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Title: Inland Voices

Date of first publication: 1943

Author: Sally Bullock Cave (1865-1958)

Date first posted: Sep. 3, 2013

Date last updated: Sep. 3, 2013

Faded Page eBook #20130903

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INLAND VOICES

BY

SALLY BULLOCK CAVE



The Christopher Publishing House
Boston, U. S. A.

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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INLAND VOICES

AVIATOR

I think of man's far paths begun in fear
And naked dark beneath a drowsing sea
The warm compassion of whose waves can be
His rest no longer . . . for within this mere
Unworded matter stirs the power to clear
Perverse and sullen elements . . . to free
The magnitude of space . . . the mystery
Of seas beyond the chart of now and here.
The days pass over and the hours share
The magic of a worm's release . . . as gyre
On rising gyre he circles upward . . . where
The incandescent wings of his desire
Now send him through the dazzling whorls of air
To whirl and flutter at an astral fire.

NEW YORK CITY

What boundless thoughts are his who dares to play
With affirmations of dominion. . . Height
And depth are perilous metaphors,—the might
Of gods,—high gods.—“The man is now,” they say,
“As one of us; he rears his summits gay,—
His unimaginable towers bright
Upon the sheer outposts of dark and light
Where night dims night and day outdazzles day.
We know he means at length to meet the skies;—
To mount on high desires,—and soon or late
To lift his spires to higher pageantries
Where wild geese drive,—indifferent as fate.
Oh, cherubim,—unsheathe your flaming sword
Wherewith you bar the gate-way of the Lord!”

AMATEUR

I love the tread of measured prose that swings
Its ordered legion of words in bright
Accoutrement that gleams against the light,—
And poetry's aerial course that flings
The star dust scattering from cloudy wings,—
Or lights its fire of faery rhythm to fright
The creeping fears of dust and cold and blight. . .
For words are magical,—words are charmed things.
And if with slow and heavy hand I dare
To make them march or fly or set them free
To burn within that rich and perfumed air
That is their element,—say then of me:
“This English speech of spikenard and of myrrh
She loved,—and much shall be forgiven her.”

BURNING BUSH

A seer in a cloudy place
Once saw the glory of God's face. . .
And lo, he had a mind to tell
Of a burning bush where God's word fell!

Today I saw in cloud and flame
A rainbow go the way it came. . .
And a fiery thing
Is the flowering
Japonica in the spring.

OBOE

A TRIOLET

Through this delicate reed
Breathes a pale oread
In a voice that would plead
Through this delicate reed
To all wo and its need
In a tone frail and sad. . .
Through this delicate reed
Breathes a pale oread.

OCTOBER

Silence has fallen on my garden. . .
Autumnal, crystalline,—
October silence. . .
The birds are on their way, now,—their songs are mute. . .
But from the path of their faring,—
And from the very wings of departure
Is shed the clear glory of silence,—
Beauty unrealized in the clamor of summer. . .
Hushed bird songs linger here in the amber of
 remembrance,—
While all the world seems a rondure of snared music. . .
The sky is a golden gong
Crashing the thin reverberance of silence. . .
Everywhere are stilled rhythms,—sheer harmonies,—
Of pause;—
Of deeper music within music.
Pierce the plenitudes of song—and silence wells beneath. . .
Peer into the deep pools under the shoals of speech
Where pause is the ultimate harmony,—
Soundless unisonance of word, of thought. . .
Silence has fallen on my garden. . .
Silence like new snow
And clear as frosted rime;—
Autumnal, crystalline,—
October.

POEM

A poem is an unicorn;
Of the delicate air
It is born
To dare
The jeopardy of breath;—
The jaguars of love and of death.
Its evasive feet
Tune their part
To the beat
Of your heart.
It drinks of the nectar of nenuphars
Under the stars. . .
When honeyed manna it is fed,—
Smooth anodynes and charms,—
You dare to stroke its timorous head
And soothe its shy alarms.

