the fight,  
He felt his now unchallenged right  
To take by demonstrated merit  
What he by birth-line did inherit—  
The lordship of each bull and dam  
That in mammalian waters swam,  
As Maharajah of the seas  
From Rio to the Celebes.  
And nobly did the splendid brute  
Leap to his laurels, execute  
His lineal functions as he sped  
Towards the Equator northwards, dead  
Against the current and the breeze;  
Over his back the running seas  
Cascaded, while the morning sun  
Rising in gold and beryl, spun  
Over the cachalot's streaming gloss,  
And from the foam, a fiery floss  
Of multitudinous fashionings,  
And dipping downward from the blue,  
The sea-gulls from Comoro flew,  
And brushed him with their silver wings;  
Then at the tropic hour of noon  
He slackened down; a drowsy spell  
Was creeping over him, and soon  
He fell asleep upon the swell.

### III

The cruising ships had never claimed  
So bold a captain, so far-famed  
Throughout the fleets a master-whaler—  
New England's pride was Martin Taylor.  
'Twas in this fall of eighty-eight,  
As skipper of the *Albatross*,  
He bore South from the Behring Strait,  
Down by the China Coast, to cross  
The Line, and with the fishing done  
To head her for the homeward run  
Around the Cape of Storms, and bring  
Her to Nantucket by the Spring.  
She had three thousand barrels stowed  
Under the hatches, though she could,  
Below and on her deck, have stood  
Four thousand as her bumper load.  
And so to try his final luck,  
He entered Sunda Strait and struck  
Into the Indian Ocean where,  
According to reports that year,  
A fleet had had grand fishing spells  
Between the Cocos and Seychelles.  
Thither he sailed; but many a day  
Passed by in its unending way,  
The weather fair, the weather rough,  
With watch and sleep, with tack and reef,  
With swab and holystone, salt beef  
And its eternal partner, duff;  
Now driving on with press of sail,  
Now sweaty calms that drugged the men,  
Everything but sight of whale,  
Until one startling midday, when  
A gesture in the rigging drew  
The flagging tension of the crew.

In the cross-trees at the royal mast,  
Shank, the third mate, was breathing fast,  
His eyes stared at the horizon clouds,  
His heels were kicking at the shrouds,  
His cheeks were puffed, his throat was dry,  
He seemed to be bawling at the sky.

“Hoy, you windjammer, what’s the matter?  
What’s this infernal devil’s clatter?”

“She blows, sir, there she blows, by thunder,  
A sperm, a mighty big one, yonder.”

“Where-a-way?” was Taylor’s scream.

“Ten miles, sir, on the looard beam!”

“Hard up and let her go like hell!”

With heeling side and heady toss,  
Smothered in spray, the *Albatross*  
Came free in answer to his yell  
And corked off seven with a rout  
Of roaring canvas crowding her,  
Her jibs and royals bellying out,  
With studsail, staysail, spinnaker.  
The barque came to; the first mate roared  
His orders, and the davits swung,  
The block-sheaves creaked, and the men sprung  
Into the boats as they were lowered.  
With oars unshipped, and every sail,  
Tub and harpoon and lance in trim,  
The boats payed off before the gale,  
Taylor leading; after him,  
Old Wart, Gamaliel, and Shank—  
Three mates in order of their rank.  
The day was fine; ’twas two o’clock,  
And in the north, three miles away,  
Asleep since noon, and like a rock,  
The towering bulk of the cachalot lay.

“Two hundred barrels to a quart,”  
Gamaliel whispered to Old Wart.

“A bull, by gad, the biggest one  
I’ve ever seen,” said Wart, “I’ll bet’ee,  
He’ll measure up a hundred ton,  
And a thousand gallons of spermaceti.”

“Clew up your gab!”  
    “Let go that mast!  
There’ll be row enough when you get him fast.”

“Don’t ship the oars!”  
    “Now, easy, steady;  
You’ll gally him with your bloody noise.”

The four harpooners standing ready  
Within the bows, their blades in poise,  
Two abaft and two broadside,  
Arched and struck; the irons cut  
Their razor edges through the hide  
And penetrated to the gut.

“Stern all! and let the box-lines slip.  
Stern! Sheer!” The boats backed up.

    “Unship  
That mast. Bend to and stow that sail,  
And jam the pole under the thwart.”

With head uplifted the sperm whale  
Made for the starboard boat of Wart,  
Who managed with a desperate swing  
To save his skiff the forehead blow,  
But to be crushed with the backward swing  
Of the flukes as the giant plunged below;  
On this dead instant Taylor cleft  
His line; the third mate's iron drew,  
Which, for the sounding trial, left  
But one boat with an iron true,—  
The one that had Gamaliel in it.  
The tubs ran out, Gamaliel reckoned  
Two hundred fathoms to the minute;  
Before the line had cleared the second,  
He tied the drugg and quickly passed  
The splice to Shank who made it fast,  
And with ten blistering minutes gone,  
Had but a moment left to toss  
It to the fifth boat rushing on  
With Hall fresh from the *Albatross*,  
Who when his skiff, capsizing, lay  
So low he could no longer bail her,  
Caught up the end for its last relay,  
And flung it to the hands of Taylor.  
With dipping bow and creaking thwart,  
The skipper's whaleboat tore through tunnels  
Of drifting foam, with listing gunwales,  
Now to starboard, now to port,  
The hemp ran through the leaden chock,  
Making the casing searing hot;  
The second oarsman snatched and shot  
The piggin like a shuttlecock,  
Bailing the swamping torrent out,  
Or throwing sidelong spurts to dout  
The flame when with the treble turn  
The loggerhead began to burn.  
A thousand fathoms down the lug  
Or rope, harpoon, of boat and drugg,  
Began, in half a breathless hour,  
To get his wind and drain his power;  
His throbbing valves demanded air,

The open sky, the sunlight there;  
The downward plunging ceased, and now,  
Taylor feeling the tarred hemp strand  
Slackening that moment at the bow,  
Began to haul hand over hand,  
And pass it aft where it was stowed  
Loose in the stern sheets, while the crew  
After the sounding respite threw  
Their bodies on the oars and rowed  
In the direction of the pull.



“He blows!” The four whaleboats converged  
On a point to southward where the bull  
In a white cloud of mist emerged—  
Terror of head and hump and brawn,  
Silent and sinister and gray,  
As in a lifting fog at dawn  
Gibraltar rises from its bay.  
With lateral crunching of his jaw,  
And thunderous booming as his tail  
Collided with a wave, the whale  
Steamed up immediately he saw  
The boats, lowered his cranial drum  
And charged, his slaughterous eye on Shank;  
The mate—his hour had not yet come—  
Parried the head and caught the flank  
With a straight iron running keen  
Into the reaches of his spleen.  
The other boats rushed in; when Taylor backed,  
Gamaliel leaped in and lodged  
A thrust into his ribs, then dodged  
The wallowing flukes when Hall attacked.  
As killers bite and swordfish pierce  
Their foes, a score of lances sank  
Through blubber to the bone and drank  
His blood with energy more fierce  
Than theirs; nor could he shake them off  
With that same large and sovereign scoff,  
That high redundancy of ease  
With which he smote his enemies.  
He somersaulted, leaped, and sounded;  
When he arose the whaleboats hounded  
Him still; he tried gigantic breaches,  
The irons stuck to him like leeches;  
He made for open sea but found  
The anchors faithful to their ground,  
For, every surface run, he towed  
The boat crews faster than they rowed.  
Five hectic hours had now passed by,  
Closing a tropic afternoon,  
Now twilight with a mackerel sky,  
And now a full and climbing moon.

'Twas time to end this vanity—  
Hauling a puny batch of men,  
With boat and cross-boards out to sea,  
Tethered to his vitals, when  
The line would neither break nor draw.  
Where was his pride, too, that his race  
Should claim one fugitive in a chase?  
His teeth were sound within his jaw,  
His thirty feet of forehead still  
Had all their pristine power to kill.  
He swung his bulk round to pursue  
This arrogant and impious crew.  
He took his own good time, not caring  
With such persistent foes to crush  
Them by a self-destroying rush,  
But blending cunning with his daring,  
He sought to mesh them in the toil  
Of a rapid moving spiral coil,  
Baffling the steersmen as they plied  
Their oars now on the windward side,  
Now hard-a-lee, forcing them dead  
Upon the foam line of his head.  
And when the narrowing orbit shrank  
In width to twice his spinal length,  
He put on all his speed and strength  
And turned diagonally on Shank.  
The third mate's twenty years of luck  
Were ended as the cachalot struck  
The boat amidship, carrying it  
With open sliding jaws that bit  
The keel and sawed the gunwales through,  
Leaving behind him as he ploughed  
His way along a rising cloud,  
Fragments of oars and planks and crew.  
Another charge and the death knell  
Was rung upon Gamaliel;  
At the same instant Hall ran foul  
Of the tail sweep, but not before  
A well directed iron tore  
Three feet into the lower bowel.

Two foes were now left on the sea—  
The *Albatross* with shortened sail  
Was slatting up against the gale;  
Taylor manoeuvring warily  
Between the rushes and the rough  
Wave hazards of the crest and trough,  
Now closed and sent a whizzing dart  
Underneath the pectoral fin  
That pierced the muscle of the heart.  
The odds had up to this been equal—  
Whale and wind and sea with whaler—  
But, for the sperm, the fighting sequel  
Grew darker with that thrust of Taylor.  
From all his lesser wounds the blood  
That ran from him had scarcely spent  
A conscious tithe of power; the flood  
That issued from this fiery rent,  
Broaching the arterial tide,  
Had left a ragged worm of pain  
Which crawled like treason to his brain,—  
The worm of a Titan's broken pride!  
Was he—with a toothless Bowhead's fate,  
Slain by a thing called a second mate—  
To come in tow to the whaler's side?  
Be lashed like a Helot to the bits  
While, from the cutting stage, the spade  
Of a harpooner cut deep slits  
Into his head and neck, and flayed  
Him to the bone; while jesters spat  
Upon his carcass, jeered and wrangled  
About his weight, the price his fat  
Would bring, as with the heavy haul  
Of the blocks his strips of blubber dangled  
At every click of the windlass pawl?  
An acrid torture in his soul  
Growing with the tragic hurry  
Of the blood stream through that widening hole  
Presaged a sperm whale's dying flurry—  
That orgy of convulsive breath,  
Abhorred thing before the death,  
In which the maniac threads of life

Are gathered from some wild abysm,  
Stranded for a final strife  
Then broken in a paroxysm.  
Darkness and wind began to pour  
A tidal whirlpool round the spot,  
Where the clotted nostrils' roar  
Sounded from the cachalot  
A deep bay to his human foes.  
He settled down to hide his track,  
Sighted the keels, then swiftly rose,  
And with the upheaval of his back,  
Caught with annihilating rip  
The boat, then with the swelling throes  
Of death levied for the attack,  
Made for the port bow of the ship.  
All the tonnage, all the speed,  
All the courage of his breed,  
The pride and anger of his breath,  
The battling legions of his blood  
Met in that unresisted thud,  
Smote in that double stroke of death.  
Ten feet above and ten below  
The water-line his forehead caught her,  
The hatches opening to the blow  
His hundred driving tons had wrought her;  
The capstan and the anchor fled,  
When bolts and stanchions swept asunder,  
For what was iron to that head,  
And oak—in that hydraulic thunder?  
Then, like a royal retinue,  
The slow processional of crew,  
Of inundated hull, of mast,  
Halliard and shroud and trestle-cheek,  
Of yard and topsail to the last  
Dank flutter of the ensign as a wave  
Closed in upon the skysail peak,  
Followed the Monarch to his grave.

## OLD HARRY

A long the coast the sailors tell  
The superstition of its fame—  
Of how the sea had faceted  
The Rock into a human head  
And given it the devil's name.

And much there was that would compel  
A wife or mother of a seaman  
To find a root in the belief  
The rock that jutted from the reef  
Was built to incarnate a demon.

But there's a story that might well  
Receive a share of crediting,  
And make the title fit the look  
Of vacancy the boulder took  
Under the ocean's battering.

Within that perforated shell  
Of basalt worn by wave and keel  
The demon ruler of the foam  
One night upon returning home  
Was changed into an imbecile,

Ordered to stay within his cell,  
Clutch at the spectres in the air,  
Listen to shrieks of drowning men,  
And stare at phantom ribs and then  
Listen again and clutch and stare.

So like a sea-crazed sentinel,  
Weary of sailors and their ships,  
Old Harry stands with salt weed spread  
In matted locks around his head,  
And foam forever on his lips.

## THE DRAG-IRONS

He who had learned for thirty years to ride  
The seas and storms in punt and skiff and brig,  
Would hardly scorn to take before he died  
His final lap in Neptune's whirligig.

But with his Captain's blood he did resent,  
With livid silence and with glassy look,  
This fishy treatment when his years were spent—  
To come up dead upon a grapnel hook.

## 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 colours from the night  
By hand, I had to touch that face to feel  
It marble white.

## GREAT TIDES

Great Tides! You filled the reaches up  
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.



## 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.

## 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 SHARK

He seemed to know the harbour,  
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 harbour,  
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 husky.

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.

## SEA-GULLS

For one carved instant as they flew,  
The language had no simile—  
Silver, crystal, ivory  
Were tarnished. Etched upon the horizon blue,  
The frieze must go unchallenged, for the lift  
And carriage of the wings would stain the drift  
Of stars against a tropic indigo  
Or dull the parable of snow.

Now settling one by one  
Within green hollows or where curled  
Crests caught the spectrum from the sun,  
A thousand wings are furled.  
No clay-born lilies of the world  
Could blow as free  
As those wild orchids of the sea.

## THE WAY OF CAPE RACE

Lion-hunger, tiger-leap!  
The waves are bred no other way;  
It was their way when the Norseman came,  
It was the same in Cabot's day:  
A thousand years will come again,  
When a thousand years have passed away—  
Galleon, frigate, liner, plane,  
The muster of the slain.

They have placed the light, fog-horn and bell  
Along the shore: the wardens keep  
Their posts—they do not quell  
The roar; they shorten not the leap.  
The waves still ring the knell  
Of ships that pass at night,  
Of dreadnought and of cockle-shell:  
They do not heed the light,  
The fog-horn and the bell—  
Lion-hunger, tiger-leap!

## 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 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.

## 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.

## 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 neighbours 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.

## TO ANGELINA, AN OLD NURSE

She lingers in our memory even yet,  
Like an aroma or an anecdote,  
Chipped from the 'nineties with her silhouette  
Begemmed with buttons from the shoes to throat;  
Her paper curls, her parlour pompadour,  
Her leg-o'-mutton sleeves, the shawl she wore;  
So trussed with cord and whalebone that she faced  
The near annihilation of her waist.

Stark as a rampike under winter skies,  
She brooded on us with her deep-set eyes  
That never slept: mournful and thin was she,  
Like something borrowed from eternity.  
She never tucked us in our beds at night,  
But feared we should not see the next day's light;  
And when in course of time the morning broke,  
She could not understand it that we woke.  
She watched for every sneeze, for every whoop,  
And even breadcrumbs in our throats was croup.  
A lengthy spell of laughter was a fit,  
And she could always put a stop to it.  
Though healthy and as active as young beavers,  
She always saw in us a soil for fevers.  
When we were sound asleep within our cots,  
She'd listen to our breathing, bending down  
With many a murmur, many an anxious frown,  
And turn us over on the search for spots,  
Spots on the back and chest and diaphragm,  
Spots on the tongue and throat *ad nauseam*—  
It might have been a sunburn or the glow  
Left over from a joy-ride in the snow,  
But measles, chicken-pox or scarlatina  
Was always present there to Angelina.  
And when, our stomachs full, we went to bed,  
Heavy with purloined cake instead of bread,  
And gave a bilious scream within our sleep,  
Or called her name—Lord, how her blood would creep!  
This was delirium—her greatest fear,  
The last of all the mortal ills that shocked her,  
She knew that the eternal imps were near,  
And sent at once for clergyman and doctor.

That town of ours had no apothecary,  
And faith, for us he was not necessary.  
For Angelina had the cupboards stacked  
With every known and unknown medicine—  
Hundreds of bottles, till the household smacked  
Of things malodorous, day out, day in;  
Powders and pills for every malady,  
Goose oil and turkey rhubarb, turpentine,  
And still more oil, pine syrup, senna tea,  
Sulphur and blackstrap, tonics for the spring,  
Liquids unnamed—acid and alkaline,  
And all most pungent and disquieting.  
She used not only standard remedies  
By which all mothers classify the seasons:  
She improvised for all emergencies  
And filled us up for most fictitious reasons  
Before the meals or after, on retiring,  
Or any time when chilled or just perspiring;  
The moment that we felt unduly merry,  
It was our failing appetite, she said—  
She touched our temples, charted out the head,  
And reached at once for essence of wild cherry.

But then, her first and last line of defence,  
The utmost limit of her confidence,  
Was what she kept upon the highest board.  
'Twas there her rancid Dead Sea salts were stored.  
This saturated brine she daily poured  
With senna down our throats in fixed routine.  
What mattered it to her that we should go  
At any time into the world unseen,  
With spirits unprepared or hearts unclean;  
It satisfied her conscience quite to know  
That if we died, we died at least saline.

And yet, we know, that failing Angelina,  
Our infancy and childhood would have been a  
Most dull and unheroic sort of thing.  
She gave to life its deepest flavouring,  
She taught us tastes, improved our deglutition.  
We loved her with a pale sardonic love—  
The way she kept our thoughts on things above,  
Etherealized our bodies by attrition,  
The way she proved, despite our apprehensions,  
That all she did was with the best intentions.

It's twenty-seven years ago to-day,  
That sainted Angelina passed away,  
Answering the summons of an evening bell.  
Her soul or wraith or whatso'er it be,  
That's left from her corporeality,  
Spun out upon its voyage. Whither? Well,  
It matters not: but this one thing we know,  
That most unhappy would the old nurse be,  
If somehow she were not allowed to go  
Throughout the nurseries of the nebulae,  
Stalking at will, administrative, grim,  
With spoon or cup in hand full to the brim  
With oil designed for the felicity  
Of young and fever-spotted cherubim.



## 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, “sculpted” 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 skyline, 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.

# TOLL OF THE BELLS

## I

We gave them at the harbour 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 ship 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.

## TIME-WORN

What magic long ago was in your footstep,  
That changed each night to day,  
And swung high noon to midnight every hour  
You went away.

How long the time—is now beyond my telling,  
With days become as years,  
And that last pledge of your returning—seasons  
In arrears!

I only know my heart is beating slowly:  
Come—and swift your feet!  
Or else there will be neither noon nor midnight  
When we meet.

## THE WEATHER GLASS

There is no refuge from this wind to-night,  
Though sound the roof and double-latched the door,  
And though I've trimmed the wick, there is no light,  
Nor is there warmth although the tamaracks roar;  
Nor will the battery of those surges keep  
The hammering pulses silent in my sleep.

