



The Spirit of the North

and 

Other Poems



By 

A. Evelyn Gunne

Entered according to the Act of Parliament of Canada, in the
year 1900, by A. EVELYN GUNNE, Rat Portage, at the
Department of Agriculture.

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ERRATA.

Page 25, third verse, fourth line—last word should be “turning.”

Page 30, last verse, second line—omit “where.”

Page 41, last verse, second line—read “vault of the firmament” instead of “vaults of the firmament.”

THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH.

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AND OTHER POEMS**

BY A. EVELYN GUNNE

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DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER.

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THE SPIRIT OF THE NORTH.

Downward, and ever downward, under the ice and snow;
Downward where the treach'rous, evil Messengers go:—

Loki, the Northern Spirit, stretches himself and sleeps,
Save when the Southland laughter into his dungeon creeps.

Into his ear this laughter stealing so gladly gay,
Wakens the vengeful sleeper to fear of the far off Day.

Thundering forth he comes, a god of the olden time—
Calling for, "Hela, Hela!" daughter of Niffelheim.

Hela, the awful goddess, who reigns in the Hall of Grief,
Low at the root of the Ash Tree, where never a dewy leaf

Falls from the high, green branches, swarming with golden bees,
And watched by the Beautiful Three who water the sacred trees.

Never a note from Heimdal's wonderful song of Fate
Floats from the Rainbow Bridge up-springing to heaven's gate.

There all is joy and laughter; here all is grief and woe;
Here in the House of Hela—House of the ice and snow.

"Hela! oh, Hela!" thunders the Spirit of the North;
"Open the gates—the Helgrind—and let me once more forth;

"Help me to hush the laughter maddening all my brain,
The senseless, tinkling laughter made by the dancing rain.

"Curses on him of Alfheim! riding his golden boar—
Garmented as the sun and watched by his Dwarfings four—

"Curses on him forever! Frost and the bitter night!—
Gods! I will rend his kingdom and cover his lands with blight!"

Swiftly the Northern Spirit hurried, a shape of dread,
Shaking the giant walls of Grief with his mighty tread.

Up, he rushed from the darkness—up, to the earth once more—
Up, where the smiling summer brooded o'er sea and shore.

Far and away the Southland thrilled with the murm'ring pines,
Slowly the golden sunshine nuzzled the fruited vines

Slowly the golden sunbeams purpled the haunted vales.

Dark grew the brow of Loki; and as his bitter breath
Drifted across the meadows, still grew the land in death.

“Hela, oh, Hela, Hela!” the mocking Spirit cried;
“Speak! Have the sons of Alfheim a corner where to hide?”

“Where are his dancing sunbeams—valleys and lakes outspread?
Hela!” he cried, and, “Hela!” Lo, they are cold and dead!

“Never more will their laughter madden my aching brain—
Never more will the blossoms bow to the dancing rain.”

Sadly the Prince of Alfheim, smiled in his foeman’s face,
Bravely he held his head though slower grew his pace—

“I go for a time,” he said, and fair were his eyes and clear—
But I will come again, and gladly my sons will hear.

“Think ye to kill my people?—not dead but sleeping, they
Await my springtime coming, as the sufferer waits the day.

“My Boar of the golden bristles! again will ye bring me here,
But now must ye carry me hence for the sleeping night of the year.

“Loki, the war between us lasts till the Winters Three,
And yet again Three more and the ending of all shall be;—

“Lasts till the purple dusk of the Gods shall surely come,—
The ramparts of Asgard fall, and Heimdal’s voice be dumb.

“Ever the war is waged till the Rainbow Bridge goes down;
Yea, and the sons of Valhalla perish with Odin’s crown.

“Loki, the end is near when double the Winters Three
Call for the Fenris-wolf—then perish the Gods—and We.”

HEIMWEH.

My strife with the world is over, and here I needs must lie
And sigh my final sighing beneath an alien sky

For years o'er the portly ledgers, in a stifling city street,
I ruled as a king of commerce, but rule is bitter-sweet!