TO MARCO,—MY DOG

Dear dark one,
You were my shadow on bright days
Of sun. . .
In sunlit ways.
But on black nights it seemed your aim
To touch the springs of darkness whence you came,—
Deeper than night's own shadow.
Then I could only see
The tips of your white feet guiding me
To your busy commerce with the things of night,—
The incommunicable, secret night
You loved; and when I loosed you in the park
In the deepest dark,—
Unled,—
I followed where your white feet sped,—
Four, vagrant, twinkling points of light. . .
You go a long way . . . and unleashed . . . tonight. . .
Far, far beyond my sight. . .
Back to your dark,—my shadow. . . Oh, it would hearten me,
When I shall travel on the path you tread,
To see
Your little white feet speeding on ahead!

TIME IN THE MUSEUM

The echoes ring their silver hooves tonight
As charioted Aminóphis rides
Along the streets of Karnak. . . and his bride's
Scant draperies flow backward,—as the bright
Emblazoned trumpets of old Egypt fight
In mute reverberation with the tides
Of past and future . . . and the present glides
In unperceived,—inexorable flight. . .

A gift of lapis lazuli awaits
The young queen's pleasure at the palace gates
Where Nefertiti tries her bracelet on
From Bourrabura,—King of Babylon. . .
No sun nor moon would mar a rondure thus
Refigured on a gold sarcophagus.

DESERT BY TRAIN

By the train side
Glide
The grey busses over the Great Divide. . .
And the huge solitudes
Somehow relate
Themselves to the preposterous
Bus. . .
To the state
Of fret and strife. . .
To the stress
Of the incalculably small
Stretch of loneliness
We call
Human life.
Across the swales
Of sage. . .
Over the shard and the shales
Of cosmic mountainous trails
Without effrontery or fuss
Sides the little bus
Rising to express a mood
Not clearly understood,—
A guess,—
Indicative
I am. . . I live. . .
Far better it understands
The slow,
Straight, categorical demands
Of Go!
Of how to glide
By the train side. . .
Through the sieve
Of Time to climb
With the tenuous imperative
Of human breath. . .
That flirts
The outskirts

THE FIRST SWALLOW

To read your dazzling cypher,—I should know
The antique scrolls,—vermilion, gold and blue
Encrusted manuscripts,—and should construe
Their ancient text and lettering. . . Although
The Word is not made blossom in the low
Unbudded pear tree,—there is spread for you
The open page of heaven,—to set thereto
Your signature in evening's afterglow.

Upon the cloudy parchment of the skies
You curve your verses in a running screech
Of unknown script and gilded heraldries.
Oh, some day,—surely,—I shall learn to read
Your darting phrase,—that whirls its length in bars
Of arabesque,—picked out with evening stars!

LEAF MUSIC

At daybreak, the trees
Share the tide's mystery;
And the tremors that seize
At daybreak,—the trees,—
Are like thin symphonies
Of the shells of the sea.
At daybreak, the trees
Share the tide's mystery.

QUESTION

What is life?

Life is desire.

What is death?

Look at the old women,—

Desireless,—deshicated.

Air may be pumped with a bellows.

Breath?

Of what avail are a few more mouthfuls,—

Death?

SHAKESPEARE SPOKEN

We walk in radiant, enchanted ways,—
A labyrinth of wonder words,—more rare
Than planetary path, moon trail or haze
Of milky sky-swath. . . Now we grow aware
Of timeless things,—of deathless; there appears
A long, dim, lovely vista,—as today
Calls yesterday,—and fugitive, far years
Swim in the air like birds, about our way.
Last night,—was it,—Elizabeth, the Queen
Heard first these wreathen words? Tonight, the stir
My heart makes,—links this hour with what has been,—
As pearl with matching pearl. . . The fretful whir
Of time is muted,—as we move among
The enchanted mazes of the English tongue.

COLOR CONFLICT

My neighbor has a black cat. . .
I confess
I distrust
Lithe loveliness;—
I must.
My neighbor has a black cat;—
Treachery thereat!
Incandescent eyes,—
Globes of amber sorceries
Inset
With jet.
My neighbor has a black cat
I have red birds!
Last summer's nestlings
With crimson wings
Lovelier than words. . .
I offer security
Window high
But I can give no warnings
These snowy mornings
Though my heart cries
Beware of amber eyes
And be not so
Radiant . . . so blood red upon the snow!