But one alone might quell this storm to-night,  
And were he now this moment at the door,  
His eyes would clear the shadows from this light,  
His voice put laughter in the billets' roar,  
And he would clasp me in his arms and keep  
The wheeling gulls from screaming through my sleep.

## THE LEE-SHORE

Her heart cried out,—“Come home, come home,”  
When the storm beat in at the door,  
When the window showed a spatter of foam,  
And her ear rang with the roar  
Of the reef; and she called again, “Come home,”  
To the ship in reach of the shore.

“But not to-night,” flashed the signal light  
From the Cape that guarded the bay,  
“No, not to-night,” rang the foam where the white  
Hard edge of the breakers lay;  
“Keep away from the crash of the storm at its height,  
Keep away from the land, keep away.”

“Come home,” her heart cried out again,  
“For the edge of the reef is white.”  
But she pressed her face to the window-pane,  
And read the flash of the signal light;  
Then her voice called out when her heart was slain,  
“Keep away, my love, to-night.”

# THE RITUAL

## I

She took her name beneath according skies,  
With ringing harbour cheers, and in the lee  
Of hills derived her birthright to the sea—  
The adoration of a thousand eyes.  
Each bulwark ran its way from stern to prow,  
With the slim tracery of a sea-gull's wing,  
And—happy augury for the christening—  
The bottle broke in rainbows on her bow.

Beyond the port in roll and leap and curl,  
In the rich hues of sunlight on the spray,  
And in the march of tides—swept down the bay  
The pageant of the morning, to the skirl  
Of merry pipers as the rising gale  
Sounded a challenge to her maiden sail.

## II

She left her name under revolted skies,  
Before the break of day, upon a rock  
Whose long and sunken ledge met the full shock  
Of an Atlantic storm, and with the cries  
Of the curlews issuing from dark caves,  
Accompanied by the thud of wings from shags  
That veered down from their nests upon the crags  
To pounce on bulwarks shattered by the waves.

And the birthright that was granted for a brief,  
Exultant hour with cheers and in the lee  
Of hills was now restored unto the sea,  
Amidst the grounded gutturals of the reef,  
And with the grind of timbers on the sides  
Of cliffs resounding with the march of tides.

## ONE HOUR OF LIFE

This little face will never know  
Cut of wind or bite of snow:  
The sea will never wind its sheet  
Around those pallid hands and feet.

Nor shall its sleeping heart, grown cold  
After a pulse of life, unfold  
That futile challenge on the face  
Of one who with a last embrace

Could only cheat the earth to save  
The plunder for another grave:  
But in that hour of battle she  
Forgot the patience of the sea.

## EROSION

It took the sea a thousand years,  
A thousand years to trace  
The granite features of this cliff,  
In crag and scarp and base.

It took the sea an hour one night,  
An hour of storm to place  
The sculpture of these granite seams  
Upon a woman's face.



## A REVERIE ON A DOG

We know the symptoms well: that sudden stitch,  
We call it, in the side, and the cold rheum  
That fills the corners of the eyes; the twitch  
Of nerves, and those hot spasms that consume  
The strength which would endure the duller pains  
In creaking joints and knotted sinews. Time  
Accounts for it, pouring his chilling rime,  
Instead of blood, through arteries and veins  
And hardening up the walls. It's just old age,  
Flying her tendon needles through and through,  
That knits the tangles in the cartilage.  
Easy to see why she should come to men  
Under the stress of threescore years and ten,  
But why to dogs and least of all to you.

To-night it's hard for me to understand  
You are the same great fellow that I knew,  
As free-born to the sea as to the land.  
There is the same wide forehead; the same wise  
Reflection in your brown and tolerant eyes;  
The deep curl lustre of your shaggy coat;  
The massive jet circumference of your throat;  
Your heave of shoulders, length of back—but these,  
Reminders of your prime, may not disguise  
That in the effort of that laboured thump  
Your tail declared lumbago in the rump;  
Nor make me disbelieve how ill at ease  
You feel placing your head upon my knees,  
For when I spoke your name, your forelegs told  
As plain as speech itself that you were old.

Not years—but fifteen weeks—it seems to be:  
The span of a canine biography.  
We had you as a pup, a ball of fur,  
Without a bone in your anatomy.  
No leopard's cub was ever livelier.  
I do not know the kind of lubrication that  
Was rendered to your gristle from your fat.  
You tied yourself in skeins and then untied,  
Or with your teeth into a stick you hung,  
Like a blood-leech to a swimmer, as we swung  
You over water from a schooner's side.  
A whistle acted like a hidden spring,  
Releasing inward levers, wheels and traps;  
Your leaps were antics of a crazy thing,  
Your barks—a series of percussion caps.

And you were brought up somewhat like a child:  
We teased and petted you and leathered you,  
And sent you to your kennel, tethered you,  
And put you on short rations for your wild  
And freakish ways; and often did we turn  
You with a broomstick out of doors  
To howl the livelong night that you might learn  
To have respect for kitchen mats and floors.  
You don't forget the evening when you kept  
Your vigil waiting till the household slept,  
Crept up the stairs, entered the attic, stole  
Into a cupboard, and began to chew  
The life out of a silver-buckled shoe.  
You caught it like a muskrat without warning;  
You tore the clasp and uppers from the sole,  
And then slept on the carnage till the morning,  
When Aunt Marie with her keen tongue and keener  
Strap, sauntered in, and with a master-stroke  
That caught you flush upon the quarters, woke  
Your conscience to its first high misdemeanour.

But when you grew to adult strength and size,  
We thought it most absurd to scandalize  
Your judgment with such capers as debase  
The minds of other dogs about the place.  
What greater training nonsense can be known  
Than this—to whistle for a full-grown dog,  
Especially if old and adipose,  
And bid him stand upon his two hind legs,  
Silent with forepaws drooping as he begs  
A lump of sugar placed upon his nose,  
While someone counted up to five or six;  
Or dress him up in scarlet coat and pants,  
And make him balance on one leg or dance  
As if he were a monkey: now, these tricks  
Might well pertain to Poms or Pekingese  
And other breeds of sofa pedigrees,  
But not to you who, scorning a command,  
The circus gesture of a whip or hand,  
But just for fun, would never hesitate  
To make a clear leap at a five-foot gate,  
Jump from the bow-sprit to the sea or take  
A two-mile morning swim across a lake;  
Or—what we thought the greatest sport of all—  
To fight your way out to the last high wall  
Of breakers, place your fine retrieving grip  
On anything we flung—a rope or chip;  
And what a sight as you emerged and laid  
It at our feet! and how the rainbows played  
Above the rising showers as you tried  
To drown us with salt water from your hide!

You never fought with smaller dogs: your pride  
Regarded wrangling as undignified.  
But once when a half-bred conceited pup,  
A Dachshund or a poodle broke your nap  
One afternoon with his infernal yap;  
When for a solid hour he kept it up,  
Presuming on your patience—then we saw  
You lose your temper. Not being worth a bite,  
Much less the honour of a serious fight,  
He took a blow from your contemptuous paw  
Which drove him deep into a snow-drift where  
You held him without benefit of air,  
Until, at length released, he scrambled out  
With what was left to him of wind and limb,  
And disappeared in one vertiginous rout  
As if the devil himself were after him.

Now in the course of years it came to pass  
This little strip of shoreline grew to fame,  
Merely as habitation for your name,  
When a great kennel of the ribbon class,  
Whose carriage of the head and vertebrae  
Announced but one—your own—paternity,  
Delivered to the world a score of males—  
Those champions that crashed the fairs, and made  
Competitors from other nations fade  
Into a group of sorry draggle-tails.  
So in these less known parts your blood prevails  
Over the mix of anonymity,  
For no one here may question dogs whose sires  
First drew from such a regal pedigree  
To fortify their biologic fires.

And other habits that were bred within  
Required no hand of mine to discipline:  
Indeed our human sense lagged far behind  
The deep uncanny wisdom of your kind.  
Call it a second sight or just plain scent,  
A calculation or presentiment,  
You never were, as we have been, storm-blind,  
Nor felt our herded judgment when with head  
Bent down we followed hard where no one led,  
Circling upon our tracks with that arrest  
Of will when east was north and north was west,  
And when the winds lied in their throats to tell  
Us it was night before the evening fell.

The way you hit direction was our wonder:  
Like a St. Bernard you could find your man  
And dig him out; or with the roads snowed under,  
Go out into the bush and fetch a span  
Of horses home. Blindfolded you could tell  
The folk from one another by their smell,  
Identify the owner by a sniff  
At a shoe-lace or a mitt, and when your tail  
Began to wag, we knew it without fail,  
That racing down the wind our herring skiff  
Was making for the cove—before an eye  
Could spot it from the fleet, or could descry  
The cut of jib or colour of the sail.

How did it happen too that in default  
Of words you had a language all your own  
With many a modulation, many a tone?  
How much of tameless fury for assault  
Was held in the potential of your growl  
Awakened by a distant timber howl?  
Your notes ran the full gamut from a roar  
That fell only below the leonine  
Down to the soft insistence of a whine  
That begged admittance at the kitchen door.  
And, in between, varieties of bark  
Expressive of annoyance or delight,  
With those domestic gutturals that mark  
A mutual recognition and a fight.

But this I know, however much I tried  
To give the tongue canine its shadings, yet  
The vocal meaning would be poor beside  
The drama of your silent alphabet.  
Here was the cipher in epitome  
Of all our human moods from “A” to “Z(ed)”.  
In your cocked ear and gently tilted head  
Attention had its perfect simile.  
What disciplined submission as you tried  
To feign indifference though your dilated  
Nostrils, sniffing the oven air, belied  
The patience in your haunches as you waited:  
And what oblivion when you lay curled  
Upon the flagstone in the summer shade;  
What drowsy misconception of a world  
Where stores are always full and bad debts paid!  
But tongue and ear and eye and nostril fail  
To measure the expression of the tail.  
For every curve and angle known to Science  
Lay in its lines—the one that stiffly barred  
A tramp’s suspicious entrance to the yard  
Looked like a level ramrod of defiance:  
Only one cause could make it deadlier straight—  
We saw it on occasions when you stood,  
Sniffing the wolf within the husky blood,  
When the grey fellow came too near the gate.  
And then that most abject configuration,  
The tail between the legs, which means disgrace  
To other dogs I know, but in your case  
The final symbol for complete damnation.  
That day—now let me recollect—I’ve long  
Forgotten the real nature of the deed,  
Some piece of mischief rather than a wrong  
Done with intent I’ll readily concede.  
But like a fool I hurled at you a word  
Hard as a granite fragment for it stirred  
The self-respect within your own dog soul;  
It made you slink away without a sound,  
With lowered flanks and head close to the ground,  
As though you searched for the last burial hole.  
And when I saw the way your tail became

The figure of your mood, I had no doubt  
That even Adam when he was cast out  
Knew not such deep contrition in his shame.

But I shall not attempt to picture all  
The many joyous movements when it curved  
In gentle oscillation at a call  
To those tremendous lateral sweeps reserved  
For high ecstatic moments when the ship  
Came into harbour from a five-months' trip:  
For joining in our welcome to the crew  
Your tail out-did your bark in the halloo,  
And as it thudded on your sides, the slam  
Had power enough to flatten out a ram.  
Hanged be the man who first tried to defame  
An instrument of speech so eloquent  
As this—by dubbing it with such a name  
That from the dawn of monkeys it has meant  
A carry-over fussing at the end:  
For I am sure that when you greet a friend  
It is the tail itself that wags the dog,  
And not a vulgar spinal epilogue.



Enough of this—I must reform my ways,  
And speak of acts which seven years ago  
Broke in upon the passage of our days,  
Doings of yours which stirred the village so,  
When from the wharf we watched you wondering  
What caused your frantic movements to and fro  
Behind the five young swimmers, shepherding  
Their strange and headlong struggle to the beach;—  
The way in which you criss-crossed on your track,  
Snapping at something that you could not reach,  
Dived and came up, swam forward and swam back,  
But ever at the youngsters' plunging feet;  
Till someone pointed out in full retreat,  
A fin shaped like a cutlass, and we knew  
That underneath the furrow was a blue  
Torpedo shark making its baffled way  
Back to the deeper waters of the bay.  
Do you remember too your own wild fear  
You would not reach the children at their play  
Through the high palings of the field, the day  
You managed with that mighty spring to clear  
The fence, made for the charging Hereford, caught  
Him by the muzzle with four fangs, held on  
And worried him until his wind was gone,  
When with his nostrils clogged with blood, you brought  
Him to his knees? And many another deed  
There was of this like scale which would have won  
A barrow full of stars, had it been done  
By men, but being natural to your breed  
The acts have slipped your knowledge and concern;  
For who upon this troubled earth could earn  
Such wages for such service measureless  
And yet demand so little in return—  
A caribou-bone of marrow for your share  
At supper; a soft word, or the caress  
Of a child's arms and the great debt was square.  
And there were other days of bitterness  
Whose salt was like the sea, but where no less  
Your royal kinship with our hearts was shown—  
The failures where the will was strong to save,  
As on that winter night you took that brave

Dive through the ice-crack, but came up alone;  
No pulse next day beat slower than your own  
At the enigma of the open grave.

So here you are, your head upon my knees;  
Your joints are stiff, your blood is running cold;  
How strange it is, in all these fantasies,  
I had forgotten that you had grown old.  
Old. . . Well! Here is your last great bond with men,  
This year will seal it fast, or perhaps another;  
Your fifteen years is our threescore and ten;  
Give me the paw, old chap—and now, the other.

## THE SEA-CATHEDRAL

Vast and immaculate! No pilgrim bands,  
In ecstasy before the Parian shrines,  
Knew such a temple built by human hands,  
With this transcendent rhythm in its lines;  
Like an epic on the North Atlantic stream  
It moved, and fairer than a Phidian dream.

Rich gifts unknown to kings were duly brought  
At dawn and sunset and at cloudless noons,  
Gifts from the sea-gods and the sun who wrought  
Cascades and rainbows; flung them in festoons  
Over the spires, with emerald, amethyst,  
Sapphire and pearl out of their fiery mist.

And music followed when a litany,  
Begun with the ring of foam bells and the purl  
Of linguals as the edges cut the sea,  
Crashed upon a rising storm with whirl  
Of floes from far-off spaces where Death rides  
The darkened belfries of his evening tides.

Within the sunlight, vast, immaculate!  
Beyond all reach of earth in majesty,  
It passed on southwards slowly to its fate—  
To be drawn down by the inveterate sea  
Without one chastening fire made to start  
From altars built around its polar heart.

# THE IRON DOOR

(An Ode)

Its features half-revealed in passing gleams  
Which had no origin in earthly light,  
Half-buried in a shifting mass of gloom  
Which had no kinship with the face of night,  
It had its station in the cliffs to stand  
Against the clamour of eternal storm.  
A giant hand  
Had wrought it cruciform,  
And placed deep shadows on the sunken panels,  
Then in ironic jest,  
Had carved out the crest  
Of death upon the lintel.  
Out of some Plutonian cave  
It had been brought, and hung  
Within its granite architrave.  
I saw no latch or knocker on the door;  
It seemed the smith designed it to be swung  
But once, then closed forevermore.

The noise as of stubborn waters  
Came in from a distant tide  
To the beat of Time with slow,  
Immeasurable stride.  
From an uncharted quarter,  
A wind began to blow,  
And clouds to rise,  
And underneath I saw the forms of mortals  
Come and go,  
And heard their cries,—  
Fragments of speech, bewildered pleas,  
That rose upon the pauses of the wind,  
To hush upon the thunder of great seas.  
And I thought what vain credulities  
Should lure those human souls before  
This vast inexorable door.

A music which the earth has only known  
In the drab hours of its emptiness,  
Or in the crisis of a fiery stress  
Fell on my ear  
In broken chord and troubled undertone.  
For in this scale were tragic dreams  
Awaiting unfulfilled decrees,  
Some brighter than the purest gleams  
Of seraphic ecstasies;  
And some with hopes and fears  
Which ran their paling way  
Beyond the boundaries of availing prayer,  
To dim-illumined reaches where the froze,  
Dumb faces of despair  
Gazed at their natural mirror in the door.  
Then with the intermittent lull  
Of wind and the dull  
Break of transitory light,  
Where rents in the shawl of the darkness  
Revealed star-bursts and clouds in flight,  
The cries were winged into language,  
And forms which were featureless grew  
Into the shapes of persons I knew  
Who had tasted of life and had died.

Standing, anxious-eyed,  
So small against the drift of space,  
Enveloped by the gloom,  
A boy searched for his father's face,  
With that unvoiced appeal,  
Which I remember, when he brought  
A water-spaniel home one day,  
Crushed beneath an engine-wheel;  
And could not, by a rational way,  
Be fully made to understand  
That the mending of a lifeless body lay  
Beyond the surgery of his father's hand.

A master mariner  
Stood looking at the dull  
Outline of a basalt spur,  
Which in the fall and lift of fog,  
Took on the shape of a gigantic hull.  
He was old and travel-stained,  
And his face grained  
With rebel questionings  
Urged with unsundered dignity;  
For he had lost three sons at sea,  
In a work of rescue known  
To the high Atlantic records of that year.  
Then as the crag took on the heaving motion  
Of the fog, and the roar beat in his ear  
Of surge afar off, he hallooed  
The unknown admiral of the unknown ocean:—

*Ahoy! The latitude and longitude?  
Within these parts do the stars fail?  
Is the sextant in default?  
What signals and what codes prevail?  
And is the taste of the water salt  
About your reefs? Do you bury your dead  
In the national folds?  
Is the blood of your sailors red  
When songs are sung  
At the capstan bars? Are davits swung  
At a call from the bridge when the night is dark,  
And life like wine is spilled at a word to retrieve  
The ravage of gales? Do courage and honour receive  
On the wastes of your realm, their fair name and title?  
As they do at our sea gray altars,—by your leave.*

The fog closed in upon the spur,  
The moving hull became a rock  
Beneath the undulations, and the shock  
Of winds from an unknown compass point cut short  
The seaman's challenge till that sound again  
From the hinter-sea broke through, and the swart  
Impress on his face was stirred  
By that insurgent flash,  
It once had known when after the report  
Of his sons' loss on the High Seas, he had heard  
With a throb of pride,  
The authentic word  
From the Captain's lips,  
Of the way the lads had died.

Another form appeared,  
One whom I knew so well,—endeared  
To me by all the natural ties which birth  
And life and much-enduring love impose.  
There was no trace  
Of doubt or consternation on her face,  
Only a calm reliance that the door  
Would open and disclose  
Those who by swifter strides had gone ahead.  
It was the same expression that she wore,  
One evening, when with life-work done,  
She went to bed,  
In the serene belief that she could borrow  
Sufficient strength out of the deep  
Resources of a final sleep,  
To overtake the others by the morrow.