None dare disobey the master:—the name with men means fear!—
I am sick of such slavish service this many a weary year.

My tender and loving lost ones, who made strife worth the while,
Reply not when I call them by word, or look, or smile.

What boots all the gold and silver when love and loved are dead—
When hands of the hired tend us, nor heed the aching head.

What boots all the gold and silver when life is a yearning cry
For the plains—the open prairies under the brooding sky.

My birth claims a far-off Northland—she calls me—calls me home
To rest on her quiet bosom 'neath God's cathedral dome.

I long with a homesick longing to feel the buffalo grass,—
To hear the honking wild-geese and white cranes Northward pass.

To see the reedy marshes, rank with the rains of June,
Shelter the nesting wild-duck beneath a summer moon.

When shadowy mists of morning are ghosts all drawn and pale
Of blanketed Indian women who have lost the travois trail.

Will never I see uprising like a slender stalk of pray'r
The smoke of the ruddy camp-fire in the chill October air?—

Nor witness the Indian Summer linger on plain and lea
To kiss in his snowy cradle, the Winter at her knee—

Nor see with his sheets of silver spread to the earth and sky
The frostily blue cloud-shadows over its surface fly.

What time the bending cat-tails with pendant diamonds glow,
And cheeks of the scarlet rose-hips are blushing thro' the snow,

When bravely the chirping snow-bird chants from some tilting spray
Of gaudily stemmed red willow fringing the frozen way

Of gaudy stemmed red when hanging the frozen way.

And slowly with noiseless footsteps the lovely jeweled nights
Come with their trains of dancers flashing the Northern lights!

Oh, beautiful Northern twilight! and the blue, blue Northern sky
That hangs like a giant harebell held by the Hand on high!

The city is pressing 'round me—I cannot get my breath,—
No air—no sky—no stillness, but clamors worse than death!—

Oh, for the noble silence pulsing the great, blue bell!
When rosy the dawn is glowing as the heart of an ocean shell!

One glimpse of the red-drenched splendor of chalice clouds that sail
Close to the dying sun-god, like cups of the Holy Grail!

They say I'm sick unto death;—then for Christ's sake take me home,—
Home to the quiet seas that never break in foam.

Oh, God! I am old and broken—and the pain is the pain of hell—
The mystical North is calling—no power can make me well,—

But I am her child, she would hold me cradled against her breast—
Lulled to a dim forgetting—hushed to a dreamless rest.

THE LOYALIST.

SONG.

We are a nation but newly formed
From varied tribes of earth;
Yet are we true to the brave old flag
That guards our land of birth.
Loyal and true are we of the East,
And we of the golden West—
We who are lords of the placid seas
The years have rocked to rest.

CHORUS.—Tho' we are not Britons from o'er the sea
Nor all have British sires;
Yet loyaller love to the British flag
Lives not in the English shires.

We of the farms and the swaying fields
Of rippling, rustling grain;
We who are fed from the earth's full breast
And reap the sun and rain;
We who are wise in nature's ways
And toil for a nation's weal,
Truly our lands and our lives would lose
To prove our Maples leal.

We of the ranch of a thousand kine,
Who look o'er leagues of land,
Straight to the gateway of earth and sky,
Unmarred by a human hand;—
We who are browned by the sun and the wind,
—Are fearless, frank and free,
Will not be the last to come when call
The trumpets o'er the sea.

We of the mines, whose manly men
Dig in the dim, dark drifts;
We who demand from the naked rocks
Their ringing, golden gifts;
We who are rude, and rugged and rough
And shut from the open sky,—
We at the call of the Mother come,
To stand by the flag—or die.

THE FALLING STAR

A star looked down from his home in space
Deep in a glassy pool;
And saw, with wonder, his own sweet face
Framed in the waters cool!

Enthralled he gazed at the image true,
Winking its curious eye,
Till—leaning too far for a better view—
He tumbled out of the sky!

HARD TIMES.

“Come in,—come in, it’s blowin’, sir, a perfec’ gale to-night.
Hang up yer coat there by the door,—come to the fire,—that’s right!
Things is kinder mussy-like,—ain’t got much furn’cher yet—
But still the shanty’s shelter from the wind, an’ snow an’ wet.