MEMORY

I need a word,—a star sapphire,—to be
Inset with the fretted gold-work of a phrase.
I do not find it in the damascene trays
Wherein I keep the pearl and filagree;—
And neither does it lie within the three
Carved ivory caskets,—where in locked relays
Are spread the jasper and the chrysoprase,
The topaz, beryl and chalcedony.
At length I send my courier, who has played
With time and space,—and knows where glow the bright
Sapphires like stars through lovers' tears,—when night
Meets day above Verona's balustrade.
And suddenly . . . within my phrase is set
A star that might have shone on Juliet.

CHILD WITH BOOK

His thoughts are birds,—unloosed for sea and air
And earth tonight;—he feels their swift release
From narrow words of “now” and “here” to these
Free sentences of lordly ones who wear
The kingly robes of miniver and vair,—
And in their worded turrets turn the keys
That lock the levels of the lunar seas
And loose the secrets crested thoughts may share.
He learns the lay of hidden gardens by
Their lurk of cinnamon and bergamot
Near Persian palaces,—uncareful what
His course is toward in wayward vagrancy
That follows the roc’s cry to the towering cliffs
Where echo the hoof-beats of the hippogriffs.

CALL OF THE WILD GEESE

Remember
When October shies
Into November
I am on the track
Of the roving pack
Of the skies.
Out beyond the barrier
Of time's preserve,—
Out beyond the misty blur
Of the planet's curve,—
On their royal flight
At the spangled hem
Of some bright
October night
I shall follow them. . . !
Remember. . .
When October shies
Into November
I am on the track
Of the roving pack
Of the skies!

POEMS

In Italy,—like shells upon the shore
The poems lie,—uncut,—unsorted,—for
The questing hand of any passer-by
To gather and to chase exquisitely
Some precious outline,—graven to the worth
Of shell or stone,—where even the ancient earth
Is steeped in myth and lore and poetry
Down fathoms deep as the Tyrrhenian sea.
And I have searched as children do the wells
Of sand and shoal to find the dripping shells
Of poem stuff,—and secretly bestow
Thereon some treasured word,—intaglio,—
Where nacred tints of milk and honey mix
In cameo and two-fold sardonyx.

BOOK WORM

The library is old across the way. . .
And my five years are few to enter where
Doors close and windows sift the light and day
Is muted and the world grows pent and grey
And words said, thin to whispers unaware,—
And kind, old, pungent odors,—here and there,—
Creep out to meet me,—sandalwood and bay,—
Like breath of olden thoughts upon the air.
I gnaw the bone of quiet;—on the wall
Is spread a blur of books,—their taint in all
The corners and on every shelf and chair
A lovely savor ancient leathers wear,—
And I,—in after hours,—have found that scent
More gracious than the oils of Orient.

TO ELIZABETH

A queen
Should be more wonderful than a king.
She should bring
All the beauty that has been.
She should seem
All the loveliness of the spring,—
All the radiance that a king
Could dream.

THE PRIZE

Oh, life is a fair merchandise. . .
A doubloon for each freighted breath,—
An aureate cargo,—under azure skies,—
Trailed by the black prowed brigantine of death.

BABEL

As long ago as misty Genesis
They dared to dream of towers to touch the sky. . .
Some great Assyrian star swung heavily
Above the velvet sward of night,—and this,—
A climbing thought reached after; blasphemies
Were whispered,—and dreams soared in secrecy
Toward stars in gardens,—and such high thoughts by
Their thrust were tinged with perpetuities.
Yet Babylonia is less than breath
Of words forgotten,—and its spires-to-be
Made short and hasty covenant with death,—
Shut in the plain of Shinar from the sea.
I sometimes dream of those untenable towers. . .
As lovely and as insolent as ours.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

You come to me
So confidently
I like to think
It is not alone
For the grain and drink
On the smooth stone
But that a kindred drift
We own. . .
For I long. . . I long
For the lift
Of song. . .
And the wings of my heart ache too
For the winds of the coastal blue!