A young man struck against the door  
Demanding with his sanguine prime,  
If the eternal steward registered  
The unrecorded acts of time;  
Not for himself insisting, but for one,—  
A stranger at his side,  
For whom he had staked his life,  
And on the daring odds had died.  
No one had seen this young man go,  
Or watched his plunge,  
To save another whom he did not know.  
Men only guessed the grimness of the struggle,  
The body-tug, the valour of the deed,  
For both were wrapped in the same green winding-sheet,  
And blood-red was the colour of the weed,  
That lay around their feet.  
Life for a life! The grim equivalent  
Was vouched for by a sacred precedent;  
But why the one who should have been redeemed  
Should also pay the price  
In the mutual sacrifice,  
Was what he wished to know,  
And urged upon the iron, blow by blow.

One who had sought for beauty all his days,  
In form and colour, symphony and phrase,  
Who had looked on gods made perfect by man's hand,  
And Nature's glories on the sea and land,—  
Now paused and wondered if the Creator's power,  
Finding itself without a plan, was spent,  
Leaving no relic at this vacant hour,  
But a grave-stone and iron monument.

One who had sought for truth, but found the world  
Outside the soul betray the one within,  
Knew beacon signals but as casual fires,  
And systems dead but for their power to spin,  
Laid deeply to his heart his discipline,  
Looked at the door where all the roadways closed,  
And took it as the clench of evidence,  
That the whole cosmic lie was predisposed,  
Yet faced it with a fine indifference.

From somewhere near the threshold of the door,  
A sharp insistent cry,  
Above all other notes, arose,—  
A miserere flung out to the sky,  
Accompanied by a knocking  
So importunate,  
It might have been the great  
Crescendo from the world of human souls,  
Gathering strength to assail  
The unhearing ears of God, or else to hail  
His drowsy warders at the stellar poles.  
Then through a rift  
In a storm-cloud's eddying,  
A grayness as of drift  
Of winter snow in a belated spring,  
Appeared upon a woman's face,  
Eroded with much perishing.  
The same dark burden under which the race  
Reaches old age lay strapped upon her soul:—  
That which collects in silence all the shame,  
Through hidden passages of time and blood,  
Then puts the open stigma of the blame  
Upon a spotless name.

Why all the purchase of her pain,  
And all her love could not atone  
For that incalculable stain:  
Why from that tortuous stream,—  
Flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone,—  
Should issue forth a Cain;  
Were queries rained upon the iron plates.  
'Twas not enough, it seemed, that her one gift  
To life should be returned  
To death, but that the Fates  
Should so conspire  
To have this one devoted offering burned  
At such an altar, and by such a fire!  
But what availed  
A woman's cry against the arrest  
Of hope when every rubric paled  
Before the Theban mockery of the crest?

And at this darkest moment, as I dreamed,  
The world with its dead weight of burdens seemed  
To pause before the door, in drifts of sand,  
And catacombs of rock and burial turf:  
For every wind that raged upon the land  
Had fled the nescient hollow of God's hand.  
And all the music left upon its waters  
Lay in the gray rotation of the surf,  
With calls of seamen in great weariness  
At their unanswered signals of distress;  
And all the light remaining was bereft  
Of colour and design in full eclipse;  
No fragrance in the fields; no flowers left  
But poppies with their charred autumnal lips.

Then with a suddenness beyond surprise,  
When life was sinking in its cosmic trial,  
And time was running down before my eyes,  
New lights and shadows leaped upon the dial.

I have often heard it said that by some token,  
As fragile as a shell,  
Or a wish thrice-spoken,  
The direst spell,  
Though old and ringed of iron, might be broken;  
That a fool's belief in the incredible,  
Joined to the sounding magic of a name,  
Makes up the stuff of miracle.  
From such a source, it well might be,  
Came this supreme authority.  
It may have been the young man's claim  
On life; or the old captain calling stormily  
From sea to sea;  
Or that root faith within a woman's heart;  
Perhaps it was the white face of the child;  
Or that last argument so wild  
Of wing, of such tumultuous breath,  
Its strange unreason might be made to prove  
The case for life before the throne of death,  
I do not know;  
But in the dream the door began to move.

A light shot through the narrow cleft,  
And shattered into hurrying gleams that rode  
Upon the backs of clouds, and through deep hollows,  
Like couriers with weird, prophetic code.  
And as the door swung forward slowly,  
A sound was heard, now like the beat  
Of tides under the drive of winds,  
Now like the swift deck-tread of feet,  
Steadying to a drum  
Which marshalled them to quarters, or the hum  
Of multitudinous voices that would tell  
Of the move of life invincible.

Then as the opening widened,  
And the sound became more clear, I tried  
With an insatiate hunger, to discover  
The fountain of that light and life inside;  
And with an exultation which outrode  
The vaunt of raw untutored strength, I cried;—

*Now shall be read  
The faded symbols of the page which keeps  
This hoary riddle of the dead.*

But something heavy and as old as clay,  
Which mires a human soul,  
Laid hold upon the quest so that it fell,  
Just baffled of its goal.  
Beyond the threshold of the door,  
I could not see; I only knew  
That those who had been standing, waiting there,  
Were passing through;  
And while it was not given me to know  
Whither their journey led, I had caught the sense  
Of life with high auroras and the flow  
Of wide majestic spaces;  
Of light abundant; and of keen impassioned faces,  
Transfigured underneath its vivid glow.

Then the door moved to its close with a loud,  
Relentless swing, as backed by ocean power;  
But neither gird of hinges, nor the feel of air  
Returning with its drilled weight of cloud,  
Could cancel half the meaning of that hour,—  
Not though the vision passed away,  
And I was left alone, aware  
Of blindness falling with terrestrial day  
On sight enfeebled by the solar glare.

# A MISCELLANY

## A PRAIRIE SUNSET

What alchemist could in one hour so drain  
The rainbow of its colours, smelt the ore  
From the September lodes of heaven, to pour  
This Orient magic on a Western plain,  
And build the miracle before our eyes  
Of castellated heights and colonnades,  
Carraran palaces, and cavalcades  
Trooping through a city in the skies!  
A northern cloud became a temple spire,  
A southern reach showed argosies on fire,  
And in the centre, with unhurried feet,  
Came priests and paladins, soon to descend  
To earth with swinging censers to attend  
The god of harvests down amidst his wheat.

And scarcely less resplendent was the passing,  
When with the night winds rising on the land,  
The hosts were led by a Valkyrian hand  
To their abodes, accompanied by the massing  
Of amber clouds touched with armorial red,  
By thrones dissolving, and by spirals hurled  
From golden plinths, announcing to the world  
That Day, for all its blazonry, was dead.  
And when, like a belated funeral rite,  
The last pale torch was smothered by the night,  
The mind's horizon like the sky was stripped  
Of all illusion but a fable told  
Of gods that died, of suns and worlds grown cold,  
In some extinct Promethean manuscript.

# OUT OF STEP

(1931 A.D.)

When the celestial dance was planned  
For star and constellation,  
A mighty baton took command  
Of perfect orchestration.

We praised the Master of the skies  
For sun and moon and planet—  
The ellipse was lovely to our eyes,  
So gracefully he ran it.

But when the human dancers met,  
This year—about two billion—  
They fumbled with their minuet,  
And CRASH went their pavilion!



## THE MAN AND THE MACHINE

By right of fires that smelted ore  
Which he had tended years before,  
The man whose hands were on the wheel  
Could trace his kinship through her steel,  
Between his body warped and bent  
In every bone and ligament,  
And this “eight-cylinder” stream-lined,  
The finest model yet designed.  
He felt his lesioned pulses strum  
Against the rhythm of her hum,  
And found his nerves and sinews knot  
With sharper spasm as she climbed  
The steeper grades, so neatly timed  
From storage tank to piston shot—  
This creature with the cougar grace,  
This man with slag upon his face.

## THE PARABLE OF PUFFSKY

Puffsky knew not how to live,  
But only how to sell,  
And strange it is—this truth to tell—  
That he was never known to give  
And never known to buy.  
Crack salesman of his time,  
He kept financiers wondering why  
He found such means to multiply  
His wealth yet never parted with a dime.  
He sold by night, he sold by day,  
Sold long, sold short, sold anyway;  
He'd sell his teeth, he'd sell his eyes: it made  
No difference to his trade  
No matter what he sold—  
Bottles, gases, oils or foods—  
The other fellow took the goods,  
But Puffsky took the gold.

And yet alas!  
One night it came to pass  
That just the hour that Puffsky died,  
He still assumed the bargain-rôle,  
For, shambling up to God, he tried  
To dicker with his soul.

And the good Lord sized him up and down,  
And looked him through and through,  
As he would a parvenu;  
And then replied with darkening frown,  
As Puffsky wedged his foot against the door,  
“Sirrah—you may think it strange,  
But on the floor  
Of this Exchange  
We neither barter, buy nor sell,  
And neither dime nor rusty sou  
Have we to offer you”:  
And whereupon the Lord adjusted well  
A glittering monocle,  
And said: “Hence—try thy game in hell.”  
So without further argument,  
Thither Puffsky went.

Then Satan with a hoarse and bronchial laugh—  
Amazed that such a spirit could exist—  
Appointed a commission,  
Composed of two professors on his staff,  
A chemist and a pessimist,  
To make report upon the apparition;  
To estimate  
Its size and weight,  
Specific gravity,  
And value in Gehenna currency.

And from the laboratory retort  
Came back this joint report—  
“Both size and weight  
Are indeterminate.  
It is a watered soul  
That hath a swollen diaphragm,  
Gaseous, but non-inflammable  
When mixed with coal,  
Therefore in hell  
Not worth a current damn.”

## OLD AGE

So poor again—with all that plunder taken;  
Your mountain stride, your eagle vision—gone!  
And the *All Hail* of your voice in a world forsaken  
Of song and curving wings and the laughter of dawn.

So little is left; I cannot be persuaded  
It is your hand that shakes; your step that falls;  
Your will, once statured on the crags, now faded  
To the round of a wheel chair and four dull walk.

And yet to-day as I watched your pale face yearning,  
When the sun's warmth poured through the open door,  
And something molten in your soul was burning  
Memorial raptures life could not restore,

I knew, by some high trick of sight and hearing,  
Your heart was lured beyond the window sills,  
Adventuring where the valley mists were clearing,  
And silver horns were blowing on the hills.

## BLIND

It was your boast before the darkness fell,  
That you could measure all your love, and chart  
The return of mine so surely as to tell  
Both boundary and trespass in my heart.

But when the dawn and the meridian  
Entered their sudden fusion with the night;  
When roses and anemones began  
To grow as winter rushes in your sight;

I wondered by what navigator's sign,  
By what vicarious starlight, you could trace  
Horizons which were never yours nor mine,  
Until your wistful fingers sought my face.

## A LEGACY

The will she made contained no room for strife,  
For twisted words concerning gold or lands,  
For all the wealth that she had saved from life  
Was such as lay within her folded hands.

She would have been less rich with other store,  
And we the poorer if she had not willed  
Only her heart, and then gone out the door,  
Leaving that cupboard on the latch and filled.

# THE DECISION

(To L.R., a college athlete who died May, 1923.)

You left the field and no one heard  
A murmur from you. We,  
With burning look and stubborn word,  
Challenged the Referee—

Why he forbade you to complete  
The run, hailing you back  
Before your firm and eager feet  
Were half-way round the track;

Unless he had contrived, instead,  
To start you on a race,  
With an immortal course ahead,  
And daybreak on your face.

## THE HIGHWAY

What aeons passed without a count or name,  
Before the cosmic seneschal,  
Succeeding with a plan  
Of weaving stellar patterns from a flame,  
Announced at his high carnival  
An orbit—with Aldebaran!

And when the drifting years had sighted land,  
And hills and plains declared their birth  
Amid volcanic throes,  
What was the lapse before the marshal's hand  
Had found a garden on the earth,  
And led forth June with her first rose?

And what the gulf between that and the hour,  
Late in the simian-human day,  
When Nature kept her tryst  
With the unfoldment of the star and flower—  
When in her sacrificial way  
Judaea blossomed with her Christ!

But what made our feet miss the road that brought  
The world to such a golden trove,  
In our so brief a span?  
How may we grasp again the hand that wrought  
Such light, such fragrance, and such love,  
O star! O rose! O Son of Man?



## CHERRIES

“I’ll never speak to Jamie again”—  
Cried Jennie, “let alone wed,  
No, not till blackbirds’ wings grow white,  
And crab-apple trees grow cherries for spite,  
But I’ll marry Percy instead.”

But Jamie met her that self-same day,  
Where crab-apple trees outspread,  
And poured out his heart like a man insane,  
And argued until he became profane,  
That he never meant what he said.

Now strange as it seems, the truth must be told,  
So wildly Jamie pled,  
That cherries came out where the crab-apples grew,  
And snow-winged blackbirds came down from the blue,  
And feasted overhead.

## A FELINE SILHOUETTE

They faced each other, taut and still;  
Arched hickory, neck and spine;  
Heads down, tails straight, with hair of quill,  
The fence—the battleline.

The slits within their eyes describe  
The nature of their feud;  
Each came to represent a tribe  
Which never was subdued.

One minute just before they fought,  
Before their blood called—“Time”,  
One told the other what he thought  
In words I cannot rhyme.

They hit each other in mid-air  
In one terrific bound,  
And even yet, as I’m aware,  
They have not struck the ground.

# THE CHILD AND THE WREN

(To Claire)

It took three weeks to make them friends—  
The wren in fear the maid molest  
Those six white eggs within the nest  
She built up at the gable-end.

What fearful language might be heard  
(If only English she could speak)  
On every day of the first week,  
All from the throat of that small bird!

The scolding died away, and then  
The fear was followed by surprise  
At such sky-blue within the eyes,  
That travelled from the girl to wren.

But that third week! I do not know—  
It's neither yours to tell nor mine—  
Some understanding glance or sign  
Had passed between them to and fro;

For never was her face so flushed,  
Never so brilliant blue her eye  
At any gift that I could buy,  
As at the news when in she rushed

To tell us that the wren had come,  
With flutter and hop and gurgling sound,  
From gable to tree, to shrub, to ground,  
Right to her hand to get a crumb.

## FROST

The frost moved up the window-pane  
Against the sun's advance,  
In line and pattern weaving there  
Rich scenes of old romance—  
Armies on the Russian snows,  
Cockade, sword, and lance.

It spun a web more magical,  
Each moment creeping higher,  
For marble cities crowned the hills  
With turret, fane and spire,  
Till when it struck the flaming sash,  
The Kremlin was on fire.

## COMRADES

You—that could not stand the dust  
Of a day's dry weather,  
Nor in high winds  
Shoulder a load together,  
Without a faith that was broken,  
And a love consumed  
By the hot marl of words  
That were spoken—  
Do you not know that a hemlock root  
Will enfold you together,  
Though fair be the sky  
Or foul be the weather?  
To that same bed you shall come,  
When the ear shall be deaf  
And the lips be dumb;  
Where under the turf,  
Not a note shall be heard,  
From the cry of a wren  
To the thunder of surf.

## JOCK O' THE LINKS

Ah Jock! I'm sure that as a right  
Good honest friend I ken ye,  
And damned be he that would indite  
A scornful word agen' ye:  
A self-controlled God-fearin' Scot,  
You fight with all that's evil,  
But every time you top your shot  
The odds are with the devil.

A softer heart in human breast  
I do not know another,  
And many a time, in many a test,  
You've proved yourself a brother.  
That man, I'll swear, is not alive  
More temperate in speech,  
But every time you fan your drive  
I get beyond your reach.

That God is partial to the plaid,  
Long-suffering, too, I've heard;  
I hope He was the day I had  
You stymied on the third;  
I cannot vouch for rumour, but  
One thing I trust is clear,  
That when He saw you miss your putt,  
He turned His one deaf ear.

I'm thankful, too, that when you dub  
Your spoon, it's not on me  
You break your new steel-shafted club,  
But on your Highland knee.  
And wise I have been to abstain  
From comments on your stance,  
With pibrochs crashing through your brain,  
Culloden through your glance.

# THE CONVICT HOLOCAUST

(Columbus, Ohio, 1930)

Waiting their turn to be identified,  
After their fiery contact with the walls,  
Three hundred pariahs ranged side by side  
Upon the floors along the cattle stalls!

The fires consumed their numbers with their breath,  
Charred out their names: though many of the dead  
Gave proof of valour, just before their death,  
That Caesar's legions might have coveted.

But these, still subject to the law's commands,  
Received the last insignia of the cell:  
The guards went through them, straightened out their hands,  
And with the ink-brush got the thumb-prints well.

## 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.

## LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

Helen, Deirdre, Héloïse,  
Laura, Cleopatra, Eve!  
The knight-at-arms is on his knees,  
Still at your altars—by your leave.

The magic of your smiles and frowns  
Had made you goddesses by right,  
Divorced the monarchs from their crowns,  
And changed world empires over-night.

You caught the *male* for good or ill,  
And locked him in a golden cage,  
Or let him out at your sweet will—  
A prince or peasant, lord or page.

But do not preen your wings and claim  
That when you passed away, the keys—  
The symbols of your charm and fame—  
Were buried with your effigies.

For, wild and lovely are your broods  
That stole from you the ancient arts;  
In tender or tempestuous moods,  
They storm the barrens of our hearts.

Amy, Hilda, Wilhelmine,  
Golden Marie and slim Suzette,  
Viola, Claire and dark Eileen,  
Brown-eyed Mary, blue-eyed Bett.

Daughters are ye of those days  
When Troy and Rome and Carthage burned:  
Ye cannot mend your mothers' ways  
Or play a trick they hadn't learned.

But whether joy or whether woe—  
Lure of lips or scorn of eyes—  
We bless you either way we go,  
In or out of Paradise.