“Yes, times is hard; I reckon that there won’t be much to show
Fer last year’s work upon the claim,—the price of wheat’s so low;
An’ wife’s bin sick a long, long time,—she took the grip real bad—
Got kinder tuckered out a-workin’ morn an’ noon like mad.

“I’ve jis’ bin fer the doctor,—that’s him who went up stairs,—
He didn’t speak of pay at all, or ask about my ’fairs,—
But if he had, the Lord alone knows what I should ’a done;
There’s many here in want of cash—but us! *We ain’t got none!*

“We can’t afford to hire help, that’s how things as they be,—
There’s no one here to do the chores, but Sue an’ Babe an’ me.
An’ Babe,—she’d like to do her share,—bein’ most a whole year old!
An’ knowin’!—Gosh! that child knows more’n many a man could hold!

“Yet I most say she ain’t a *whale* at helpin’ on the game,—
Though, lawzy-sakes!—she thinks she is,—Lord love her jis’ the same!
Sue’s home was in Ontairy.—She’d never worked real hard—
Not as she’s had to work out here, in stable, house and yard.

“A man scarce stan’s this climate when he’s poorly clothed an’ fed,
An’ housed in shacks so cold yer breath goes smokin’ ’round yer head!
An’, Gosh! I couldn’t help it,—I’d haf to go to town
A-teamin’ loads of wood er hay, fer Smith, er Jones, er Brown—

“Try’n to am a dollar p’rap’s to keep the wolf at bay,
An’ git the things we needed, so, we’ve struggled day by day.
Yes, while I’d be away she’d haf to look up all the stock;—
An’ chop the hole out at the crick—froze solid like a rock.

“She’d water all the cattle there,—Sue’s jis’ a little thing—
Comes hardly to my shoulder, yit she’d laugh an’ jest an’ sing,
An’ sorter joke about her work, because it worried me!
I might ’a known how it would end;—fer now she’s down, ye see.

“I’m tur’ble glad the doctor’s here,—an’ that he come to-day;
Of course it’s jis’ a cold, but still—I’m anxious, I mus’ say
It seems so strange when Sue’s not ’round, that worried like I feel,—
Ef times iis’ wasn’t *quite* so hard I’d nistle out a deal

EXILES JR. WASN'T QUITE SO HARD TO TALK OUT A GUY.

“An’ git her down East to her folks. That would be a surprise!
But with these mortgages,—Go! Damn!—say, what would you advise?
Oh, doctor! How’s yer patient seem? Guess I was off my head
To be so scared this mornin’. Doctor!—No!—my God!—she’s dead!”

THE PRISON CHAPEL.

STONY MOUNTAIN.

Outside, the summer winds roam free—the soaring birds no boundaries own,
The June time fills each heart with glee, save these behind the bars alone.
The roving sunlight struggles thro' the bars of weather-beaten steel—
A gay old outlaw dancing while the prisoners decorously kneel.

The armed guards watch ceaselessly in sentry box—by iron door
The ways that lead to liberty—each avenue and corridor.
The hush is gently stirred—a voice swells out in praise and pray'r and psalm,
The organ moans its sadness through the silence of the Sabbath-calm.

“The Lord is in His Temple here,” so reads the solemn scroll above
The crimson altar-cloths, where lie the volumes of the law and love;
“Almighty Father we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep;”
The heart-break of the world breathes through the sad confession low and deep.

Shut from the world, condemned to live throughout the week with soundless lips,
The prison-voice with pain o'erflows when silence once her leash unslips.
The firm-voiced priest speaks reverently the great “Thou shalt nots,” and with awe
Comes the response from convict lips: “Lord, teach our hearts to keep this law.”

The sermon follows, tender, plain, as suited to the time, and need
Of future days of liberty, with freedom both for will and deed,—
A laying of foundation deep,—not leaving all to idle chance,
When once again the men go forth to fight with place and circumstance.