WISH FULFILLMENT

San Francisco. 1906.

*“For in one hour so great riches is come
to naught.”*

I coveted the gems of Asia,—strand
On supple strand,—that evening,—in the great
Thronged port of merchandise,—the open gate
To orient treasuries,—where sea and land
Re-word desire in jade or amber . . . and
I would have bartered a round year for spate
Of ivory and pearl and crusted plate
And purple silk and scarlet saraband.
Then hell flung high the loot of seven seas
To the beleaguered stars. . . An old Chinese
In charred, brocaded priest gear,—owed me his
Frail breath . . . and pressed on my reluctance this
Rare temple jade . . . repayment he thought not
A sacrilege toward gods that clean forgot.

TEN TO ONE

We know less of mathematics
Than a cat knows of aquatics
Yet I reckon,—little Fido,—
You should live as long as I do.
If your year counts ten of mine
Unmathematically align
Your little stretch with my design
With zero east of the digit line.
There should be some way to do it,—
Some trick,—if we only knew it. . .
Surely there's a sly equation,—
A subtraction,—a summation,—
Syncope or syncopation,—
Solar time or magnitude
That would adjust the dual feud
Of tempo that disturbs the measure
Of our little round of pleasure.
That your year counts ten of mine
Is surely nothing but a fine
Impertinence of figurers
To lengthen mine and shorten yours. . .
Throw adage, axiom, apothem
Into the dust bin,—all of them!
If your year counts ten of mine
I'll whistle you over the other nine.
You jump so nimbly, little pet,—
Perhaps we'll score the mark we've set.
If we should put our sapience to it. . .
I think it's ten to one we'd do it.

SUN DIAL ANTIPHONY

My dial is a lovely thing;
It stands serenely summoning
The shy, swift messengers, awing. . .

Its story is of hours that pass,—
Not counted off with boom and brass
But sun encircled on the grass.

It stands enswathed in velvet mist,—
By the first flush of sunrise kissed
With topaz, rose and amethyst.

I know a call the redbirds know,—
A ritual of morning,—slow,
Antiphonal,—tossed to and fro

Between us,—with a manifold
Sweet, secret meaning,—told and told,—
As dear as friendship,—and as old.

Upon the weather-beaten face
Of the old dial, now I place
A votive bowl of seed,—a grace

Of faith. Soon on the dial rests
A fire of wings,—a flame of crests,—
Of coral beaks, of ruby breasts.

And so they go the way they came,—
I know their tongue,—I speak their name,—
The dial glows,—an altar flame.

My dial is a lovely thing,
It stands serenely summoning
The shy, swift messengers awing.

AWAKENING

1940

Two oceans cradle us in guarded ease,—
And from this soothing premise, inference runs
In ways illogical. . . The tragic suns
Of undefended lands may set,—but these
Have not our oceans to defend their peace.

Not with my ears,—oh, no,—mere hearing shuns
The blow,—it is my heart that hears the guns
Boom heavily, today, across the retreating seas.

LOVE'S PARADOX

They tell us love is briefer than the span
Of day or night in swift totality. . .
They say it is enduring as the sky,—
An ache, an ease, an irk,—since time began;—
A bauble tawdry as a tinsel fan,—
A gift no god has scorned,—in earth or high
Elysium;—a grace, a guile,—to try
The tongue of Ormazd or of Ahriman.
I think that love is like a wild sea bird
Blown in, by storm, against your breast. . . Absurd
To call it yours . . . yet on its talon, band
A thong of pity,—that on sea or land
Or mistiest port of heaven,—it may live
A lightly bound, far roving fugitive.

THE ROOST

My little poems never stray,—
I caution them to mind
The portly giants in the way—
And bide where folk are kind. . .

Anonymous to peck and tear
At homely crust,—because
I know a cold, appraising stare
Would chill their little craws.

I see them as I wish they were!
We shun the roaring fuss
Of ogre and of editor
The contumelious.

WATER COLOR

If wishes were fishes,
Oh my, oh me!
Reedily, weedily
I'd carve a deep pool of the green porphyry
By the green sea,—
If wishes were fishes, oh me!