# EXTRAVAGANZAS

# THE WITCHES' BREW

(In celebration of a fifth wedding anniversary)

Perched on a dead volcanic pile,  
Now charted as a submerged peak,  
Near to a moon-washed coral isle,  
A hundred leagues from Mozambique,  
Three water-witches of the East,  
Under the stimulus of rum,  
Decided that the hour had come  
To hold a Saturnalian feast,  
In course of which they hoped to find  
For their black art, once and for all,  
The true effect of alcohol  
Upon the cold, aquatic mind.  
From two Phœnicians who were drowned,  
The witches three (whose surnames ran  
Lulu, Ardash, Maryan)  
Had by an incantation found  
A cavern near the coast of Crete,  
And saw, when they had entered in,  
A blacksmith with a dorsal fin,  
Whose double pectorals and webbed feet  
Proved—while his dusky shoulders swung—  
His breed to be of land and water,  
Last of great Neptune's stock that sprung  
From Vulcan's union with his daughter.  
The sisters' terms accepted, he,  
Together with his family,  
Left his native Cretan shore  
To dig the witches' copper ore  
Out of their sub-aquaceous mines  
In the distant Carolines,  
And forge a cauldron that might stand,  
Stationary and watertight,  
A thousand cubits in its height,  
Its width a thousand breadths as spanned  
By the smith's gigantic hand,  
So that each fish, however dry,  
Might have, before the Feast was through,  
His own demonstrable supply  
Of this Pan-Oceanic brew.  
A thousand leagues or so away

Down the Pacific to Cape Horn,  
And Southwards from Magellan lay  
A table-land to which was borne  
This cauldron from the Carolines,  
For here, as well the sisters knew,  
The Spanish conquerors of Peru  
Had stored their rich and ancient wines,  
About the time the English burst  
Upon their galleons under Drake,  
Who sank or captured them to slake  
A vast Elizabethan thirst.  
With pick and bar the Cretan tore  
His way to the interior  
Of every sunken ship whose hold  
Had wines almost four centuries old.  
Upon the broad Magellan floors,  
Great passage-way from West to East,  
Were also found more recent stores,  
The products of a stronger yeast.  
For twenty years or thereabout,  
The Bacchanals of Western nations,  
Scenting universal drought,  
Had searched the ocean to find out  
The most secluded ports and stations,  
Where unmolested they might go  
“To serve their god while here below,”  
With all the strength of their libations.  
So to the distant isles there sailed,  
In honour of the ivy god,  
Scores of log-loaded ships that hailed  
From Christiania to Cape Cod  
With manifests entitled *ham*,  
*Corn beef*, *molasses*, *chamois milk*,  
*Cotton*, *Irish linen*, *silk*,  
*Pickles*, *dynamite* and *jam*,  
And myriad substances whose form  
Dissolved into quite other freights,  
Beneath the magic of a storm  
That scattered them around the Straits;  
For this is what the blacksmith read,  
While raking up the ocean bed:—

*Budweiser, Guinness, Schlitz (in kegs),  
Square Face Gin and Gordon's Dry,  
O'Brien's, Burke's and Johnny Begg's,  
Munich, Bock, and Seagram's Rye,  
Dewar's, Hennessy's 3 Star,  
Glenlivet, White Horse and Old Parr,  
With Haig and Haig, Canadian Club,  
Jamaica Rum, and other brands  
Known to imbibers in all lands  
That stock from Brewery or Pub.  
All these the Cretan, with the aid  
Of his industrious progeny,  
Drew to the cauldron, and there laid,  
By order of the witches three,  
The real foundation for the spree.*

## OTHER INGREDIENTS



To make a perfect fish menu,  
The witches found they had to place  
Upon this alcoholic base  
Great stacks of food and spices too.  
Of all the things most edible  
On which the souls of fish have dined,  
That fish would sell their souls to find,  
Most gracious to their sense of smell,  
Is flesh exotic to their kind;—  
Cold-blooded things yet not marine,  
And not of earth, but half-between,  
That live enclosed within the sand  
Without the power of locomotion,  
And mammal breeds whose blood is hot,  
That court the sea but love it not,  
That need the air but not the land,—  
The Laodiceans of the ocean.  
So in this spacious cauldron went  
Cargoes of food and condiment.  
Oysters fished from Behring Strait  
Were brought and thrown in by the crate;  
Spitzbergen scallops on half-shell,  
Mussels, starfish, clams as well,  
Limpets from the Hebrides,  
Shrimps and periwinkles, these,  
So celebrated as a stew,  
Were meant to flavour up the brew.  
Then for the more substantial fare,  
The curried quarter of a tail  
Hewn from a stranded Greenland whale,  
A liver from a Polar bear,  
A walrus' heart and pancreas,  
A blind Auk from the coast of Java,  
A bull moose that had died from gas  
While eating toadstools near Ungava,  
One bitter-cold November day;  
Five sea-lion cubs were then thrown in,  
Shot by the Cretan's javelin  
In a wild fight off Uruguay;  
With flippers fresh from the Azores,  
Fijian kidneys by the scores,

Together with some pollywogs,  
And kippered hocks of centipedes,  
And the hind legs of huge bull frogs  
Raked by the millions from the reeds  
Of slimy Patagonian bogs.

Then before the copper lid  
Was jammed upon the pyramid,  
The sisters scattered on the top  
Many a juicy lollipop;  
Tongues from the Ganges crocodile,  
Spawn from the delta of the Nile,  
Hoofs of sheep and loins of goats,  
Raised from foundered cattle-boats—  
Titbits they knew might blend with hops,  
Might strengthen rum or season rye,  
From Zulu hams and Papuan chops  
To filets mignons from Shanghai.  
Now while volcanic fires burned,  
Making the cauldron fiercely hot,  
Lulu with her ladle churned  
The pungent contents of the pot,  
From which distinctive vapours soon  
Rose palpably before the view.  
Then Ardath summoned a typhoon  
Which as it swooped upon the stew,  
And swept around the compass, bore  
To every sea and every shore  
The tidings of the witches' Feast.  
And from the West and from the East,  
And from the South and from the North,  
From every bay and strait and run,  
From the Tropics to the Arctic sun,  
The Parliament of fish came forth,  
Lured by a smell surpassing far  
The potencies of boiling tar,  
For essences were in this brew  
Unknown to blubber or to glue,  
And unfamiliar to the nose  
Of sailors hardened as they are  
To every unctuous wind that blows  
From Nantucket to Baccalieu.  
The crudest oil one ever lit  
Was frankincense compared to it.  
It entered Hades, and the airs  
Resuscitated the Immortals;  
It climbed the empyrean stairs

And drove St. Peter from the portals.

## DEFENSIVE MEASURES

According to the witches' plan,  
All life whose blood did not run true  
Must be excluded from the brew;  
Each earthly thing from snail to man,  
And every mammal of the sea  
Was for that night an enemy.  
And so the smith from ocean hoards  
Had gathered masts and spars and boards  
Of ships, with cutlasses and swords,  
And countless pikes and spears, and made  
With them a towering palisade.  
And to the top thereof was sent,  
To guard the brew, a warrior,—  
The bravest of the ranks of war,  
And deaf to bribe or argument.  
To neither shark nor swordfish fell  
The honours of the sentinel,  
For of all fighters there, the star  
Was Tom the cat from Zanzibar.

## THE SEA-CAT

It's not for us to understand  
How life on earth began to be,  
How forms that lived within the sea  
Should leave the water for the land;  
Or how—(Satan alone may trace  
The dark enigma of this race)  
When feline variants, so far  
Removed as tabs and tigers are,  
Preferred, when they had left the shore,  
The jungle and the kitchen floor—  
That this uncouth, primordial cat  
Should keep his native habitat.  
Yet here he was, and one might find  
In crouch and slink and instant spring  
Upon a living, moving thing,  
The common genus of his kind.  
But there were qualities which he  
Derived not from his family tree.  
No leopard, lynx or jaguar  
Could match this cat from Zanzibar  
For whiskers that from ear to chin  
Ran round to decorate his grin.  
And something wilder yet than that  
Lay in the nature of this cat.  
It's said that mariners by night,  
When near a dangerous coast-line, might  
Recover bearings from the light  
Of some strange thing that swam and gleamed;  
A Salamander it might be,  
They said, or Lucifer that streamed  
His fiery passage through the sea.  
But in this banquet place not one  
Of all the revellers could fail  
To solve the riddle when Tom spun  
A vast ecliptic as his tail,  
A fiery comet, and his fur  
Electrified each banqueter.  
So the three beldams there agreed  
No alien could invade the hall  
If one of such a fighting breed  
Were placed upon the fortress wall;

For who, they asked, of mortal creatures  
Could claim more fearful derivation  
Than Tom with his Satanic features  
And his spontaneous conflagration?

## THE FLIGHT OF THE IMMORTALS

Close to the dunnest hour of night,  
Sniffing the odour of the brew,  
Their bat-wings oiled for water flight,  
The Devil and his legions flew,  
Smashing the record from Hell's Gates  
By plumline to Magellan Straits.  
Far in their wake, but hurrying fast  
For fear the odour might not last  
Till morning, came a spectral band  
Weary from Hades—that dry land.

## INVENTORY OF HADES

1. Statesmen and apothecaries,  
Poets, plumbers, antiquaries,  
Premiers with their secretaries,  
Home and foreign missionaries,  
And writers of obituaries.
2. Mediaeval disputants  
Mystics in perpetual trance,  
Philosophers in baggy pants,  
Puritans to whom the chance  
Had never come in life to dance  
Save when the dreadful circumstance  
Of death removed their maiden aunts.
3. Scribes with wide phylacteries,  
Publicists and Sadducees,  
Scholars, saints and Ph.D.'s.

4. Doctors, auctioneers and bakers,  
Dentists, diplomats and fakirs,  
Clergymen and undertakers.
  
5. Rich men, poor men, fools and sots,  
Logicians, tying Shades in knots,  
Pagans, Christians, Hottentots,  
Deacons good and bad in spots,  
Farmers with their Wyandots.

AN HOUR LATER

Not since the time the sense of evil  
Caught our first parents by surprise,  
While eating fruit in Paradise,  
One fateful morning, had the Devil,  
Used as he was to steam and smoke,  
Beheld such chaos as now broke  
Upon his horny, bloodshot eyes.  
Prince of the Power of the air,  
Lord of terrestrial things as well  
As subterranean life in Hell,  
He had till now not been aware  
How this great watery domain  
Might be enclosed within his reign;  
Such things as fish, cold-blooded, wet,  
Had served no end of his as yet.  
The serpent could be made to lie,  
And hence fit agent to deceive  
A trustful female such as Eve;  
But he, though cold, at least was dry.  
For all his wily strategy  
Since time began, the Devil saw  
No way to circumvent the sea.  
The fish transgressed no moral law,  
They had no principles, no creed,  
No prayers, no Bibles, and no Church,  
No Reason's holy light to read  
The truth and no desire to search.  
Hence from Dame Nature's ancient way  
Their fins had never learned to stray.  
They ate and drank and fought, it's true,  
And when the zest was on they slew;  
But yet their most tempestuous quarrels  
Were never prejudiced by morals;  
As Nature had at the beginning  
Created them, so they remained—  
Fish with cold blood no skill had trained  
To the warm arts of human sinning.

THE MIDNIGHT REVELS AS OBSERVED BY THE SHADES



“The witches’ device for the equitable distribution of the liquor consisted in the construction of tens of thousands of stopcocks and bungs which were fitted into the perforations of the cauldron, and graded so nicely in calibre that every species of fish from a sardine to a shark might find perfect oral adjustment. To provide against all contingencies they had, in addition, furnished each amphibious member of the Cretan family with a ladle so that the weaker fish, unable to reach the taps and bung-holes, might be supplied at the surface of the water. But notwithstanding all their powers of divination, the scheme came very near to being wrecked, first, by the tremendous congregation of fish, and secondly, by the advent of the wild hordes from Hades. Now it was not within the counsels of either the witches or the Devil that the test should be prejudiced by the Shades. If they arrived at all, their rôle would be severely restricted to that of an audience. But the momentum of their rush carried them up against the sides of the cauldron with such a terrific impact that a vertical crack, one hundred cubits long, was made near the top. Fortunately, however, for the experiment, the Shades were immediately driven back to the rear by a battalion of imps, and the crack served the purpose of allowing sufficient liquor to trickle through into the sea to account for the inebriation of such fish as those whose nervous constitution could not stand the undiluted draughts.”

*Byron:*

Now what the devil can be hid  
In whisky straight, or punch or sherbet,  
To give the doldrums to that squid,  
Or plant the horrors in that turbot?  
I never dreamed a calamary  
Could get so dead stiff on Canary.

*Wolsey:*

I've watched the effect of many a dram  
On Richmond and on Buckingham;  
And with good reasons have I mourned  
To see my Royal Henry corned;  
And many a noble prelate losing  
His benefice by one night's boozing.  
But till this hour I never knew  
What alcoholic draughts could do  
To change a salmon or a hake  
Into a paralytic rake;  
Or how a drunken sturgeon felt  
When fever burned inside his pelt.

*Campeggio:*

Now by my Hat and Clement's foot,  
What kind of devil must have dwelt  
Inside a liquor that could put  
Delirium tremens in a smelt?

*Pepys:*

What maddening impulse makes that shark,  
Which ought, by its own nature, choose a  
Mate of its own kind, to spark  
With that gelatinous Medusa?

*Paracelsus:*

They say that mortals may go mad  
Beneath thy beams, Divinest Luna;  
But how canst thou debauch a shad,  
Create an epileptic tuna?

*Gulliver:*

I saw a sardine just now glut  
His hunger on a halibut.

*Samuel Butler:*

How could a thing like rye or hops stir  
The turgid corpus of a lobster?  
And thus induce an inflammation  
Within the shell of a crustacean?

*Samson:*

I saw a small phlegmatic mullet  
Holding a dog-fish by the gullet.

*Saint Patrick:*

Such crimes as from the sea arise  
Beat out the days of old Gomorrah;  
Had I not seen it with my eyes  
I would not have believed, begorra!

## THE CHARGE OF THE SWORDFISH

Now when, beneath the riotous drinking,  
The witches found the liquor sinking  
So low their ladles couldn't reach it,  
The blacksmith with a blazing larynx  
Organized a swordfish phalanx  
And charged the cauldron plate to breach it.  
Back from its copper flanks they fell,  
The smith had done his work too well.

*A Greek:*

From such a race of myrmidons  
Our heroes and our Marathons.

*Fabius Maximus:*

It's but the fury of despair.

*A French General:*

Magnifique! mais ce n'est pas la guerre.

*Napoleon:*

By some such wild demonic means  
My astral promise was undone.

*Nelson:*

By spirits like to such marines  
Trafalgar and the Nile were won.

*Carlyle:*

Full ten feet thick that plate was wrought,  
And yet those swordfish tried to ram it;  
Unthinking fools! I never thought  
The sea so full of numskulls, dammit!

*Satan:*

Now by my hoof, this recipe  
Is worth a million souls to me;  
But lo! what mortal creature there  
Grins, haunched upon the parapet,  
Whose fierce, indomitable stare  
I long have dreamed of, but not met?

*Maryan:*

Most sovereign and most sulphurous lord!  
We, with the help of Cretans, made  
This circumambient palisade  
Of this great height and strength, to ward  
Off such invaders as might mar  
Our feast, and then as sentinel—  
Chief vigilante out of hell—  
We stationed HIM from Zanzibar.

*Satan:*

Good! From such audacious seed  
Sprang Heaven's finest, fallen breed,  
Maryan! Ardat! Lulu!  
Try out upon this cat, the brew.

## THE SUPREME TEST

Now it was clear to every Shade  
That some great wonder was before them,  
As Tom upon the palisade  
Emptied, as fast as Lulu bore them,  
The flasks upon the ocean wagon.  
And clear it was when Tom had cleaned  
The liquor from the hundredth flagon,  
The Shades then saw Hell's darkest fiend,—  
A sea-cat with an awful jag-on.

Up to this time, he did not see  
Upon the wide expanse of grey  
A single thing approach his way  
Which he might call his enemy.  
He spent the hours upon the rim,  
Leaping, dancing, rarely sitting,  
Always grinning, always spitting,  
Waiting for a foe to swim  
Within his range, but through the night  
Not a walrus offered fight,—  
A most unusual night for him.  
But with the hundredth flagon drink,  
He spat at his inactive fate,  
And moving closer to the brink,  
Began more madly to gyrate.  
Upon his face, ironic, grim,  
A resolution was ingrained,  
If fish would not come unto him  
To offer battle, what remained  
But that his lighting blood would freeze  
Unless he were allowed to go,  
Ranging at will upon the seas,  
To fight and conquer every foe?  
With that, into the cavernous deep  
He took a ghastly, flying leap.

Gaping, breathless, every Shade  
Watched the course of the wild-cat's raid;  
And never was an errand run  
With means and end so much at one.  
For from his birth he was imbued  
With hatred of his racial kind;  
A more inveterate, blasting feud  
Within the world one could not find.  
His stock were traitors to the sea,  
Had somehow learned the ways of earth,  
The need of air, the mystery  
Of things warm-blooded, and of birth.  
To avenge this shameful derogation,  
He had, upon his final flask,  
Resolved to carry out his task,—  
To wit:—the full extermination,  
First, of his nearest order, male  
And female, then the breed cetacean;  
Grampus, porpoise, dolphin, whale,—  
Humpback, Rorqual, Black and White;  
Then the walrus, lion, hood,  
Seals of all orders; these he would  
Just as they came, in single fight,  
Or in the fortunes of mêlée,  
Challenge as his lawful prey.

*The Blacksmith:*

I never knew an ocean steed  
Develop such demonic speed.

*Sir Isaac Newton:*

How he maintains that lightning rate,  
Now in air and now in water,  
And carries on such heavy slaughter,  
Is more than I can formulate.

*Blake:*

The tiger, though in stretch of limb  
And heft of bone is larger; still,  
For straight uxoricidal will  
Is but a lamb compared to him.

*Bottom:*

What humour is it makes him flail  
His tawny quarters with that tail?

*Owen Glendower:*

Did any electrician mark  
The explosive nature of that spark?

*Benjamin Franklin:*

I did in truth, but cannot quite  
See, on the basis of my kite,  
How such a flame should always sit  
Upon a wild-cat's caudal tip.

*Æsop:*

Or what blind fury makes him whip  
His smoking sides to capture it—  
An ignis fatuus that eludes  
The cat's most sanguinary moods.

*Euclid:*

The reasons for the circles lie  
Within the nature of the thing;  
This cat must run around a ring  
If he would catch his tail. But why  
So bloodily he chaseth it  
Is past the compass of my wit.



*Johnny Walker:*

Just why this wild-cat should revolve,  
Leaving his nether tip uncaught,  
And spend his energy for naught,  
The denser Shades will never solve;  
But (granting that the speed is quicker)  
All we discerning spirits know  
It's just the way a man would go,  
Grant the night and grant the liquor.

*Calvin:*

If I had known that such mad brutes  
Had found, before the world began,  
A place within the cosmic plan,  
They would have dished my Institutes.

THE RETURN OF THE CAT

TIME—MORNING

A half-point Nor'ard from the West,  
A bluish-tinted spot of light,  
Now deep below, now on the crest  
Of a high wave, hove into sight;  
And by the curves and speed it made,  
Conviction came to every Shade  
That here the monster was returning  
With all those inner fires burning  
That no destruction could assuage;  
Though through the hours of the night  
The floating victims of the fight  
Showed how the wild-cat could engage  
His foes; achieve his victories;  
For those he could not kill outright  
Had either died from heart-disease  
Or passed out through a hæmorrhage.  
An unexpected wonder met  
His rolling, unabated eye—  
For when he reached the parapet  
He found the witches' cauldron dry.  
And there was something which surprised  
Him even more; the drunken riot  
Was followed by a holy quiet;  
The fish lay dead or paralysed;  
No witch this time came forth to serve  
His inbred hunger for assault  
With either rum or wine or malt.  
The thing told heavily on his nerve,  
That near that massive banquet place  
Not one lone member of his race,  
Outside the fortress or within,  
Survived to give him grin for grin,  
Or swish a tail across his face.  
And so this wild-cat, now bereft  
Of all of life's amenities,  
Took one blood-curdling leap and left  
Magellan's for the vacant seas.  
Sullen and dangerous he ripped  
A gleaming furrow through the water,  
Magnificently still equipped  
For combat with rapine and slaughter.