Oh, brothers! overcome by stress of stormy passions,—loves and hates;
When once more free, bind not yourselves, *with stronger chains, outside the gates.*

SILVER POPLARS.

MORNING.

Gathered in friendly groups, like a bevy of graceful girls
Saucily shaking their tresses free, from a bath of pearls;
Draperies daintily green, and 'broidered against the sky
With laceries lightly swept by shy winds loitering by.
Ghosts of the dawn for background,—spirits of rose and grey,
Painting the silver stems with a blush for the coming day.

NOON.

Now when the sun hurls down his arrows of light and fire,
Drowsily nod the trees awaiting the wind-god's lyre;
Then from their slumbers wakening they rustle and pat their gowns,
And gossip in wonderful whispers till night creeps o'er the downs.

NIGHT.

Lo! as the shadows lengthen, together the trees are pressed,
Fluttering like a dove-cote thrilled and sore distressed,—
Nervous hysterical tremblers! of what are ye not afraid?
A afraid of owl-wings flapping, afraid of the cloud-rack's shade?
Clinging together with fingers clutched and entwined I wis,
Shrinking with fear at the footstep—pale 'neath the south wind's kiss.
Ah! ye cannot remember my beautiful frightened trees
Shivering in the moonlight—shuddering in the breeze,
The long-forgotten sorrow that from topmost leaf to moss,
Still thrills thro' all your branches, the sorrow of—A CROSS.

A THUNDERSTORM ON THE PLAINS.

At early eve, I sat outside my tent, and watched the changing pictures in the West
Grow quickly 'neath my gaze. Cities and towns, built up of golden clouds, faded and passed
Leaving no trace, like those fair cities of a by-gone age,—Nineve or Babylon,
At intervals the opalescent glory of the sky was rent with living fire—
A flaming sword, whose cruel, angry thrust drew out the life-blood of the firmament.
Earthward, a silence vast held all the widespread circle of the plain, whose creatures felt
A presage of the storm. A subtle frightened hush pervaded all the atmosphere—
The fear of an impending doom. Thus, while I waited, slowly all color perished;—
Dull leaden tints stole o'er the gold and crimson world,—A smell of swiftly-coming rain
Grew on the sense;—A lightly running wind just brushed my cheek, and into rippling waves
Sent all the perfumed grass. But now mine eyelids fell before a light, like unto that
Which shone around the stem-browed Pharisee, when on his way to bind the Damascenes.
I staggered back into my flapping tent, while on my deafened ears there fell a crash,
As though the bolt had split the heavens in twain, and into chaos hurled the universe!

TWILIGHT.

No cloud in sight to mar the golden vault,
Just faintly tinged with blue, that charmed while
Between the setting of the summer sun
And coming of the starry rank and file.

Reclined at ease upon the hillside's breast;—
With hands clasped beneath the tired head—
And gaze turned upward to the throbbing sky,—
So moved perchance beneath an angel's tread?

Life thus is good. E'en though the still delight
Of grief surceased, be not unmixed with pain:
The minor chord serves only to enhance
The beauty of the greater major strain.

From depths serene the velvet robe of night
Slips downward from the Master-Maker's loom,
And earth's sad wayfarers, all travel-torn,
Are softly folded in its gracious gloom.

For one short hour the scheming world is not;—
The grind,—the toil,—the cursing and the glare
Slip from the mocking soul. And roses breathe
Their perfume, like the essence of a prayer.

THE SILVER BIRCHES.

Tall and straight, and golden girdled,
With white lilies in her hand—
My beloved came to greet me
Where the silver birches stand.

I was weary with long waiting,—
Tides of sorrow o'er me swept,
While I watched beside the birches,
Where of late my lady slept.

Not a blot was on her bosom,—
All her being glorified;—
From the vista of the future
Drew she downward to my side.

All the pain of all my vigils,—
All the anguish of the past
Beat upon my tortured spirit,
Face to face with her at last.

And I would have caught her to me,—
Crushed her in a last embrace;
Kissed her hair,—her hands,—the lilies,
Kissed to rose her pallid face.