If words were birds
Oh me, oh my!
Wittily, prettily
I'd fly them as high as the bowl of the sky,—
The blue, blue bowl of Italy,—
If words were birds, oh my!

For words and wishes like birds and fishes,
Oh me, oh my!
Adventure the high
Shining cavern of sky
And the vasty dim valleys of sea,—
And cloud foam is their home
And the spume of sea fume,—
And both deeps are their keeps.

FELIX

Grandfather's bookplate: "Felix qui potuit
Rerum cognoscere causas"! Some show to it!
Virgil once said it,—and stout things I owe to it,—
Big things ever to be!
Grandfather's bookplate,—I, a child,—saw to it
"Felix" was always there,—Felix was law to it,—
Puckish and quizzical chuckles to draw to it,—
Jolly and pat and free.
Who guessed the store to it,—Latin or lore to it?
Reading grew magical while Felix bore to it
Every incentive to add more and more to it. . .
Pangloss and Shandy and Peregrine score to it,—
Melancholy Anatomy!
Who was to question or quibble a flaw to it?
Felix and I always sat cheek by jaw to it,—
Felix was there as my guide and he saw to it
Words were their starriest,—thoughts wore their wings.

Who gave a hang that I came rash and raw to it?
Nothing was taboo and nothing was awe to it. . .
Mine was the merriment,—his was the law to it,—
Felix took care of the causes of things.

TO C. B.

We talked of many things one talks of till
The dawn . . . of beauty . . . of the mysteries
Of spring . . . of thesis and antithesis
In Hegel's metaphysic . . . and the chill
Of early morning found us eagerly still
Abuilding bridges over the abyss
Unknowable with nothing more than this
Slight rope of symbol and of human will.
Dawn glowed like hieratic jade. . . No chime
Of hours quivered on the April air,—
No comet fell nor sudden wing flashed where
In our accountancy impassive time
Delayed his cold summation . . . and where mild
And violet eyed,—space looked on us and smiled.

CHERRY TREE

Philosophers say we cannot see
A thing in itself . . . a tree as a tree,—
But only as it appears to be
In time and space and in causality.

Last April burst with billowing stress
My cherry tree's frail loveliness. . .
And May's scarlet fruited bearing
Overbent and spent her wearing.
Thereafter, the small cherry tree
Dropped her leaves and ceased to be.
Only essential branch and bough
Become her delicate symbol now. . .
And no more will her feathered rim
Lie spread like wings of the cherubim. . .
And finished forever are the fire
And flaming sword of her desire.

Today,—a day of snow encrusted boughs,—
I see
Beneath the window of my house
In bloom of star and fire and ice
A tree
Of paradise. . .
And as I look,—appear
From far and near
Red birds like living flame
Where once the radiant fruit came.
Red birds that burst like burning words
From tense
Boughs of icy reticence. . .
This is no more a tree
It is a metaphor
A sign
Of a divine
Metonymy.

PARABLE

Men say that in the season of long drouth
And parching winds and brooks run rubble dry
The roots of things go deeper,—till they lie
Assuaged in soundless waters,—where the mouth
Of some unfailing spring abounds. . . The wise
Forecast the next year rich with weighted bloom
Of ever richer blossoming . . . the plume
Of wild grape like a breath of paradise.
And so in arid days when hope seems dearth
Of showers and appeasing dews,—I shall
Reach only deeper,—in that interval,—
To where,—in depths immeasurable to earth,—
My spirit roots may find the hidden springs
That draw their sustenance from eternal things.

JUSTICE

I would not be a hawk
Predatory,—death dealing,—
Though they gave me a regal crown of rapacity.
I would not be a judge
Tenacious fingered,—icily immobile,—
Sentencing grimly,—with cold lips,—
Though I wore robes of samite and of law.
I would not be a hawk
Agate eyed, fire taloned,—
Basilisk beaked and beautiful
As Lucifer,—
Enjoying bitter enchantments of death.
I looked once deep into the eyes of a hawk
Blazing wild,—
Shut hapless behind bars. . . .
I opened them. He fled. . . .
Indissolubly one
With the element that evoked him.
His crest of adamant and gold
Hurtled forth headlong
In great circles of ferocity.
I heard the searing scream of a sparrow
As the glutted talons were fattened,—rejoiced. . .
And the bronze curve of doom
Darkened the blue abeyances
Of evening.
Once I looked into the heart of a judge,—
Freezing cold. . .
“Law is my living”,—reasoned the judge,—
“Death decrees are the talons of justice,—
The beak and the claws. . .”
I would not be a judge
Dropping death from infrangible lips of ice.
I would not be a hawk
Smiting like a shadow scimitar,—
Denying the bright ambience
Of love