Now with his tail electro-tipped,  
Swiftly but leisurely he made  
Around the steaming palisade  
A blazing spiral which outshone  
The fiercest glow of Acheron.  
Then suddenly, as if aware,  
By a deep ferment in his soul  
Or something psychic in his hair,  
Of some ulterior, mystic goal,  
He sharply turned, began a lonely  
Voyage pregnant of immortal raids  
And epic plunder. But the Shades  
Saw him no more in the flesh. Only  
To Satan and the witches three  
(In touch with his galvanic tail,  
By more occulted masonry)  
Appeared a phosphorescent trail  
That headed for the Irish Sea.

# THE GREAT FEUD

*(A Dream of a Pleiocene Armageddon)*

Like a quarter moon the shoreline curled  
Upon the neck of the ancient world,  
Where, as the modern Magians say,  
In one cool morning of the Earth,  
Australasia had its birth,  
And vertebrated with Malay.  
Monsoons from Arafura Seas  
Had played their native energies  
Full upon the western tip,  
Until the vast recessional  
Of scourging wash and tidal rip  
Had made a stubborn littoral  
Take on a deep indented shape,—  
A hundred leagues, to the eastern Cape,  
Of broken bays with narrow reaches,  
Deltas and gulfs bulwarked by steep  
Eroded headlands, with a sweep  
Of fifty miles of central beaches,  
And rich alluvial flats where luscious  
Grasses, ferns and milk bulrushes  
Made up the original nursery  
For fauna of the land and sea.  
Stretching from the water line  
By gentle slope and sharp incline,  
Past many an undulating plain,  
The land ran southward to a chain  
Of heavy-wooded hills and rose  
Beyond them to the Black Sierras,  
Soaring aloft to where the snows  
That capped the ranging Guadeleras  
Were blackened by the brooding dread  
Outline of a volcano's head,—  
Jurania, with her crater jaw,  
Her slanting forehead ancient-scarred,  
And breathing through her smoky maw,  
Lay like a dragon left to guard  
The Isthmian Scarps against the climb  
Of life that left the ocean slime,  
In far adventurous design,  
On footholds past the timber line.

In such a place, at such a time,  
Long before the birth of man,  
This great Tellurian feud began.

For ages which cannot be told  
The fish along the Isthmian border  
Had felt the invasion of their cold  
Blood by an unexplained disorder.  
It looked as if the destination,  
Of all life of the stock marine,  
Was doomed to be, through paths unseen,  
The most profound obliteration.  
Millions of youthful fins were led  
Far from their safe and watery bed,  
To sport along the tidal edge,  
Nosing for grubs and water-lice,  
For pickerel weed and shoots of rice  
That grew luxuriant within the sedge,  
And many feasting unawares  
Were drawn into relentless snares;  
Strange rasp-and-saw bills harried them,  
And swooping talons carried them  
Into the air, and many more  
Were stranded high and dry on shore,  
Where poisonous lizards, asps and adders  
Bit them, or where the solar fire  
Caught them at noon-tide in the mire,  
Curdled their blood and starched their bladders.  
And thousands that survived the heat  
Turned their backs upon their breed,  
Shed their fins and took on feet,  
And clambered far inland to feed  
On windy things like grass and roots,  
Bark and leaves and bitter sloes,  
Or, like those horrid jungle brutes  
With hairy pelts and horny toes,  
To quaff the warm blood of their foes;  
While many more that did return,  
After one æonian night,  
Come back contemptuous to spurn  
Their parents, like the trilobite,  
With stony back and stonier heart;  
Rolled up in balls and dwelt apart  
In sulky isolation; while others,—  
The mongrel water scorpions sprung

From crabs and spiders,—came and stung  
Their little sisters and their brothers.



And thus it was throughout the whole  
Sea-range of the Australian zone,  
The fear of racial doom was thrown  
Heavily upon the piscine soul.  
A futile anger like a curse  
Only made confusion worse.  
Their mad desire to strike back  
At their destroying coward-foe  
Turned all their fury of attack  
Into consuming vertigo.  
It broke their hearts and crushed their wills,  
It thinned the juices of their maws,  
Left them with gnashing of the jaws  
And deep prolapsis of the gills.  
And hitherto unsuffered pains,  
A ghastly brood, came in by legions,  
Rheumatic tremors in the veins,  
And palsy in the ventral regions.  
Now, not a single evening passed  
But an aquatic breathed its last  
Beneath the terrifying roar  
Of some dread plantigrade on shore;  
And so this strange insidious spark  
Of wild adventure carried sorrow  
To many a yearning matriarch  
With the drab dawning of the morrow.  
But worst of all the horrors which  
Enmeshed them was the galling sense  
That never would the recompense  
Of battle come; that primal itch  
For vengeance would expend its force,  
According to an adverse Fate,  
Running a self-destroying course  
Down the blind alley of their hate.  
But by some quirk that Nature flings  
Into the settled scheme of things,—  
That old beldame, she gets so grumpy,  
No mortal vision may foretell  
Her antics, when her nerves are jumpy—  
It happened that she broke the spell  
By a freak shifting of the odds

Within the sea-lap of the gods.

Vibrant calms unknown before  
Lay on the Australasian shore,  
And Silences, a hooded band,  
Like portents of catastrophe,  
Tip-toed expectant on the land,  
And mummied about the open sea.  
Neptune had resigned the trident,  
For months Aeolus had not spoken,  
Nor had the sea-waves heard the strident  
Trumpeter,—his conch was broken.  
From igneous fissures in the ground  
Blue wisps of smoke with eerie sound  
Curled on the air to indicate  
That some elaborate escapade  
Was on the point of being played  
By the royal clowns of Fate.  
Here and there through asphalt holes  
Was heard a most uncanny racket,—  
Charon, before the birth of souls  
Called for his modern Stygian packet,  
Was busy at enormous scows,  
Caulking them with walrus skin,  
Hammering, sawing to the din  
Of Cerberus with his gruff bow-wows,  
Together with the gird and clatter  
Of wheels and whiffletrees, the croak  
Of scranny throats, and the fast patter  
Of feet and flap of wings, that spoke  
Of straining, jostling ambulances;  
Of Hecate with a frightful brood  
Of harpies in a phantom wood,  
Rehearsing new macabre dances.  
Now all this strange activity  
Was radiating everywhere;  
It rapped the calms upon the sea,  
It shot through flumes of stagnant air,  
It tingled in the blood of brutes  
Of land and water; in the roots  
Of trees; and even stuff like rocks  
Felt the strong etheric shocks,  
Until all natural things that dwelt

In the marine Australian belt  
Had come to feel, in a dumb way,  
That their protracted evil spell  
Might, with the birth of any day,  
Dissolve before a miracle.

One vital morning when the tide  
Was out and the Scala flats were dried,  
The largest-livered, heaviest-brained,  
Most thoroughbred pedestrian  
Of all the tribes that had attained  
The rank of the amphibian,  
A green-back turtle left the sea.  
Her blood was changing and a scent,  
Unknown to her rude ancestry,  
Had charged her with presentiment  
Of some unfathomed destiny.  
She had her eyes upon a spot  
She long aspired to, but had not  
For lack of muscle, wind and time,  
Been able to effect the climb,  
To-day, with fast evolving legs,  
Urged by the lure of distant land,  
She struggled for this cone of sand,  
Proudly there to lay her eggs,  
And from this vantage point, some day,  
To take her young and wend her way,  
Far up into the hills, to view  
What kind of giant there might dwell  
Stretched asleep against the blue,—  
A turtle with a snow-white shell,  
Or inland whale, for aught she knew,  
Sending through a spiracle,  
Intermittent puffs of gray  
Cloud resembling ocean spray.  
But when after four dusty hours  
She reached the top of the sandy cone,  
A thrill her blood had never known  
Paralysed her laying powers,  
And concentrated all her thought  
Upon the scene the morning brought.

An amphitheatre that held  
Valleys and cliffs and waterfalls,  
Gorges hewn like royal halls,  
Forests flanked by hills that swelled  
To mountains, these again to clouds  
From peaks of ice; and everywhere  
On ground, in trees and in the air,  
All forms of living things; dense crowds  
Of kites and gulls; vultures that hung  
Within the blue; and mangabees;  
Pig-tailed baboons that peered and swung  
From the liana of the trees;  
Wombats beneath acacias;  
Tasmanian tigers in the grass;  
Civets and sloths and bandicoots;  
High-standing elks in hollowed stumps  
Of redwood; tapirs in the clumps  
Of banyan, grubbing at the roots;  
And under eucalyptus trees,  
Flocks of emus and kiwis,  
With herds of skipping kangaroos,  
Antelopes and brindled gnooks;—  
All Earth's delegates were sent,  
Blood relations, tribal foes,  
Bound by cordial entente,  
To this prodigious Parliament;—  
Lions and water-buffaloes,  
Clouded leopards, chamois droves,  
Side by side and cheek by nose,  
Rested in the myrtle groves;  
While pumas, rams and grizzly bears  
Stroked each other in their lairs.  
And central to this wild tableau,  
A white giraffe began to scale  
A scraggy monolith of shale,  
Standing on a high plateau.  
And when his neck had arched the summit,  
A female anthropoidal ape  
Climbed up, and settling on the nape,  
Surveyed the crowded congress from it.  
The comeliest of the Primate race,

No one of all the Southern lands  
Could match her for arboreal grace,  
For hairy contour of her hands,  
For contemplation in her face,  
Or wisdom in her thyroid glands.  
To hide her young, to fight or climb,  
She was the cleverest of her time.  
She taught the family tribes to make  
A brier or a bamboo stake,  
Fashion an eolith and throw  
It deadly at a distant foe,  
To charge in serried ranks, or beat  
A hurried or prepared retreat,  
Showed them new uses for their paws  
In battle for the monkey cause.  
And faintly she had sniffed the raw  
Material of the moral law;  
She had observed, one windy night,  
The skull of an alligator cut  
Open by a cocoanut  
Falling from a lofty height,—  
An alligator that had torn  
And eaten up her youngest born.  
Then to a corner she had crept,  
And had not eaten, had not slept,  
But scratched her head and drummed her breast,  
And Reason entered as she wondered,  
Brooded in the trees and pondered  
On how the reptile was struck dead.  
And now on wide and just behalf  
Of all the land brutes of the world,  
She took the leadership and curled  
Around the neck of the giraffe;  
And all at once confusion ceased,  
As every hard raptorial beak  
And slanted eye of bird and beast  
Were strained upon the central peak,—  
And every lobe of every ear  
Was cocked that none might fail to hear  
The message when the ape unfurled  
Her simian marvel to the world.





*All ye that dwell afar or nigh  
Upon the plains or on the hills,  
In valley caves or in the sky,  
Feathers, and bristles, talons, quills,  
Flesh-eating ones and herbivores  
That roam inland or ramp the shores;  
All ye with snouts that turn the furrow  
For colonies of ants or burrow  
For savoury roots and fattened worms;  
And ye that carry on your sides  
Impenetrable armour hides,  
Slow-moving, ponderous pachyderms;  
All ye that lie in wait and crouch  
And gnashing leap upon your prey;  
And those that at the breast or pouch  
Suckle the young; all ye that lay,  
And scratch the ant-hills with your claws;  
And all that brotherhood that climb,  
Cracking great nuts between the jaws;  
Give ear and know ye that the time  
Has come when he that slumbereth  
Shall pay the penalty of death.  
Turn ye your gaze, a moment, far  
Beyond the plain over the height  
Of the palm trees where the white  
Foam-line breaks upon the bar.  
There under the blue stretch of sea,  
Living in darkness out of sight  
Skulks our ancient enemy,  
Devouring everything that passes  
Along the great lagoons to feed  
On clams and shrimps and rich swamp grasses  
Growing beside the tidal weed.  
By right of conquest and of birth  
We claim all footholds on this Earth;—  
Those flats there steaming in the sun,  
The coast-line to the salted edge  
Where the coral foam is spun,  
That long three-cornered, rocky wedge  
On which the walrus warms his hide,  
Where the dugong sleeps,—which the manatee*

*Claims as his dwelling when the sea  
Sucks it from us at high tide.  
All ye that hail from foreign parts  
Whose warm blood knocking at your hearts  
Has led you to this southern place,  
Attend upon my words! and know  
What great disaster to our race  
Befell us thirty years ago.  
You noticed as you cleared the height  
Of the Aral range that, to the south,  
Three juts of land came into sight,  
Extending far out of the mouth  
Of the Ravenna river;—these  
Have ever been the nurseries  
For the monkey tribe and kangaroo,  
For gentle bears and wallabies,  
For marmoset and wanderoo,  
And for the crinkly-tail baboon.  
On one dread summer day—at noon—  
A terror broke upon our eyes;  
We saw the blazing sun go out,  
And the level sea begin to rise  
Under the breath of a typhoon,  
And break with tidal water-spout,  
Carrying with the general ruin  
Of the palms, the aged and the young,  
The mother bear and little bruin;  
And wailing mandrill babes that clung  
To the parental neck were flung  
Into the watery abyss  
To satisfy the avarice  
And lust of every carrion foe  
And devil-fish that dwelt therein.  
To-day that slaughter at the Delta  
Remains the nightmare of the years;  
Those death-cries of the apes could melt a  
Stony crocodile to tears.  
Since then, their blood-thirst unappeased,  
They've ventured up our quiet streams;  
Gannets and herons have been seized,  
Baboons have died with horrid screams,*

*And elephantine calves for miles  
All along the water-courses,  
Together with young water-horses,  
Have been dragged down by crocodiles.  
For years reports have been received  
From distant countries occupied  
By furs, feathers and hairs allied  
By blood, how they have been bereaved  
And plunged in blackest misery  
By that insane, consuming hate  
Of ignorant, inarticulate  
Cold-blood barbarians of the sea.  
All we observant ones have seen  
That at high tides in clouded moons  
The habits of the fish have been  
To pass into the great lagoons,  
To lie in wait throughout the course  
Of night and morning to midday,  
Then chase our swimming breeds and slay  
Them with no feeling of remorse;  
And then with foul-distended maw,  
The cowards that they are withdraw  
To their unlighted haunts, to shun  
An open struggle in the sun.  
Therefore, let it now be known,  
By tokens that can never err,—  
By the marrow in the fox's bone,  
By the light growth of the ermine's fur,  
And by the camel's drinking bout,  
That the season's blasting drought,  
With lowering of the tides, will last  
Till three up-tilted moons have passed.  
Then will the inland shallows be,  
At all their gateways unexposed  
To the waters of the open sea,  
When the barrier reefs have closed.  
So if our hearts are resolute,  
At the appointed hour we'll match them  
With our brave hosts in massed pursuit;  
No quarter shall there be: we'll catch them,—  
From the smallest to the largest brute—*

*Throw them into consternation,  
Hem them in the muddy places  
And on the shoals, leaving no traces  
Save of their damned annihilation.  
Before I close—just one word more.  
Oft have we seen a jealous raid  
Grow into a great crusade;  
Or end by internecine war,  
When the blood of kindred drenched  
The higher mountain snows and quenched  
The jungle grass and arid moors.  
Therefore ye thirsty carnivores  
Be ye adjured that till the hour  
Of trial ye shall not devour  
The flesh of either animal  
Or bird upon the Earth; nor shall  
Ye taste of blood; your daily food  
Shall be the Earth's fair yield of fruits,  
Her store of plants and sappy roots,  
The fresh rind of the sandalwood,  
And willow bark, berries and beans,  
Tussac grass and mangosteens,  
Papaws and guavas and the sweet  
Milk of the cocoanut, the meat  
Of durian with celery,  
The ripe fruit of the mango-tree;  
Yea—all the natural plenitude  
Of Earth shall henceforth be your food.  
Likewise ye herbivores, be ye  
Adjured against all enmity.  
Ye shall not trample; shall not gore,  
With hoof or horn, the carnivore;  
But as their allies, ye shall spend,  
In one grand consummating blow  
Of death against the common foe,  
Your strength to a triumphant end.  
Now hie ye to your lairs; sleep not;  
Gather your hosts; abate no jot  
Of this day's wrath, and when the year  
Is big with three up-tilted moons,  
We'll charge on the aquatics here,*

*And trap them in the great Lagoons.*

She spoke: and every throat and lung  
Of herbivore and carnivore,  
In volleying symphonic roar,  
Rang with persuasion of her tongue.  
With vengeance firing up the breast,  
And with the speed of a monsoon blast,  
The keen dispersing hordes soon passed  
Beyond the skyline of the West.  
And the sultriness of peace again  
Brooded on valley, hill and plain,  
Shaken only when a cloud  
Of thick Juranian vapour, thrown  
In a dark spiral, burst with loud  
Echoes, like laughter from the cone.

Scrambling from her hill of sand,  
The disillusioned, now unfertile,  
Amphibious and bilingual turtle  
Fled the spectre of the land;  
Crossed the muddy flats and sought her  
Endangered kindred of the water,  
Apprised them of their bloody fate;  
The congress vote; the rage and hate  
Of the ape; her story of the feud,  
And the news was borne at ether rate  
Throughout the ocean's amplitude,  
And hailed with fierce, exultant mood,  
With wave of pectorals and high leap  
Into the air and foamy sweep  
Of tail and clutch of tentacle;  
Broken was the hoary spell!  
The hour for revenge, for daring,  
Had come for fin and scale and shell!  
For shark! swordfish! mackerel!  
Lobster! octopus! and herring!