But she paused with grave rebuking—
Held my passion in arrest,—
Raised her lovely arms in silence,—
Laid the lilies on my breast.

Then with measured, stately footsteps,
Farther, and yet farther, drew
Toward the vista of the future,—
Fringed with rosemary and rue.

In its yellow light resplendent,—
Backward turned with smiling lips,
And as promise of a guerdon,—
Beckoned with her finger-tips!

All the man's love surging o'er me,
Sorrow-crowned, and sorrow-kept;
With her sad smile, passed forever,—
Passed forever—and I slept

passed forever—and I slept.

“He but dreamed it,” say the people;

“He was crazed with lack of rest!”

Yea, perhaps, but when I wakened,

There were lilies on my breast!

And thro’ days of sun and shadow,

Wait I here her last command—

Wait, and keep my silent vigil,

Where the silver birches stand.

THE QUESTION.

“Soul,” I whispered: “Soul,” I whispered:

“Do you hear the voices crying?

See the shapes of anguish moving?

Hear the moaning, and the sighing?

Soul,” I whispered: “Soul,” I whispered:

“Is this dying, is this dying?

“In the future, Soul,” I whispered:

“See the mystery and ponder,—

Guess the secret of the doorway,—

Is it always dark, I wonder?

Soul,” I whispered: “Soul,” I whispered:

“Over yonder,—over yonder?

“Looking backward thro’ the ages,

To the lamps so dimly burning,—

To the latest priest or prophet,

See I human faces [burning](#),—

Soul,” I whispered: “Soul,” I whispered:

“Filled with yearning,—oh, such yearning!

“Soul,” I whispered: “Soul,” I whispered:

“When the veil is rent asunder.—

When the doorway wide is opened,—

Will there silence be, or thunder?—

Light or darkness? Soul,” I whispered:

“How I wonder! How I wonder!”

TO E. R. Y.

WITH A PORTRAIT OF TENNYSON.

We give you greeting, sweetest friend,
On this glad morning of the day
We keep in memory of Him,
Whose gentle sway

Has blessed the centuries; and taught
That selflessness of purest mould
Can make of life, a worth—not coined
In yellow gold.

Your fair, full life,—a help to all
On whom its essence fine descends;—
Is such to us the latest come,
Of all your friends.

From each day's intercourse, a hope,
And wingéd aspiration rise,
Till thought mounts up to touch the stars
And range the skies!

We pray you, take this little gift;—
This gift of love,—the shadow-face
Of him who sang of noble lives
And deeds of grace.

And so, sweet friend, this Christmas morn
While gladsome folk about the town
Greet friends, we kiss your hands, and lay
Our tribute down.

THE DEATH OF THE DAY.

Steadfastly on she moves,—straight to the West,—
The imperial day:
Whose burning cheek and tarnished golden robe
Speak of the fray.

Her gleaming hair in many a flaming tress
The horizon veils;—
And o'er the mountain tops in crimson state,
Her mantle trails.

So, like a war-worn queen, victorious
Yet wearied sore,—
With battle-ribboned banners flying free
This one time more

She goes to meet her doom,—though nations fall
She will not fail
To keep her tryst, and learn what lies behind
The mystic veil.

A-blaze with Death's wild fire, a space, against
The heaven's own blue,—
She parts the Western curtains with her hands,
And passes through.

EXPRESSION.

Souls of men lie chained,—imprisoned—and their wealth is never uttered,—
Lofty yearnings, poems, pictures, hide behind the windows shuttered;
All the doors are barred and bolted, and the keys of every portal
God holds surely, nor entrusts them to the feeble, falt'ring mortal.

But there comes a mighty spirit, rising from the common dust;—
Crying with a voice insistent; and the Master, ever just,
Hears the anguished note uprising,—knows the power yet to be,—
Unto him the keys are given, and the prisoned soul goes free.

MIDNIGHT.

I look up to the vast infinitude of space,
And see the velvet, midnight sky, as if it were
The wrong side of the floor of heaven, in strange device
Piercéd by rainbow stars,—a lattice-work of love,
Through which a radiant light from God's own face, in show'rs
Of misty tenderness, streams down upon the world.