DEATH

“Rejoice not against me”

For years a many,—for years on end,—
Misliked and shunned was he. . .
But now that he comes as a friend to a friend,—
I know him mine enemy.

SUMMER TIME

Grant a nimble foot to dance in the wind,—
A burnished eye to shine,—
Give a draught of the breath of a climbing rose
Or the bloom of the wild grape vine,—
Yield a radiant tang of strawberries. . .
Fling a liquid flame,—as when
A day star falls,—or the cardinal calls
And calls and calls again.

FAMILY PORTRAIT

A gentleman from Virginia,—with a streak
Of high adventure,—and an eye for more
And richer fields,—uncoveted before
He countered death on meadow land and creek
And wrested a fair acreage from beak
And claw and Indian tether,—where his floor
He laid him solid,—with a wide hearth core
And shaped his roof into a gallant peak.
And here he lived in suave urbanity
With children, friends and slaves;—the portrait caught
The peace and amplitude that ruled his thought
In quieter years,—with sun and grass and tree.
The house he built is ashes.—Nothing now
Is left him but my casual lips and brow.

ANGLO SAXON

And shall I not remember well the sweet
Fairspoken word my mother fed me on?
What lovelier stars,—what darker,—I've foregone
For the goodly taste of English speech! Albeit
I travel alien paths,—no counterfeit
Will serve me for that word of hers,—oh, none!
Upon my lips the savor lies . . . her son
Goes hungering and unashamed of it.
Far stars may fling their verse on frieze or plinth,—
Or whisper me prose as singing as a shell,—
Where,—stained with amaranth and hyacinth,—
Their wantless poets walk in asphodel;
But I,—wherever I go,—on foot or wing,—
Shall go,—as I go now,—remembering. . .

CHILDHOOD

*“And the evening and the morning were the
sixth day.”*

And God has given me dominion . . . word
Of power over all the green, sweet earth,—
And over every creeping thing and bird,—
Swift fish and lagging cattle;—from the girth
Of netted fireflies to the thundering
Of galaxies that whirl in purple space,—
Star dust and lovely dawns,—the shining face
Of the first golden crocus in the spring. . .
And through wide branches,—I may learn where far
Aldebaran and mighty Sirius are. . .
And gather the scent of gardens,—where I lie. . .
While God is lighting up the evening sky. . .
And, with His word,—above the lunar seas
The lovelier gardens of the Pleiades.

RETURN

Last night, while trade winds roared and foghorns plied
Their monotone . . . my dreams were willfully
With one who loved the eager seas,—storm free,
Or savage with the hunger of the tide. . .
With one,—who, on the ebb of April, died. . .
Land locked. . . I dreamed he climbed grey cliffs with me
Above a lashing waste of turbulent sea
Wind-hurled in spray about us far and wide. . .
His eyes held laughing fires. . . “An inland fear
Crept on me, unaware . . .” he said. . . “How far
The tide calls . . . and tonight I come . . . to hear
The trade winds battle at the outer bar. . .
The crash . . . the hush. . . I’ve dreamed of this . . .” he said.
“Your surf tonight would almost wake the dead!”

WHITE MAGIC

Upon a Tuscan day of festival
I paused a moment where the ancient road
Sweeps round a heady curve of hill thick snowed
With white Carrara dust. . . In pastoral
And flower wreathed processional
Came toward me two white oxen,—and time slowed
Its tread and claimed the primal gods were owed
Those agate eyes and horns of ritual.
On hooves of porphyry they came;—no gull
Had feather softer than their flanks,—white furred
With legend;—and the lidded centuries stirred
In sleep;—for ancient names and beautiful:
Etruria, Alba, Sybaris distill
Archaic wonder on a Tuscan hill.