WITH THE PASSAGE OF THE MOONS

# THE MUSTER

Black bucks whose distant ancestry  
Sprang from the (now) Westphalian hills;  
Wild boars with hair as stiff as quills,  
Or Brandenburgian pedigree;  
Wallachian elks, whose antlers spread  
A full five feet above the head,  
Trekking around the Caucasus,  
Sounding with defiant stare  
Their gutturals blent with blasphemous  
Umlauts upon the stricken air;  
And they were joined near Teheran  
By camels down from Turkestan,  
And elands from Trans-Caspian snows,  
Persian gazelles with harts and roes,  
Arabian antelopes and masses  
Of quaggas, zebras and wild asses;  
And on the eastern move, they met  
Horses following in the tracks  
Of ibexes and shaggy yaks  
From South Bokhara and Thibet  
And countries far-distributed;  
The thunderous Indian quadruped,—  
Rhinoceros and elephant,  
And every kind of ruminant,  
And non-cud chewing animals,  
Mammal and marsupial;  
From hill and valley, steppe and prairie,  
Peccary and dromedary,  
Bashan bull and Cashmir ram,  
The male spring-bok, chamois, gnou,  
The reid-buck and the kangaroo  
Heading downwards through Siam.  
Likewise, with earth-shattering roars,  
Accompanied by the screams of birds,  
From the wide compass came the herds  
Of storming, hungry carnivores.  
On them the patriotic call  
Fell with the greatest sacrifice.  
A troop of tigers from Bengal,  
Full of caraway and rice,  
(In keeping with the simian pledge)

Discovering early that their edge  
Of appetite was dulled enough  
By such ill-regulated stuff  
Upon a base of hops and oats,  
Attacked (although they did not slay)  
A flock of Himalayan goats  
Resting on a wooded height  
In their mid-journey to Malay;  
They drained their udders, bleached them white,  
And leaving them in awful plight,  
Prostrate and helpless for the fray,  
Passed on with energy renewed  
Into the Australasian feud.  
Through scorching plains and bleak defiles  
Of Northern India's spacious miles,  
Spread a vast host of tawny, mad  
Lions from Allahabad.  
Oleanders, roots of taro  
With ginseng and dried kauri cones  
Had changed the substance of their marrow,  
And alternated growls with groans.  
Hyænas forced-fed on salt-bush  
With sago palms and tapioca  
Wailed so loudly that they woke a  
Pack of wolves from Hindu Kush,  
Whose tocsin cry antiphonal  
Was caught by every caracal  
Sleeping with his stomach full  
Of rhododendrons near Cabul;  
And this was followed by the blab  
Of jackals cursed with elderberry  
All the way from the Punjab  
As far South-East as Pandicherry.  
Over the stretch from Turkestan,  
From Shamo Desert to Hunan,  
From Shantung down to Singapore,  
Along the central isthmus, fell  
The mighty, myrmidonian roar,  
That ululant and choric yell  
Of leopards full of okra pods  
And lentils; cheetahs gagging hard



At cascarilla spiced with nard;  
Polecats charged with cotton wads,  
And bears and civets overcome  
With stringent eucalyptus gum.  
All these in thousands numberless  
Had, with the triple lunar round,  
Arrived, in hot blood-thirstiness,  
Upon the Isthmian battle ground,  
Where, when the welter of their roars  
Had ceased along the littoral border,  
The hordes were disciplined to order,  
Divided into army corps,  
Brigades, battalions and platoons;  
Some were ambushed by the coast  
In heavy scrub and bush, but most  
Were stationed near the great lagoons  
Connected with the hostile beaches,  
And regimented into shape  
By the anthropoidal ape  
Who, by her rousing martial speeches,  
Kept up to fever heat their zeal  
For the imperilled commonweal.  
At last when the appointed week  
Had come; and when the final night  
Was over with the first faint streak  
Or orange in the Eastern light,—  
Just at the hour when every pad  
And hoof were tingling with the mad  
Moment of impending slaughter,  
A reeking, ghastly, unknown flair  
Compounded of the earth and water,  
Of subterranean clay and air,  
And like no other scent, arose  
And fell upon each roving nose.

Over the top of the nearest alp  
A cliff-like head began to rise;  
A lizard's skull with horny scalp,  
Dragon's teeth and boa's eyes;  
Covered with scales of greenish blue  
The lower jaw swung into view,  
And from the open mouth there came  
A lolling tongue of scarlet flame;  
A column of a neck whose reach  
Topped the high branches of a beech;  
Prehensile arms and girthy paunch  
Upheld by massive spine and haunch  
Are followed by unmeasured thighs;  
With hock and joint the inches rise,  
Until the monster in dread sight  
Of all, to the last claw, collects  
His stature on the Aral height,  
And lo,—TYRANNOSAURUS REX!

Now let the sceptic disbelieve  
The truth I am about to state,  
And urge, with curling lip, I weave  
A legend that is out of date.  
Let him disgorge his lie; I claim  
That by a wanton twist of Fate,  
(To which I am by Hera sworn)  
A creature of this sounding name,  
Although three million years too late,  
Stood on that peak this awful morn.  
It came to pass, one day, before  
Mammals appeared upon the Earth,  
A dinosaurian mother bore  
Tyrannus in a tragic birth.  
Chasing a mighty stegosaur  
Into a bed of pitch, she tried,  
With huge success, before she died,  
To lay an egg that chanced to live  
Throughout its long bituminous night,  
Enveloped by this soft, air-tight  
Most excellent preservative;  
Until just fifty years ago,  
When the volcano underwent  
Her seismic periodic throes,  
The egg came bouncing through a rent.  
A moa passing by espied  
The object; sidled up, cock-eyed,  
And watched it with a mother's pride.  
Like a beach-stone pumiced by the sea,  
It glowed with the full sunlight on it.  
She sniffed the thing excitedly,  
Walked around it, pecked and scratched  
The shell, then feathered down upon it.  
And in due course of time she hatched  
Her prodigy. At first she fed him  
On cotton-tails and unweaned lambs,  
On calves and badgers; then she led him  
To the higher ridges where she filled  
His stomach with the coarser hams  
Of pigs and short-horn mountain rams,  
Until he took on strength and killed

All comers with their sires and dams.

Now after fifty years, the bird  
Had, from a cassowary, heard  
About the Pan-cyclonic rally  
Of beasts in the Juranian Valley,  
And how at their great gastric session  
They swore to stand by the Food Concession.  
And so the moa felt she'd serve her  
Race the best, fanning the wild  
Instinct of her foster child  
With her strong patriotic fervour.  
She found *this* lesson easy for  
A huge blood-quaffing dinosaur;  
The next one that she strove to teach,—  
To feed on rushes, roots and grass,—  
Seemed to this hungry ward, alas,  
Beyond his intellectual reach.  
Still, after days of bleats and pants,  
Of clucking at the balsam cones,  
Of digging graves for flesh and bones,  
And building pyramids of plants;—  
And after days of petulant scolding,  
She managed to convey, by holding  
Within her talons, cocoanuts  
And bread-fruit rather than the cuts  
From the sirloin of putrid cattle,—  
That fasting from all flesh and blood,  
And chewing, self-imposed, of cud,  
Was the condition of the battle.  
And so the fatal morning found  
Him bloated, angry and unsound  
Of wind and reeling down the height  
For flesh, his object of the fight.  
His skyward neck took on the form  
Of a pliant topmast in a storm.  
His headlong and unsteady gait  
Had been the more provoked, of late.  
By a yeasty alimentary state.  
For, on the day before, twitch grass  
With coarse buck wheat and sassafras  
Had formed the staple of his diet.  
A vinery of red grape then lay

Before him; he resolved to try it;  
Which done, his head began to sway,  
The hot, fermenting liquor rose,  
And just before the charge was made,  
Had sluiced up through his neck, and played  
A geyser through his throat and nose,  
Until his body seemed to seethe  
With dragon foam on scale and claw,  
The scarlet dripping from his teeth,  
And fire issuing from his jaw.  
The ape had feared the monster's coming  
Would cause a panic as the sound  
Of thunder from the infernal drumming  
Of Tyrannus' feet upon the ground,  
Breaking like waves along the coast,  
Fell upon the affrighted host.  
And for a moment as he neared  
The rostral monolith and tossed  
His head for carnage it appeared  
As if the national cause was lost.  
So strong the impact as he hit  
A line of tigers near the centre  
It paralysed the simian's wit  
And for a fearful second rent her  
Courage as the jungle mass  
Went floundering in a deep morass.  
But instant as a thunderclap  
The prescience of her soul awoke,  
For by that self-same tiger stroke  
Tyrannosaurus filled the gap,  
And as the stress upon the line  
Was centrally towards the sea,  
She caught the panic's energy  
Of flight in time, and flashed the sign  
Of battle from her lofty tower,  
Then launched the seething frenzied power  
Of tusk and claw. Blood red the Dawn!  
The die was cast! The fight was on!

Now was seen the strategy  
Hidden in the stern decree  
Of the wise old anthropoid.  
The long-continued carnal void,  
With all its gastric irritation,  
Had raised their lust to slay and eat  
Raw flesh to the internal heat  
Of a universal conflagration.  
Just in from dry Allahabad,  
Farinaceous lions had  
Spied, upon an oozy bank,  
Five hundred head of walruses,  
Their hides of rubber steaming rank  
With odours oleaginous.  
Such was their fury when they smelled them,  
It seemed as if the nether air  
Were raining tails and brindled hair,—  
The way those brutes of India felled them;  
They had them stripped before the sun  
Arose to bleach each skeleton.  
Fifteen miles farther down the Coast,  
An angry and conglomerate host,—  
Inflammatory Bengalese,  
Starved with cherry bark and peas;  
With salicaceous jaguars,  
Leguminous leopards full of beans  
That murmured in their jugulars,—  
Swooped, with the speed of peregrines,  
Upon the red substantial meals  
Of dolphins hot and blubberous,  
And a large school of porpoises,  
Manatees and ursine seals,  
Until the sand-spit where they were  
Surrendered back unto the sea  
Not one shred of fat or fur  
But polished skulls and vertebrae.  
Down a sharp declivity  
Where the eastern skyline touched a plain,  
Wild cats of Burmese demonry  
Fell like a cloud of typhoon rain.  
Raisins had so alkalized them

That the fur upon their necks had moulted,  
Soyas and poppies which they bolted  
Stuck in their throats and agonized them.  
So swift and vital was their spring  
When circling round a "Sulphur Bottom,"  
They drove him on the rocks and got 'im  
Like turkey buzzards on the wing,  
Pouncing on a carrion,  
Until beneath the morning sky  
His ribs were arching high and dry  
Like the frame of a stranded galleon.



With the first hours of the day  
It seemed the battle fortunes lay  
In ample margins with the land.  
No courage of the sea could stand  
Against the all-consuming, savage  
Hunger springing from such a fast,  
Nor millions numberless outlast  
That crash of pyramidal ravage.  
But with the pangs of thirst abated,  
A temporary slackening of the drive  
Gave to the fish infuriated  
With loss a moment to revive  
Their ranks, when soon upon the air  
New cries of terror and despair  
Announced destruction for the land.  
Rounding the Roc peninsula,  
Sperm whales from Carpentaria  
Had reached the Dura bank of sand,  
And bellying round, began to blow  
Their challenge in contemptuous spout  
At any brute the earth could show  
Possessing horn or tusk or snout.  
Undaunted, a battalion  
Of bulling elephants from Canton,  
Directed by a jackass, tore  
Their ponderous course down to the shore,  
In answer to the loud defiance  
Of those humpbacked mammalian giants.  
Lured by the low ebb of the tide,  
And a hundred yards of bar, sun-dried,  
They plunged into the quicksands where,  
With roar of suction and the blare  
Of strained uplifted trunks, they died,  
Or slipping into weedy ground  
Off the silting edge, were drowned  
At leisure by the sweeping tails  
And jaw-tug of victorious whales.

Down at the delta of Ravenna,  
The hardest struggle of the day  
For three long hours was under way,  
Wild as the tumult of Gehenna.  
A thousand tigers of the land  
Were fighting, under the command  
Of a Sumatran chimpanzee,  
Ten thousand tigers of the sea.  
The thirstier cats that formed the van  
Took the water, swimming far  
Beyond the shallows of the bar,  
Heedless of the risk they ran;  
Others of more tempered daring,  
Striking the water margin, kept  
Well within their depth but swept  
Along the muddy regions, tearing  
The placid surface into spray,  
Like a gale's lash upon a bay.  
For those three hours the waters ran  
With every hue of the rainbow span,—  
Saffron lines and serpentine,  
Lurid darts of iris green,  
Mottled browns with dusky stripe,  
Eyeballs flashing streaks of red,  
Leaped and zigzagged to the gripe  
Of lamia and of hammerhead,  
Locking with inveterate teeth  
The tigers' bellies underneath.  
Phantoms blue and ashen pale  
Followed white ones in the race  
Where blade of dorsal, scythe of tail  
Cut and ripped the water's face,  
Curved and sank while in their place  
The vitreous glare of stomachs rose  
With flapping pectorals, as the claws  
Of tigers tore a bottle-nose  
Or bullet-head; or as their jaws,  
Just at the moment they were drowned:  
With paralysing seizure found  
Their last authentic tiger mark  
In the marble throat of a slate blue shark.

And when the fierce dispute was over,  
And the tides were crimson in the sun,  
The splash of a ground shark or the dun,  
Lithe shadow of an ocean rover,  
Cutting across the backward spins  
Of settling eddies showed how vast  
Was the jungle ruin when at last  
The furs were conquered by the fins.

Beyond the edge of the chalk canal,  
In the deeper part of the Skibo Run  
The tiger slaughter was outdone  
By a longer, bloodier carnival.  
There, neutral hippopotami,  
Spotted deer, mild-mannered sows,  
Milk-white mules and buffalo cows  
Had wandered with their young to lie  
And bathe beneath a peaceful sky,  
With antelopes and quagga mares,  
Soft gazelles and brown she-bears,  
Frightened by the roars that rent  
The rafters of the firmament;  
When suddenly as by design  
It seemed as if the whole Pacific  
Had yielded up her most terrific  
Monsters of the fighting line.  
Their long blades flashing in the sun,  
Sword-fish were swimming up the Run,  
Accompanied by flagitious things,—  
Saw-bills with their deadly pikes,  
Thornbacks with their poisoned spikes,  
Torpedo rays with scorpion stings;  
Most feared by everything that lives  
Above the ocean floor, they broke  
With full mortality of stroke  
On neutrals and on fugitives,  
Hemmed them backwards from the beaches  
Into the water's deeper reaches,  
Where with rapiers lightning sped,  
They took the measure of their sides,  
Till all the antelopes were dead,  
And all the hippos' leathery hides  
Transfixed and all the bears were drilled  
With holes and all the calves were killed.

Now late within the afternoon  
Again the tide of battle changed.  
Fish from the Seven Seas were ranged  
Along the stretch of the Blue Lagoon  
That had beneath the withering spell  
Of three hot rainless moons been closed.  
There, lash-rays—the marines of hell—  
Had come with sharks,—the shovel-nosed,  
And sickle-finned; dog-fish, big jacks  
Gifted with prophetic smell,—  
All following in the conquering tracks  
Of threshers from the Hebrides,  
Of Greenland killers and those mailed,  
Tremendous rhinodons that hailed  
From the typhoons of the Indian seas.  
Against that swarming, heaving pack  
Was launched the raving, massed attack  
Of full-grown argali, and rams  
From South Afghanistan that mourned  
The swordfish slaughter of their dams;  
And fighting boars that would have scorned  
Brigades of tigers, with koodoos,  
Flanked by battalions of gnoos,  
And bull-head rhinos double-horned.  
Into that reeling, shapeless ruck,  
Scarce covered by the water poured  
This furious and avenging horde. . . .  
Surviving rhinodons that struck  
For ocean spaces through the ford  
Were caught fast in the mire, and gored  
To death by stag and water-buck.

And as the dubious hours went by,  
Cormorants, in carrion mood,  
Ospreys and kestrels thronged the sky,  
Impatient, as the fiery feud  
Swung through such vicissitude  
As never, after or before,  
Was known within the files of War.  
Such acts of valour as were done  
Outshone the white flame of the sun;—  
Such hopeless sacrificial deeds  
And feats of strength as might belong  
To men or gods, when weaker breeds  
Wrecked their bodies on the strong.  
Reversals with the strangest luck,  
Unknown to contests in the sea,  
Took place where bulk and energy  
Matched themselves with skill and pluck.  
Mackerel and electric eels  
Drowned zebras, weighting down their thighs;  
Leonine and ursine seals  
Were killed by lemurs and aye-ayes.  
To rescue otters with their young  
From saw-fish and an instant slaughter,  
A scouting beaver party flung  
Themselves into the salted water,  
Were caught, outnumbered and were beaten,  
Run through by bayonet-bills, and eaten.  
But their assailants blown with greed  
Were seized, after the hottest chase,  
By hounds of an Eo-Irish race,  
And terriers of a Gallic breed.  
And the sun went down upon the sight  
Of bison worsted by becunas,  
Of foxes putting sharks to flight  
And weasels at the throats of tunas.  
Along the shore from tip to tip,  
This interlocking battle grip  
Relaxed only as either side  
Gave ground with flow and ebb of tide;  
For all were pledged, with teeth and claws,  
To racial blood and comradeship,

Devoted to the national cause  
And loyal to the boundary strip.

In one swift hour when the night  
Was far advanced, the Saurian,  
By some half-blinded route, began  
To scent the issue of the fight.  
Throughout the day he did not know  
Which was his ally or his foe;  
Beyond the blue lagoon he waded  
Where sluggish alligators hid  
Behind a sand-spit, and invaded  
The rocky strongholds of the squid.  
With his steep claws he rent apart  
Amphibia along the shore,  
And wandering farther out, he tore  
Pelagic mammals to the heart  
He followed up a narwhal, wedged  
Him dry upon the Gumra shoals,  
Left him with twenty streaming holes  
From twelve-inch canines double-edged.  
Then back upon his tracks he wheeled,  
Floundered through the littoral mud,  
Entered the battle zone and reeled  
Through mounting sloughs of flesh and blood,  
Scattering a full hyæna pack  
That hung all day upon his track  
Along the freshly swollen moors,  
Wondering how their nostrils missed  
The secret of those bloody spoors  
Left by the alien Atavist.  
Fish and land animals alike  
Were objects for his fangs to strike;  
Elephants and jungle cats  
Met the same fate as hares and rats;  
Beneath his horned, gigantic toes  
Camels went down and buffaloes;  
And wild cats were so many fleas  
That tickled him below the knees.  
But when the evening wore to night  
Gorillas under cover hit him  
With flying stones, and cave bears bit him;  
A flock of eagles bleared his sight  
With beak and claw; a downy pack



Of monkeys in a sycamore  
Swung downward by their tails and tore  
The scaly armour from his back.  
The bravest lions in the ranks  
Buried their teeth into his hocks;  
From hemlock crotches and from rocks,  
Tigers leaping on his shanks  
Gouged deeply with insistent claws  
And dropped with flitches in their jaws.  
Then from this unremitting stress  
Came the sure touch of weariness;  
A pulse of apprehension dim  
Of what this struggle double-faced  
Might in the outcome mean to him.  
Perhaps some inland desert taste  
During the slaughter of the camels,  
Taught him his kinship with the lizard,  
His blood-removal from the mammals,  
And gave him nausea at the gizzard.  
Perhaps in some sharp way it sprang  
From the reminiscent tang  
Of salt sea water on his muzzle,  
The moment that he stooped and took  
The narwhal's blood as from a brook  
With one inebriating guzzle.  
Something in his racial birth,  
At variance with the things of Earth,—  
A tidal call that beat like pain  
From spinal ganglion to brain—  
Now made him shake his foes aside,  
And leave the battle's desperate zone,  
And wander off to climb alone  
A promontory where the tide  
Sounded its nocturnal flow  
A sheer three hundred feet below.  
He cleared the base, his body fagged,  
And clambered on from shard to shard,  
Pausing, jibbing, breathing hard.  
Under his weight his knee-caps sagged;  
Bleeding fast from fissures torn  
By tiger fang and rhino horn,

He groped and stumbled up until  
He reached a level granite sill;  
Raw fillets hanging from his thighs,  
He sank a moment faint with pain;  
Chaos was closing on his eyes,  
When the voice of the sea-god called again,  
Far across the water,—“Ex—  
Saurian of the Pleiocene,  
Blind wanderer from the race marine,  
TYRANNOSAURUS REX!”  
Starting sharply from his swoon,  
He stood upright, his figure set  
Black like a poplar’s silhouette  
Against the orb of an inflamed moon.  
And once again from a crystal bell,  
Oceanus wove his spell;  
Sounding like a three-fold ring,  
Steepled in the crimson surge,  
It tolled . . .