TEACH ME WISDOM, MOTHER- NATURE.

Teach me wisdom, Mother-Nature;—
 Take me to thy breast,
And the heart which well-nigh breaketh
With its grief that acheth, acheth,
 May perhaps find rest

Teach me these things, Mother-Nature:—
 Let me learn apart
Secrets e'en the birdling knoweth
Skimming where the water floweth;—
 Music in his heart.

Teach me what the flowers are saying,—
 Heavy,—dew-empared.
As each perfumed head low-bendeth,—
Waiting till the sun ascendeth
 O'er a sentient world.

Show me how the torch of Autumn
 Lights the glowing fire,—
Till with colors, no man nameth,
All the savage hillside flameth
 On its funeral pyre.

Tell me what the raindrops mutter
 When the floods descend,
And the lightning's banner waveth
Over sleeping homes he craveth
 Heaven's leave to rend.

What are all the forests chanting
 In deep organ tones,
When the wind his baton swingeth,
And the thunder-bell low-ringeth
 Stormy antiphones.

Teach me these things, Mother-Nature,—
 Take me to thy breast,
And the heart which well-nigh breaketh,
With its grief that acheth, acheth,
 May perhaps find rest.

AN IMPRESSION.

A flash of carriage wheels, whirling over the urban miles;
A glimpse of velvet ease [where](#)—and an insolent outcast smiles.
With the cloak,—the gloves,—the gown, with the feet so daintily shod,
Goes a heart let loose from hell, and a face like the mother of God.

THE REVEILLE.

Wake, my own! The lances of the sun,
Rosy-red, are marching up the sky.
Wake, my own! for love and light are one,
And doubt and darkness in their presence fly.

Wind and storm galloped o'er the sea
All night long, and I dreamed of thee,—
Dreamed of thee, and as I am thine
My beloved, my beloved,—
Dreamed I, thou wert mine.

What care I for the storm's wild glee!
What care I for the moaning sea!
Day has dawned and the skies are clear!
My beloved, my beloved,—
Waken, love is here!

Wake, my own! The herald of the dawn
All the air with sweetest music fills,—
Wake, my own! The sable night is gone,
And morning calls "Reveille," to the hills!

IN MEMORIAM.

F. C. S. C.

He kept his soul unspotted and untarnished,
A radiant lily cup—a holy chalice;
Which when the Great King saw, He gently lifted
And placed securely in His royal palace.

BEYOND IS GOD.

I would grow up to the full stature of a soul;
Majestic, calm and brave; and ever strive to gain
The shining heights where love serenely dwells
With altruistic faith, in palaces of light.
Yet, with humility enough to comprehend
The narrow limits set to man's intelligence—
And—spite of subtle reason—wise enough to cry:
“Beyond is God.”

TO AN ASPEN LEAF.

The restless world, at this the century's end,
 Gazing askance at icon, sect, or creed,
Lacks everywhere the grand incentive of belief,—
 For lack of faith always aborts the deed.
Half-heartedly, men speak of nobler things
 Than those behind a counter, bought and sold;
Because we *feel* half-heartedly no ringing song
 Or stirring story, in our ears is told;
When aiming high the arrow lower flies,
 And greed of gold bids princes stand and wait.—
Oh, little leaf! hung tremblingly as fate
 Upon a thread-like stem; what comfort lies
In your brave heart!—keeping close-roofed and warm
 A silver lining for the roughest storm!

ELAINE.

I hold my hands out to you, winds, wild winds,—
Hurrying over the fields of grain,—
Brushing the lawns where the lilies have lain,
And implore you tread lightly,—
Softly and lightly,—
The mosses that cover Elaine.

I hold my hands out to you, clouds, far clouds,—
And pray, when you pour out your chalice of rain
Over the valleys, the hills and the plains,
You will sprinkle but slightly,—
Softly and lightly,—
The grasses that shelter Elaine.