COMEDY

I go to the pictures to see them twice;—
Once upon the moving screen
And again upon the screen of the crowd face.
I walk down the aisle to watch the picture reflected
Upon the crowd face.
I see smiles ripple in widening rhythms,—
Elfin, goblin rhythms,—
From the stone of merriment
Dropped into neutral waters.
The crowd face is pitiful in its smiling.
It is being slaked here at the fountain of smiles.
I watch an ever widening ripple of laughter
Run in antic circles over its face.
I pity its face
Here is assuagement for the gravity of human woe.
Here men come to drink of the fountain of smiles. . .
To be appeased with the soothing balm of laughter. . .
To release the bounded ego
To the unbounded cosmos
That knows no hap and no hindrance. . .
That spawns laughter,—untroubled laughter. . .
I watch the waves of merriment widen, flicker, recede
As the mind travels on some frail inconsequence
And faces are rippled with pitiful laughter
And eyes shine with the deliverance of dream.

RADIO

Ten cycles of the ecliptic sped by ten
Are gone since Homer wandered on the high
Green slope of Helicon . . . and shepherds by
The star pied seas of Hellas heard again
The ancient songs,—the rare old songs . . . as when
The heroes of the mountain top and sky
In immemorial cadence . . . gloriously
Gave to the winds the praise of gods and men.
And now,—in these far centuries,—I near
The secret of the tides of song,—and share
The murmur of their bardic springs . . . and on
Some sudden muted interval,—in clear
And planetary rhythms of the air
I hear the running brooks of Helicon.

MISS BLYNN

Today I rip the stitches in a satin gown
That has lain in the garret,—forgot,—folded down. . .
Old laces must be cherished,—they outlive joys,—long
years.

They outlive tears.

Little Miss Blynn,—who stitched this lace in place,—
Has been ten years under ground;

But her stitches hold,—steel bound.

As I rip them this day of winter and deep snow

I seem to see Miss Blynn as she stitched them in,—

Ten winters ago.

Her face was faintly lined,—but her neck still wore

A rondure and grace

Though she had stitched for forty years or more. . .

And she was slow as the hour hand of eternity,—I thought,—

Watching her: “Time and money wasted!

Caught

And pierced by her suspended needle,—basted

In her unhurrying, deliberate thread!” Out and in!

Stitch on stitch! Little Miss Blynn

Seemed inexorable as her stitches were. . .

And now,—as I take out each contumacious little thread,—

I seem to read it plain as word said,—

Clear as sound,—

Though she is dead,—ten years,—under ground:

“Scissors and thread!

Fate,—they call it! Fate!

Never a chance! Early and late

I’ve stitched . . . straight . . . straight. . .

Only in dreams

I’ve known

The raptures of

Love. . .

While I have sewn

Your seams . . . seams . . . seams. . .

My breath shortens with counting

The mounting sum of them! . . . Now love is starving to

INLAND VOICES

Within this sea of blue grass lie the beat
Of tides,—the tune of surf,—the luminous haze
Of mewing gulls;—I hear on quiet days
The secret voices of the waves that meet
The wordage of warm sand,—as crisp and sweet
As chosen verse that chants the fugitive ways
A trade wind takes on deep sea paths,—and lays
The purring breath of shell beneath my feet.

The tides of ocean,—long before my birth,—
Moved on this meadow,—and the measureless sand
Lay on these leagues of blue grass pasture land
Where ages hence,—when spring tides wake the earth. . .
Some unremembered word of mine may sing
Rewhispered in a shell's frail whispering.

CHILD OF GOD

Deep snow . . . and twilight deepening . . . yet I should
Have known him, surely,—even had the gull
Not hovered near,—wing curved and beautiful,—
In swerving arcs above him,—where he stood
With lantern and with staff,—and knocked. . . His breast
Was girt with no insignia of gold
Yet as he turned against the bitter cold
I think I might have known. . . I might have guessed.
For peradventure even holden eyes
May open and may know him standing there. . .
The bloom on him of stars from kindlier skies,—
The mood of tenderer winds about his hair. . .
It was my humble gardener at the door
Where he had stood a hundred times before.