“TYRANNOSAURUS!

TYRANNOSAURUS!

TYRANNOSAURUS KING!”

The lizard staggered to the verge,  
Looked into the water’s face,  
The rolling cradle of his race,  
Brooded a moment as he hung  
Over the crag-holds wearily,  
And with the final echo, flung  
His body to the Austral Sea.

Wilder than the maddest rout,  
Madder than the wildest roar,  
A storm of rage unknown before  
Followed Tyrannus' passing out.  
The dark unreason of his mind,  
Read in promiscuous assault  
Upon the land and ocean kind,  
Had placed the agreement in default.  
But through the day, the immediate sight  
Of a teeming and aggressive sea  
Enforced the covenantal right  
Against a mutual enemy;  
Kept in abeyance blood desires  
As veteran as Jurassic fires.  
Now under cover of the night  
When many of their ranks had died  
Of virus from the saurian's bite,  
The leash of discipline was untied,  
And soon the full abyssmal sound  
Broke out in internecine notes  
From all the brutes on fighting ground  
Feeling for each other's throats.  
So piercing was the central cry  
It carried to the southward high  
Over the foothills to the crests  
Of the snowy Guadeleras, waking  
The æries of the eagles; shaking  
The condors from their craggy nests.  
Then by a fierce contagion carried  
East and west to either tip  
Of the Isthmian sea-board, it was harried  
Into ten thousand shards;—the rip  
Of lion's claws on buffalo hides;  
Of ivory through the lions' sides;  
The grunt of a bush hog or the squeal  
Of a babyroussa with the pounce  
Of an infuriated ounce;  
Of leopards crushed beneath the kneel  
Of battle-wearied elephants;  
The growls of bears; the dissonance  
Of fleeing, howling allouattes

Pursued by cheetahs; of wild cats  
Nine-lived and strung in endless knots  
Upon the backs of Cashmir ewes,  
Or arguing with ocelots  
The fallen bodies of kangaroos.  
And now and then the storm would rise  
To unimaginable cries,  
As though a stubborn racial note,  
Goaded to the bitter-full,  
Had baulked within the cosmic throat.  
And yet the scale, for all this woe,  
Had still a higher note to go.

All through the day,—in throaty pant  
Of steam and pulmonary moan,  
Being full of slag, the stridulant  
Jurania, like a surly crone,  
Had growled about a deeper pain,  
Caused by an old Silurian sprain.  
By dusk, her fetid breath had grown  
Into a thick revolving cone.  
And as the minutes passed, a flash,—  
An incandescent fork of blue,  
And now of green would struggle through  
The smothering pall of smoke and ash,  
Until with undulating sheet  
Of multi-coloured flame that beat  
The blank face of the sky apart,—  
Just as the last convulsive stroke  
Unthrottled the volcano's heart,—  
The storm flood of the lava broke.  
It shot a fifteen thousand feet  
Straight to the sky, then billowing higher,  
And outward, made as if to meet  
Its own maternal stellar fire  
With tenuous play of finger streaks;  
But failing in its vaunted leap,  
Returned with frenzied haste to sweep  
Across the Guadelera peaks;  
Inundate the valleys; glut  
The plains and canyons; rise and shut  
The higher gorges, rifts and caves  
Of the mountains; overflow and roll  
Seaward with tumbling lava waves  
Over the great Juranian bowl.  
It blazed the forest pines and passed  
The northern stretch of cliffs until,  
Clearing the summit and the last  
Excoriated ridge and hill,  
It poured its fury on the dead;  
Then the inexorable blast,  
Capping the horrors of the night,  
Pursued the living remnants, bled  
To the final pulses with the fight,

And caught them as they tried to flee  
To the drowning mercies of the sea.

Far to the East,—from all this dire  
Titanic strife of claw and fire,  
The only fighter to escape,—  
The female anthropoidal ape!  
By subtle powers that placed her head  
Of land belligerents, she, alone,  
Had often turned to watch with dread  
The beat of catastrophic power,  
In cloud and thunder, as the cone  
Ticked off her last Aeonian hour.  
She sniffed the warning just in time,  
Before the extinction throe, to reach  
The forest heights that flanked the beach.  
She took the eastern headland climb,  
And then turned southwards from the sea,  
Shambling upward wearily,  
Ever on the chasing fringe  
Of the lava that, with hideous twist  
Of myriad anacondas, hissed  
And spat out fiery tongues to singe  
Her hair. Gaining the summit where  
Water breezes cooled the air,  
She paused a moment to endure  
The scene survived, her eyes aglow  
Held first by the mesmeric lure  
Of globes of vivid indigo  
That danced and burst as they were thrown  
From the deep labour of the cone,  
And then by that which choked her breath  
And dazed her brain,—the molten red  
Of plain and ridge on which were spread  
The incredulities of death,  
Riding on tumultuously  
In a gulf of fire to the sea.  
Under the shelter of the height,  
She gathered up her residue  
Of will to blot out from her view  
The awful fiction of the night,  
And take upon herself the strain  
Of the descent. By swinging, crawling,  
Running in little spurts and falling,

Splay-footed, shoulders crooked with pain,  
She reached a shallow river-bed  
Winding through a moor which led  
Her to a grove of sandalwood.  
There, at the hollow of a tree,  
She found her lair, and brokenly  
She entered in, cuddling her brood  
To withered paps; and in the hush  
Of the laggard hours as the flush  
Of dawn burnt out the coppery tones  
That smeared the unfamiliar West,  
The heralds of the day were moans,  
And croons, and drummings of the breast.



## THE FABLE OF THE GOATS

One half a continental span,  
The Aralasian mountains lay  
Like a Valkyrian caravan  
At rest along the Aryan Way.  
And central to the barrier,  
Rising in mottled columns, were  
The limestone ramparts of the heights—  
The Carolonian Dolomites.  
Over those scaffolds nothing passed  
But navigators of the sky:  
Those crags were taken only by  
The sun and moon and the wind's blast,  
By clouds and by the eagles' wings  
Out on their furthest venturings.  
So rooted in geography  
The natural frontier, it could be  
A theme for neither god nor beast  
To argue that one side was east  
And that the other side was west.  
Yet with this knowledge manifest,  
We must record a truth as strange  
As any fact or myth that can  
Inflict mortality on man.

The middle section of this range  
For endless centuries had been  
Earth's most dramatic *mise en scène*  
For lawless indeterminate fights.  
Both avalanche and cataract  
With Time compounding had attacked  
The lowest of the Dolomites  
With spring's recurrent cannonade;  
Had deepened crater and crevasse,  
Tom down the gorges and had laid  
The canyon of Saint Barnabas.  
Along this canyon's northern edge,  
One hundred feet in length, a ledge  
Of schist, known as the Capra Pass,  
Projected from the mountain wall.  
This slippery stretch might well appal  
The tread of cloven-footed things  
In their most cautious pedallings,  
But as a ground on which to stage  
The fortunes of a battle rage,  
That ledge of Capra might reveal  
A tale which, for perversity,  
Could tame the Kyber Route or steal  
The title from Thermopylae.

The country which those peaks divide  
Was noted for its rich terrains,  
Its sweeping uplands and its wide  
Deltas and undulating plains.  
Millions of hornèd ruminants  
Roebucks and elks and argalis  
Upon this vast inheritance  
Had founded aristocracies,  
Which ruled the commons till, between  
Their slaughterous feuds internecine  
And foreign raids, they lost their lead  
To a lusty more enduring breed—  
A new totalitarian horn  
Known as the genus capricorn.

The Aralasian country west,  
Described as Carob, was possessed  
By a remarkable race of goats  
With lyrate horns and shaggy coats.  
Unyielding individualists  
At first by nature they had learned  
The folly of obstructionists  
Within their tribal ranks and turned  
To federal virtues for the wise  
Conduct of corporate enterprise.  
And of this wide domain the head  
Was Cyrus. It was he who led  
The bucks against the bulb in that  
Perfidious effort to profane  
The purity of the racial strain:  
'Twas he, the high-born aristocrat,  
Who rounded up intransigents,  
Drove out all civil disputants,  
And bent the proletariat  
Under a regimen of drill  
To his authoritarian will.

And on the east there was a spot  
As fertile as the Carob land,  
Where goats likewise had won command—  
The ancient dynasty of Gott.  
Straight-horned those tribes, of wiry coat,  
They had outmatched their canine foes,  
Then turned upon the yaks and smote  
The harts and put to shame the does.  
Inebriated by success,  
With numbers vastly multiplied,  
They built a citadel of pride  
About a national consciousness,  
Outran their borders to possess  
The lush exotic harvest yields  
Of hitherto unvanquished fields,  
Until they had from that wild shore  
Of the Fallopian corridor  
Down to the grey Ovidian Sea  
Established their hegemony.

Now when the veterans returned  
Flushed with their foreign victories,  
The hearts of all the generals burned  
With personal antipathies.  
All scrambled for the seats of power,  
Some wanted this, some wanted that,  
And some they knew not what—whereat  
Uprose the leader of the hour,  
A buck who by right of descent,  
As by his natural temperament,  
Had never recognized retreat.  
A scion of a Caliphate,  
He knew the strategy to beat  
The factions by a stroke of state  
And quell diversity of bleat,  
For of all lands, the realm of Gott  
Indubitably was polyglot.  
His stroke of state, his *coup d'état*  
Was nature's oldest formula.  
It was the leader's bright idea  
To send them forth to find their grub  
On fetid moors and desert scrub  
Where tuber roots of Ipomoea  
Purga—the standard panacea  
For disaffections of the mind—  
Became their diet, which, combined  
With seeds of Croton Tiglium,  
Restored their equilibrium.  
The mightiest hybrid of his race  
Was this ballista of the herd;  
The orient frame-work of his face  
Had been through generations blurred  
By a gigantic Ural trek—  
For unlike Cyrus, Prince of Carob,  
The Gottite leader's stream was stirred  
By elements from Turk and Arab:  
Tincture of Tartar, touch of Czech  
Lay in the great Abimelech.  
So with the martial banners furled  
At all the frontiers in debate,  
It seemed as if the caprine world

Might manage to domesticate  
The gains imperial and release  
Their bucking energies for peace  
Under a wise duumvirate—  
Two cousins far removed but loined  
From the same root, the god-like Pan,  
Abimelech and Cyrus joined  
In a world reconstruction plan!  
But goats like men have never found  
Much standing room on neutral ground,  
Once let a point of honour rise  
And death stalks in on compromise.  
Those Gottites and the Carobites  
Stood pat upon their natural rights,  
And here we must at once admit  
Three rocks on which a League might split.

It seemed that Nature had designed,  
When first she fixed a Gottite mind,  
Or pitched the Carob brain, and bent  
The bony bulwarks round about,  
Into a three-inch armament,  
That compromise should never find  
An alley either in or out.  
For when in any age was born  
A freak without a cloven hoof,  
Or with palmated frontal roof  
That blossomed points along the horn—  
Some civilized concessive goat  
Who carried democratic stripes  
Upon his softly textured coat—  
The uniformitarian types,  
Who strove to dominate the breed,  
Exiled him from the herds. Indeed,  
One had appeared like this to show  
Progressive softening of the brain  
By urging tolerance towards the foe  
At the finish of a great campaign?  
Now, inasmuch as he was not  
Pure Carob or acknowledged Gott,  
But some form of a large jerboa  
Derived from stray spermatozoa,  
They tore his carcass joint from joint  
And sheared him to the fourteenth point.  
That goats were laid down for dissent  
Was clearly, whether right or wrong,  
An architectural intent.  
Those picket horns were three feet long—  
What was their purpose but reproof?  
And what the skull's, if not for shock?  
As axiomatic as the hoof  
For stance upon the mountain rock!

Moreover, Nature—quirky dame—  
Had planted in their disposition  
A sacred but a smoky flame  
Of uncontrollable ambition.  
Nomads from zoologic time,  
The race grew conscious that they must  
Give to an aimless wanderlust  
The sublimation of a climb.  
Valleys and plains were nurseries  
Which full-grown goats might leave behind  
For the wild gully routes that wind  
Up to the mountain crags and screes—  
Places of habitation where  
Ancestral bands of satyrs shook  
Lascivious lightnings from their hair.  
They marvelled with exalted look  
At things that voyaged through the air;  
They worshipped clouds and glorified  
The golden eagles as they took  
The solar orbit in their stride.



Joined with this instinct of ambition  
There was a problem called nutrition,  
A knotty, vexed consideration  
Not yet resolved by sublimation.  
Of all the animals that faced  
The question of a food supply,  
The goat had the most catholic taste  
That crops could ever satisfy.  
It could be proved by any test  
He had no rival at a feast.  
He craved the foliage of the west  
To vary pastures of the east,  
New barks and fresher rinds: the sight  
Of grasses inaccessible  
Was whetstone to the appetite.  
The more he had, the more he wanted;  
A taste unrecognized, a smell  
Still unappropriated, haunted  
The rumen like a ghostly spell.  
The eastern tribes had often stared  
Up at the peaks and wondered what  
Those vapours were their nostrils flared,  
What herbs and blossoms there might be—  
Was it goatleaf or bergamot,  
Red clover or sweet cicely?  
And likewise when the east wind blew  
Over the Carolonian summit,  
The herds from western uplands drew  
Intoxicating essence from it.  
Was that bay laurel, was it thyme  
That floated from the mountain span?  
Their eyes were fastened on the climb,  
Their noses quivered with the sniff,  
Yes, by the beard of the first Khan,  
There was no error in that whiff,  
They knew it, every buck and dam,  
'Twas lavender and marjoram.

On one crisp morning when the heights  
Were diamond brilliant with their snows,  
When Dawn had flushed with a deep rose  
The panels of the Dolomites,  
And atmospheric odours tart  
Made tonic impact on the heart,  
A common inspiration struck  
Concurrently each monarch buck:  
*It was the Ledge, the unconquered Ledge,*  
*The sanguinary Capra Pass,*  
That sent its challenge from the edge  
Of the canyon of Saint Barnabas.

Abimelech and Cyrus led  
Their troops up the opposing sides,  
Past fell and scaur and watershed,  
Over the small and great Divides.  
The marching bleat from every corps  
Combined into their battle roar,  
*Excelsior! Excelsior!*  
Such stout morale, such fine *élan*  
Was never seen since time began.  
By noon both tribes became aware  
Through subtle changes in the air  
Caused by the sharp reverberant sound  
Of hoofs upon untimbered ground,  
And by the Carob-Gottite smell,  
A mixture indescribable,  
That they might any moment close  
With their hereditary foes.  
They reached the hollow where the green  
Ledge like a boa lay between  
The twin peaks of the Dolomites.  
Massed by prophetic signals, kites  
And buzzards in a storm of wings  
Swept up and down the great ravine,  
Impatient for their scavengings.  
Upon that very ledge were fought  
Thousands of battles that had wrought  
The drama of a racial glory,  
With nothing in the strife more certain  
Than that each act of the long story  
Should close upon a carrion curtain.  
And yet—was there a goat dismayed  
In all that spiral cavalcade?  
No—not a buck, nor could there be  
From stock designed for battery  
And built like Carthaginian rams,  
Although that thousand feet of drop  
Sheer from the Carolonian top  
Put curds within the milcher dams.  
With pawing hoofs and sweating flanks,  
Each chieftain as the duellist  
Of his own herd stepped from the ranks

To try the quarrel on the schist.  
Abimelech himself had seen  
His sires—grands and great-grands—fall,  
Locked with the lyrates, down the wall,  
Plumb to the crypts in the ravine,  
Dropping like frenzied bacchanals,  
Hitting their corrugated globes  
So bloodily, the frontal lobes  
Came out through their occipitals.

But so intense the patriot fire,  
And so magnificent the roll,  
The youth had felt the same desire  
Kindle the torches of his soul.  
And had not Cyrus felt as well  
The potent ritual of the spell,  
The phobias of his spirit burn  
In the white heat of discipline,  
As he had watched his kith and kin  
In their inexorable turn  
Perish? How splendidly they fell!  
And how the witenagemot  
Would hallow this immortal spot!  
And had he not gone back to tell  
The nursing dams who would convey  
To generations then unborn  
The story? How they would portray  
That plunge! And had not Cyrus sworn  
Upon the blood script of the laws,  
That on some sacrificial day  
He would go forth his father's way,  
Crusading downward to be torn  
By canyon jags and vulture claws,  
Maintaining to the end The Cause,  
The exaltation of The Horn?  
And now the fatal hour had struck.  
Abimelech, that eastern buck  
With all the pride of a Mogul,  
His anger rising in a storm  
Of snorts, superbly true to form,  
Moved to the centre, lowered his skull—  
The famous Gottite cranium—  
To meet the Carobite Defender,  
The noble Cyrus who had come  
To die but never to surrender.