I hold my hands out to you, earth, fair earth,—
Who gatherest into thy bosom, the slain,—
And keepest them safe in the wind and the rain,
I pray you hold tightly,—
Softly and lightly,—
The white narrow bed of Elaine.

I hold my hands out to you, sea, sad sea,—
Singing forever the same refrain
Of the dead who will never come home again,—
And pray you sing nightly,—
Softly and lightly,—
Your soft lullabies for Elaine.

I cry to you, clouds, and the winds, and the stars,
I cry to you, earth and the sea,
To watch well and guard well
The gate death has barred well
Till death himself ceaseth to be;
And when for me the long day has ended;—
Watch well, and guard well, the charge I have tended;—
Thro' the long centuries, earth, and oh, sea!
Watch till the day in a far 'ternity,—
God Himself giveth her back unto me.—
Elaine! Elaine! Elaine!

ASPIRATION.

It shines, at first, a distant wavering gleam,
But faintly struggling through the misty night
Of sordid commonplace: Yet stirring up
The soul to fresh endeavor towards the light.
Discouragement and doubt forever draw
The curtain of the present 'round our way—
But look beyond, the dawn will break, and still
“Shine more and more unto the perfect day.”

THE SINGER'S PRAYER.

There is joy in the heart of the robin,—
There is bliss in the throat of the lark.—
All the bird-songs of day are triumphant,
And,—the nightingale sings in the dark!

But they all know the secret of singing,
So that hearts lighter grow with their songs:
For their souls are so filled with life's music,
There are no comers left for life's wrongs.

There's a boon I would ask of the Master—
Lord, grant me the prayer that I pray!
Let me sing so the toilers may listen,
As they pause in the work of the day.—

Let me sing so the tired at night-fall
May behold in the jubilant West
All the glory of work, when the workman
Has completed his task and may rest.

Let me sing so the sick and the suffering,
Heavy-eyed with the vigils they keep,
Still may listen to my lullabies stealing
Softly in at their windows—and sleep.

Let me sing for my own time, and people,—
For the children we meet on the way;
Let my voice find its chord in the present,—
In the needs that are pressing to-day.

Many nations unborn have their singers
Enwrapped in the nebulous mist
Of virginal days which the sunlight
Has yet, nor discovered, nor kist.

They will sing for the time that is coming,—
Let me sing for the time that is here;
Has the world of to-day less of heart-break
Than the world of some far-forming year?

Fill my songs full of beauty and gladness,—
Master, grant me the prayer that I pray.
Fill my songs full of hope for the hopeless,—
And oh! let me sing them to-day.

UNCLE'S CHRISTMAS STORY.

“You want a story, chickens mine,—a tale that must be true!
A tale of little children,—with a Christmas flavor, too?
My poor old brain will reel, I fear, attempting deeds like this:
You would not like to see, I'm sure, your Uncle crazy, Miss.
You doubt my word—you saucy scamps! Oh, well, oh, well, you'll see,
When, growling like a bear, I come, and eat you all for tea.
'Don't fool so much—be sensible!' Come now, I *do* like that;
If I've no sense in my old age, I'll eat my Sunday hat!

“I see there's no escape, so—in the good, old-fashioned way:
Once on a time—far, far from here, and at a distant day,
I went—a missionary—to preach to flocks so sparse and thin
It took me weeks to gather half my congregation in.
My Sabbaths were expended,—nearly all the live-long day—
In driving to my stations with my span of ponies gray.
'Jehu, the son of Nimshi,' wasn't in it,—not at all.
When I my bronchos speeded, like a North-wind in the fall.

“A service short I held at ten—then off to Holland's Bluff
To meet a congregation there, of diamonds in the rough;
Then on, ten miles, and Evening Prayer refreshed the heart like dew;—
Sweethearts, a prairie preacher's lot has compensations too;
Then pastoral calls, at distant homes, filled up my busy week;
With here a word,—and there a pray'r, I tried to fitly speak.
I often think of that vast plain, whose circle made me feel
The centre of the universe,—the hub of all the wheel.