MICROCOSM

1940

They say
Thousands were killed in one short day. . .
Thousands and thousands . . . on the air
Come words of bleak despair.
And these are only words to me. . . .
For such things cannot be.
But when,—as now,—they send
A token of one smiling boy
“Shot down” . . . at last . . . I comprehend
In single count . . . the casual end
Of youth and joy.
I share in cost
The piteous few
Lost
Years. . .
As though of all despair
The measure were
Concentred in this integer. . .
As a drop of dew
Holds for your eyes
The clouded skies
And enspheres
All tears.

FRATERNITÉ

I walked with one who said our score was paid
And over-paid upon the battlefield
Of the Argonne. . . We saw the fertile yield
Of berries,—dark and red,—no tilth of spade
Had touched where young blood poured beneath the shade
Of Belleau Wood . . . and small white stones had sealed
The legend of libation there,—a shield
On alien altars we had rashly laid.

He spoke . . . yet I remembered how you came
From out the courtly ways of Chavagnac
To fight on wild frontiers and in the track
Of foaming wildernesses,—for a name,—
A shining word,—a shibboleth that set
Your torch to ours,—your heart,—young LaFayette!

WILD GEESE

A whisper is upon the wind tonight,—
The whirring, gusty whispering of wings. . . .
The muffled surge of murmuring armies brings
To emulous tumult the far paths of flight.
Upon what secret order is the might
Of lunar armies loosed and sped,—what things
Unknowable,—these cosmic journeyings
Above the pale of thought,—the arc of sight?
And do they pass, in vague processional,
Vast other armies also under stress
Of marching order,—whose dim voices fall
Upon my shuttered door of consciousness?
And are these wild geese flying overhead
Or hurrying legions of the newly dead?

ARTIST

They said he hunted fireflies
High up in the sidereal skies. . .
They whispered . . . only nebulae
His net of dream would hold . . . that he
Was not sky wise . . . and furthermore
His filament of fancy bore
No bait to snare a meteor.
They railed: "Old Fireflies!" He went
His own high way intransigent;
For he had learned in far off land
To hold his heart in his naked hand;
Dark lore he learned,—by scroll and chart:
"There's no bait like a beating heart."
He went his way,—for bliss or ban,—
His sky way antinomian;
For well he knew,—come fire, come flood,—
The net was baited with his blood.
They said he netted fireflies,—
The trivia of the stellar skies;—
But hurtling from the fields afar,—
From where the dizziest sky trails are,—
There blazed, one night, a shooting star. . .
All thereabout it raged, and rent
The skies,—and roared incontinent. . .
Upon the net it swept, unspent.
It whined,—it sniffed,—it eat,—they heard,—
It licked the hunter's hand,—it purred.

IN A LIBRARY

Here thoughts exale their qualities,—as fair
Old perfumes live,—or sacred unguents are
Preserved within a mortuary jar
Whose lid I open tenderly to the bare
Astringence of the outer, living air
While Pliny tells of terraces where far
Cool breezes of the Apennines re-star
His villa with these violets I share.

I breathe the odors of the hours that were
And know the unwasted joy of ancient things;
The rhetoric of Abelard,—the blur
Of love words long forgotten,—and the strings
Of scented cargoes on the waves that stir
The ships of Tarshish and of Nineveh.

KENTUCKIAN

I dream the old trees live again . . . their scars
Made whole . . . and while the ancient summers spread
Their leaves,—like words interminably said,—
The forest murmurs at my window bars. . .
The immemorial wilderness that wars
No more with man,—where young grandfather led
The trail his searching ax interpreted,—
And built his cabin open to the stars.
On many a winter midnight hushed in snow
Come footsteps round our fires and doors shut blind,—
As over the drowsing quiet of the mind
Move soundless moccasins that come and go
On lonely trails a lean young woodsman knows
Through forests bending with forgotten snows.

[The end of *Inland Voices* by Sally Bullock Cave]