Come all ye hair-dividers, wise  
To ways of nature and of art,  
Who know how to anatomize  
The fine vagaries of the heart,  
Come bring your lore and make it plain—  
This riddle in the Carob brain.  
In that weird passage from the dark  
Matrix that shaped the Carobite  
And stratified his skull for fight,  
Up to this present hour, the spark  
Had never failed the dynamite.  
Ye cannot say that Cyrus knew  
Just what he was about to do.  
For nowhere in his long descent  
Was there a trace of one rehearsal  
Which might account for this reversal  
Of military precedent.  
Folly it is to speculate  
Upon the food that Cyrus ate,  
That inland buds of evergreen  
With valley shoots could mitigate  
A million years of feudal hate  
From Irish Moss and carrageen;  
Or that the Adriatic weed  
By working on the thyroid freed  
The activators in his blood;  
That something in the morning cud  
Gentled his lymph towards his foes,—  
A steadying digitalis flip  
To the heart when he paused to nip  
The foxglove. Tell us he that knows.  
Or failing every shibboleth  
Of blood or ductless glands or such,  
Did reason enter in to touch  
The senses with the thought of death,  
And flash across goat-leaden eyes  
Glimpse of futilitarian skies?  
The vultures with their ten-foot spread,  
Their hairless necks and crimson lids,  
Were at their business half-a-mile  
Below among the ancient dead

Or roosting on the pyramids.  
And some were mounting the defile  
To flank the Pass of Capra where  
They lounged like lizards on the air;

And one black wing had come so near  
The Rock, its tip had brushed the coat  
Of the Carob leader as it passed:  
And had that brush, so leisured, cast  
The only one acknowledged fear  
Within the history of the goat?  
Or was it fear? Did Cyrus know  
That neither courage, strength nor will  
Behind the battle urge to kill  
Was proof against a flying foe?  
That every time when honour wronged  
Secured revenge upon the peaks,  
Inevitably the spoils belonged  
To the swiftest wings and sharpest beaks—  
The harpies and the cormorants  
Who, compensating for their theft  
Of blood and flesh and fat, had left  
The glory to the ruminants?  
But do not reason why the mind  
Should save the soul or seek to find  
Within the evolutionary dream  
An optimistic phagocyte  
That cleaning up the corporate stream,  
Had scrubbed a conscience into light,  
The conscience of a Carobite—  
An Aryan working overtime  
Beating the Tartar to the climb!  
Ye cannot know what Cyrus felt;  
Ye only know that Cyrus knelt.  
*Knelt!* Hocks and knees! The body lay  
Prone—lengthwise—on the Capra Pass,  
As if beside his dam—the way  
He went to sleep in summer grass.

Now let pathologists explain  
What happened to the other brain.  
After a close look at the head,  
A momentary sniff at hoof  
And beard which gave Abimelech proof  
That Cyrus was by no means dead,  
A flash of understanding thrown  
Like a dagger of apocalypse,  
Had pierced the Gottite cranial bone  
And crashed his spiritual eclipse.  
Was it a glint of chivalry  
Nurtured under the eastern climes,  
A throw-back to the Gobi times,  
When someone in his ancestry  
Had set a fashion for the race,  
Made it a stigma of disgrace  
To foul a fallen enemy?  
Let him declare it who can tell  
Whether in Palestinian lands  
Some new conciliatory cell  
Had been evolved while roving bands  
Converged upon the desert sands  
To share the water from a well.



The chieftain saw the road was thrown  
Wide open: it was his alone  
To take possession in his stride—  
'Twas his alone, this flush of pride  
In a great conquest which would place  
Him as the hero of his race.  
But all the arrogance and scorn  
On which his tribal soul was bred,  
Spurn of the hoof, flaunt of the horn  
That was Abimelech's, had fled,  
And in its place a strangely warm  
Infusion—a considerate care  
That would not harm a single hair.  
He sniffed once more the prostrate form  
Of Cyrus. Then as if he feared  
He might do violence to the head  
Or bring pollution to the beard,  
He stepped so lightly over, cleared  
Knees, hoofs and rump with that sure tread  
Which never yet had made him miss  
His foothold on a precipice.  
Clean over? Yes, beyond his foe!  
None could deny the deed was done,  
The Carolonian summit won,  
The Capra Pass without a blow!

Cyrus looked up and in his eyes  
Was an incredulous surprise.  
He could not find his enemy.  
He shook himself and blinked awhile,  
Then straightened up and gingerly  
He made the perilous defile.  
Reaching the safety of the bend,  
He stopped and, curious, craned his neck,  
Only to see Abimelech  
Watching him at the other end.  
The eyes of those two hierarchs  
Were four interrogation marks.  
No record in the family tree  
Illumined this epiphany.  
Five minutes motionless and mute  
They stood with that hypnotic stare  
That only puzzled goats could wear;  
And then in reverent salute  
As though their eyes had shed their scales,  
And each had recognized a brother  
Bidding Good Morning to the other,  
They waved their beards and stubby tails,  
And turning took their downward trails,  
Accompanied by their retinue,  
Alive to the redemptive clue—  
Cyrus to where the wild thyme grew,  
And where he could at his sweet beck  
Tread acres of the cistus-tree  
And lavender; Abimelech  
To bergamot and barberry,  
And where he could, up to his neck,  
Crop billowing leagues of cicely.

# THE DEPRESSION ENDS

If I could take within my hand  
The rod of Prospero for an hour,  
With space and speed at my command,  
And astro-physics in my power,  
Having no reason for my scheme  
Beyond the logic of a dream  
To change a world predestinate  
From the eternal loom of fate,  
I'd realize my mad chimera  
By smashing distaff and the spinner,  
And usher in the golden era  
With an apocalyptic dinner.  
I'd place a table in the skies  
No earthly mind could visualize:  
No instruments of earth could bound it—  
'Twould take the light-years to go round it.  
And to this feast I would invite  
Only the faithful, the elect—  
The shabby ones of earth's despite,  
The victims of her rude neglect,  
The most unkempt and motley throng  
Ever described in tale or song.  
All the good lads I've ever known  
From the twelve winds of sea and land  
Should hear my shattering bugle tone  
And feel its summoning command.  
No one should come who never knew  
A famine day of rationed gruel,  
Nor heard his stomach like a flue  
Roaring with wind instead of fuel:  
No self-made men who proudly claim  
To be the architects of fame;  
No profiteers whose double chins  
Are battened on the Corn-Exchange,  
While continental breadlines range  
Before the dust of flour-bins.  
These shall not enter, nor shall those  
Who soured with the sun complain  
Of all their manufactured woes,  
Yet never had an honest pain:

Not these—the well-groomed and the sleeked,  
But all the gaunt, the cavern-cheeked,  
The waifs whose tightened belts declare  
The thinness of their daily fare;  
The ill-starred from their natal days,  
The gaffers and the stowaways,  
The road-tramps and the alley-bred  
Who leap to scraps that others fling,  
With luck less than the Tishbite's, fed  
On manna from the raven's wing.

This dinner, now years overdue,  
Shall centre in a barbecue.  
Orion's club—no longer fable—  
Shall fall upon the Taurus head.  
No less than Centaurs shall be led  
In roaring pairs forth from their stable  
And harnessed to the Wain to pull  
The mighty carcass of the bull  
Across the tundras to the table,  
Where he shall stretch from head to stern,  
Roasted and basted to a turn.  
I'd have the Pleiades prepare  
Jugged Lepus (to the vulgar *hare*),  
Galactic venison just done  
From the corona of the sun,  
Hoof jellies from Monoceros,  
Planked tuna, shad, stewed terrapin,  
And red-gut salmon captured in  
The deltas of the Southern Cross.  
Devilled shrimps and scalloped clams,  
Flamingoes, capons, luscious yams  
And cherries from Hesperides;  
And every man and every beast,  
Known to the stars' directories  
For speed of foot and strength of back,  
Would be the couriers to this feast—  
Mercury, Atlas, Hercules,  
Each bearing a capacious pack.  
I would conscript the Gemini,  
Persuading Castor to compete  
With Pollux on a heavy wager,  
Buckboard against the sled, that he,  
With Capricornus could not beat  
His brother mushing Canis Major.  
And on the journey there I'd hail  
Aquarius with his nets and pail,  
And Neptune with his prong to meet us  
At some point on the shores of Cetus,  
And bid them superintend a cargo  
Of fresh sea-food upon the Argo—  
Sturgeon and shell-fish that might serve

To fill the side-boards with *hors d'oeuvres*.

And worthy of the banquet spread  
Within this royal court of night,  
A curving canopy of light  
Shall roof it myriad-diamonded.  
For high above the table head  
Shall sway a candelabrum where,  
According to the legend, dwelt a  
Lady seated in a chair  
With Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta,  
Busy braiding up her hair.  
Sirius, the dog-star, shall be put  
Immediately above the foot,  
And central from the cupola  
Shall hang the cluster—Auriga,  
With that deep sapphire-hearted stella,  
The loveliest of the lamps, Capella.

For all old men whose pilgrim feet  
Were calloused with life's dust and heat,  
Whose throats were arid with its thirst,  
I'd smite Jove's taverns till they burst,  
And punch the spigots of his vats,  
Till flagons, kegs and barrels all  
Were drained of their ambrosial  
As dry as the Sahara flats.  
For toothless, winded ladies who,  
Timid and hesitating, fear  
They might not stand the barbecue  
(Being so near their obsequies),  
I'd serve purées fresh from the ear  
Of Spica with a mild ragout—  
To satisfy the calories—  
Of breast of Cygnus stiffened by  
The hind left leg of Aries,  
As a last wind-up before they die.  
And I would have no wardens there,  
Searching the platters for a reason  
To seize Diana and declare  
That venison is out of season.  
For all those children hunger-worn  
From drought or flood and harvest failing,  
Whether from Nile or Danube hailing,  
Or Yangtze or the Volga born,  
I'd communize the total yields  
Of summer in the Elysian fields,  
Gather the berries from the shrubs  
To crown souffles and syllabubs.  
Dumplings and trifles and *éclairés*  
And roly-polies shall be theirs;  
Search as you may, you will not find  
One dash of oil, one dish of prunes  
To spoil the taste of the macaroons,  
And I would have you bear in mind  
No dietetic aunt-in-law,  
With hook-nose and prognathic jaw,  
Will try her vain reducing fads  
Upon these wenches and these lads.  
Now that these grand festivities



Might start with holy auspices,  
I would select with Christian care,  
To offer up the vesper prayer,  
A padre of high blood—no white  
Self-pinched, self-punished anchorite,  
Who credits up against his dying  
His boasted hours of mortifying,  
Who thinks he hears a funeral bell  
In dinner gongs on principle.  
He shall be left to mourn this night,  
Walled in his dim religious light:  
Unto this feast he shall not come  
To breathe his gloom. No! rather some  
Sagacious and expansive friar,  
Who beams good-will, who loves a briar,  
Who, when he has his fellows with him  
Around a board, can make a grace  
Sonorous, full of liquid rhythm,  
Boom from his lungs' majestic bass;  
Who, when requested by his host  
To do the honours to a toast,  
Calls on the clan to rise and hold  
Their glasses to the light a minute,  
Just to observe the mellow gold  
And the rare glint of autumn in it.

Now even at this hour he stands,  
The benison upon his face,  
In his white hair and moulded hands,  
No less than in his spoken grace.  
“We thank thee for this table spread  
In such a hall, on such a night,  
With such unusual stores of bread,  
O Lord of love! O Lord of light!  
We magnify thy name in praise  
At what thy messengers have brought,  
For not since Galilean days  
Has such a miracle been wrought.  
The guests whom thou hast bidden come,  
The starved, the maimed, the deaf, and dumb,  
Were misfits in a world of evil,  
And ridden hard by man and devil.  
The seven years they have passed through  
Were leaner than what Israel knew.  
Dear Lord, forgive my liberty,  
In telling what thou mayst not know,  
For it must seem so queer to thee,  
What happens on our earth below:  
The sheep graze on a thousand hills,  
The cattle roam upon the plains,  
The cotton waits upon the mills,  
The stores are bursting with their grains,  
And yet these ragged ones that kneel  
To take thy grace before their meal  
Are said to be thy chosen ones,  
Lord of the planets and the suns!  
Therefore let thy favours fall  
In rich abundance on them all.  
May not one stomach here to-night  
Turn traitor on its appetite.  
Take under thy peculiar care  
The infants and the aged. Bestow  
Upon all invalids a rare  
Release of their digestive flow,  
That they, with health returned, may know  
A hunger equal to the fare,  
And for these mercies, Lord, we'll praise

Thee to the limit of our days.”

He ended. The salubrious feast  
Began: with inundating mirth  
It drowned all memories of earth:  
It quenched the midnight chimes: nor ceased  
It till the wand of Prospero,  
Turning its magic on the east,  
Broke on a master charm, when lo!  
Answering the summons of her name,  
Fresh from the surf of Neptune came  
Aurora to the Portico.

# THE TRUANT

“What have you there?” the great Panjandrum said  
To the Master of the Revels who had led  
A bucking truant with a stiff backbone  
Close to the foot of the Almighty’s throne.

“Right Reverend, most adored,  
And forcibly acknowledged Lord  
By the keen logic of your two-edged sword!  
This creature has presumed to classify  
Himself—a biped, rational, six feet high  
And two feet wide; weighs fourteen stone;  
Is guilty of a multitude of sins.  
He has abjured his choric origins,  
And like an undomesticated slattern,  
Walks with tangential step unknown  
Within the weave of the atomic pattern.  
He has developed concepts, grins  
Obscenely at your Royal bulletins,  
Possesses what he calls a will  
Which challenges your power to kill.”

“What is his pedigree?”

“The base is guaranteed, your Majesty—  
Calcium, carbon, phosphorus, vapour  
And other fundamentals spun  
From the umbilicus of the sun,  
And yet he says he will not caper  
Around your throne, nor toe the rules  
For the ballet of the fiery molecules.”

“His concepts and denials—scrap them, burn them—  
To the chemists with them promptly.”

“Sire,

The stuff is not amenable to fire.  
Nothing but their own kind can overturn them.  
The chemists have sent back the same old story—  
‘With our extreme gelatinous apology,  
We beg to inform your Imperial Majesty,  
Unto whom be dominion and power and glory,  
There still remains that strange precipitate  
Which has the quality to resist  
Our oldest and most trusted catalyst.  
It is a substance we cannot cremate  
By temperatures known to our Laboratory.’”

And the great Panjandrum’s face grew dark—  
“I’ll put those chemists to their annual purge,  
And I myself shall be the thaumaturge  
To find the nature of this fellow’s spark.  
Come, bring him nearer by yon halter rope:  
I’ll analyse him with the cosmoscope.”

Pulled forward with his neck awry,  
The little fellow six feet short,  
Aware he was about to die,  
Committed grave contempt of court  
By answering with a flinchless stare  
The Awful Presence seated there.

The ALL HIGH swore until his face was black.  
He called him a coprophagite,  
A genus *homo*, egomaniac,  
Third cousin to the family of worms,  
A sporozoan from the ooze of night,  
Spawn of a spavined troglodyte:  
He swore by all the catalogue of terms  
Known since the slang of carboniferous Time.  
He said that he could trace him back  
To pollywogs and earwigs in the slime.  
And in his shrillest tenor he began  
Reciting his indictment of the man,  
Until he closed upon this capital crime—  
“You are accused of singing out of key,  
(A foul unmitigated dissonance)  
Of shuffling in the measures of the dance,  
Then walking out with that defiant, free  
Toss of your head, banging the doors,  
Leaving a stench upon the jacinth floors.  
You have fallen like a curse  
On the mechanics of my Universe.

“Herewith I measure out your penalty—  
Hearken while you hear, look while you see:  
I send you now upon your homeward route  
Where you shall find  
Humiliation for your pride of mind.  
I shall make deaf the ear, and dim the eye,  
Put palsy in your touch, make mute  
Your speech, intoxicate your cells and dry  
Your blood and marrow, shoot  
Arthritic needles through your cartilage,  
And having parched you with old age,  
I’ll pass you wormwise through the mire;  
And when your rebel will  
Is mouldered, all desire  
Shrivelled, all your concepts broken,  
Backward in dust I’ll blow you till  
You join my spiral festival of fire.  
Go, Master of the Revels—I have spoken.”

And the little genus *homo*, six feet high,  
Standing erect, countered with this reply—  
“You dumb insouciant invertebrate,  
You rule a lower than a feudal state—  
A realm of flunkey decimals that run,  
Return; return and run; again return,  
Each group around its little sun,  
And every sun a satellite.  
There they go by day and night,  
Nothing to do but run and burn,  
Taking turn and turn about,  
Light-year in and light-year out,  
Dancing, dancing in quadrillions,  
Never leaving their pavilions.

“Your astronomical conceit  
Of bulk and power is anserine.  
Your ignorance so thick,  
You did not know your own arithmetic.  
We flung the graphs about your flying feet,  
We measured your diameter—  
Merely a line  
Of zeros prefaced by an integer.  
Before we came  
You had no name.  
You did not know direction or your pace;  
We taught you all you ever knew  
Of motion, time and space.  
We healed you of your vertigo  
And put you in our kindergarten show,  
Perambulated you through prisms, drew  
Your *mumu's* through the Milky Way,  
Lassoed your comets when they ran astray,  
Yoked Leo, Taurus, and your team of Bears  
To pull our kiddy cars of inverse squares.

“Boast not about your harmony,  
Your perfect curves, your rings  
Of *pure and endless light*—’Twas we  
Who pinned upon your Seraphim their wings,  
And when your brassy heavens rang  
With joy that morning while the planets sang  
Their choruses of archangelic lore,  
’Twas we who ordered the notes upon their score  
Out of our winds and strings.  
Yes! all your shapely forms  
Are ours—parabolas of silver light,  
Those blueprints of your spiral stairs  
From nadir depth to zenith height,  
Coronas, rainbows after storms,  
Auroras on your eastern tapestries  
And constellations over western seas.

“And when, one day, grown conscious of your age,  
While pondering an eolith,  
We turned a human page  
And blotted out a cosmic myth  
With all its baby symbols to explain  
The sunlight in Apollo’s eyes,  
Our rising pulses and the birth of pain,  
Fear, and that fern-and-fungus breath  
Stalking our nostrils to our caves of death—  
That day we learned how to anatomize  
Your body, calibrate your size  
And set a mirror up before your face  
To show you what you really were—a rain  
Of dull Lucretian atoms crowding space,  
A series of concentric waves which any fool  
Might make by dropping stones within a pool,  
Or an exploding bomb forever in flight  
Bursting like hell through Chaos and Old Night.



“You oldest of the hierarchs  
Composed of electronic sparks,  
We grant you speed,  
We grant you power, and fire  
That ends in ash, but we concede  
To you no pain nor joy nor love nor hate,  
No final tableau of desire,  
No causes won or lost, no free  
Adventure at the outposts—only  
The degradation of your energy  
When at some late  
Slow number of your dance your sergeant-major Fate  
Will catch you blind and groping and will send  
You reeling on that long and lonely  
Lockstep of your wave-lengths towards your end.

“We who have met  
With stubborn calm the dawn’s hot fusillades;  
Who have seen the forehead sweat  
Under the tug of pulleys on the joints,  
Under the liquidating tally  
Of the cat-and-truncheon bastinades;  
Who have taught our souls to rally  
To mountain horns and the sea’s rockets  
When the needle ran demented through the points;  
We who have learned to clench  
Our fists and raise our lightless sockets  
To morning skies after the midnight raids,  
Yet cocked our ears to bugles on the barricades,  
And in cathedral rubble found a way to quench  
A dying thirst within a Galilean valley—  
No! by the Rood, we will not join your ballet.”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Obvious printer errors have been corrected.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Collected Poems* by E. J. Pratt]