“One winter in my visiting, (the story's coming now),
I reached a dreary, wind-swept hut,—a jolly 'Bow-wow-wow,'
Saluted me, from friendly throats, while tumbling through the snow
Two little tots came floundering, as fast as they could go,
But *firstly*, let me tell you, dears, the happy Christmas-tide
Was coming soon to glad with gifts, the children far and wide;
Alas, this little prairie home,—half-buried in the snow,
Was poverty's own haunt,—so drear and bare was it, you know!

“But, oh, how large the kindly hearts beneath that homestead roof,—
How sweet the gentle mother's voice, when raised in soft reproof,—
For e'en the best of little ones, a mother must subdue
When they upon the war-path go—a fearsome band of two!
I coaxed the doughty braves at last to sit upon my knee;
And as you stare to-night, you scamps, just so they stared at me!
For stranger-people in that land a luxury were deemed,
And like a Punch and Judy show to them I doubtless seemed!

And me a punch and Judy show, to their goodness bound.

“I told them all about the elves and fairies I had known—
Of Giant-killers great and tall,—of Mother Hubbard’s bone;
Of wond’rous Bean-stalks growing up—of Jack’s so great and wise,
Who climbed those Bean-stalks in a night—right up into the skies!
I told them all the tales I knew,—and last the Bethlehem Star,—
And how the wond’ring shepherds heard the songs of heav’n afar;
But when their sleepy eyelids fell, beneath the dustman’s arts,
We knelt—a humble roof-tree shelt’ring happy, peaceful hearts.

“Before the dawn I wakened, hearing ‘voices in the night,’
My little friends were talking fast, but hidden from my sight
Not far from where I rested;—raising cautiously, my head,
And drawing back the drapery, I saw the moonlight shed
A radiance like silver, over two small saints in white,—
Where, quaintly kneeling side by side, they prayed with all their might:
‘Please, God, the preacher-man what comed, said you knew ever-thing,
And ownded all that’s in the world,—so please, sir, won’t you bring,
At Christmus-time, a drum fer Fred,—fer favver nice mince pies—
A chiny-set fer muvver—an’ I’d like a doll what cries.
An’ him what told us stories here, *an’s sleepin’ in our bed,*
Say, can’t you help him, so’s his hair *won’t be so awful red,*
Amen.’ ‘Hold on a bit,’ said Fred, ‘I want to have a gun;’
The small maid said: ‘I guess He knows; oh, Freddie, ain’t it fun?’
They cuddled down,—the moonlight fair, baptized each golden head;
The ‘preacher-man’ he laughed, and groaned, because his hair was red.

“I think that’s nearly all. Oh, did the children get their toys?
Dear me, how you do tease,—were ever seen such girls and boys?
I think perhaps they did, you know, for when I called once more
The babes came tumbling thro’ the snow, just as they did before:
And I am sure Fred had a drum, and my sweet maid a doll,
A gift had come for everyone,—Santa remembered all.
And ’bout my hair, that funny thing? Yes, pets, now say ‘good-night,’
God answered that in years of pain, by bleaching it snow-white.”

THE TRUANT WIND.

A baby wind went running wild about the fields one day,
Capricious—full of glee he danced—a little child at play.
But as day passed he wearied sore of running to and fro,—
The smiling evening found him just too tired to even *blow*.

FIRE FLIES.

Coming from darkness we pass to the dark—
Death that has been and a death yet to be,
Life flames between them—a luminous spark
Fanned by the wings of some far destiny.

Destiny, swift to enkindle the spark,
Blots it again in the blackness before,—
We cry for a sound from the soundless—the dark
Silence but deepens her stillnesses more.

Master of darkness, both future and past,
Lord of our days from the darkneses free;
Great God of silences, awful and vast,
Keep us from fearing our own mystery!

SUNSET.

The sun on his way to his home in the west
A-down the long [vaults](#) of the firmanent springs
To love and his hearth, where the embers at rest
Will flash into flame at the beat of his wings.

Transcriber's Notes

Obvious printing errors have been silently corrected.

Inconsistencies in hyphenation, spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[The end of *The Spirit of the North and Other Poems* by Alzina Evelyn Gunne]