

A  
FURTHER  
RANGE

\*

ROBERT  
FROST

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BOOK SIX

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A  
FURTHER  
RANGE  
BY  
ROBERT  
FROST

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To E. F.

for what it may mean to her that beyond the White Mountains were the Green; beyond both were the Rockies, the Sierras, and, in thought, the Andes and the Himalayas—range beyond range even into the realm of government and religion

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TAKEN DOUBLY

# A LONE STRIKER

The swinging mill bell changed its rate  
To tolling like the count of fate,  
And though at that the tardy ran,  
One failed to make the closing gate.  
There was a law of God or man  
That on the one who came too late  
The gate for half an hour be locked,  
His time be lost, his pittance docked.  
He stood rebuked and unemployed.  
The straining mill began to shake.  
The mill, though many, many eyed,  
Had eyes inscrutably opaque;  
So that he couldn't look inside  
To see if some forlorn machine  
Was standing idle for his sake.  
(He couldn't hope its heart would break.)

And yet he thought he saw the scene:  
The air was full of dust of wool.  
A thousand yarns were under pull,  
But pull so slow, with such a twist,  
All day from spool to lesser spool,  
It seldom overtaxed their strength;  
They safely grew in slender length.  
And if one broke by any chance,  
The spinner saw it at a glance.  
The spinner still was there to spin.  
That's where the human still came in.  
Her deft hand showed with finger rings  
Among the harp-like spread of strings.  
She caught the pieces end to end  
And, with a touch that never missed,  
Not so much tied as made them blend.  
Man's ingenuity was good.  
He saw it plainly where he stood,

Yet found it easy to resist.

He knew another place, a wood,  
And in it, tall as trees, were cliffs;  
And if he stood on one of these,  
'Twould be among the tops of trees,  
Their upper branches round him wreathing,  
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.  
If—if he stood! Enough of ifs!  
He knew a path that wanted walking;  
He knew a spring that wanted drinking;  
A thought that wanted further thinking;  
A love that wanted re-renewing.  
Nor was this just a way of talking  
To save him the expense of doing.  
With him it boded action, deed.

The factory was very fine;  
He wished it all the modern speed.  
Yet, after all, 'twas not divine,  
That is to say, 'twas not a church.  
He never would assume that he'd  
Be any institution's need.  
But he said then and still would say  
If there should ever come a day  
When industry seemed like to die  
Because he left it in the lurch,  
Or even merely seemed to pine  
For want of his approval, why  
Come get him—they knew where to search.

## TWO TRAMPS IN MUD TIME

Out of the mud two strangers came  
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.  
And one of them put me off my aim  
By hailing cheerily "Hit them hard!"  
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind  
And let the other go on a way.  
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:  
He wanted to take my job for pay.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,  
As large around as the chopping block;  
And every piece I squarely hit  
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.  
The blows that a life of self-control  
Spares to strike for the common good  
That day, giving a loose to my soul,  
I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.  
You know how it is with an April day  
When the sun is out and the wind is still,  
You're one month on in the middle of May.  
But if you so much as dare to speak,  
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,  
A wind comes off a frozen peak,  
And you're two months back in the middle of March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight  
And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume,  
His song so pitched as not to excite  
A single flower as yet to bloom.  
It is snowing a flake: and he half knew  
Winter was only playing possum.  
Except in color he isn't blue,  
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

~

The water for which we may have to look  
In summertime with a witching-wand,  
In every wheelrut's now a brook,  
In every print of a hoof a pond.  
Be glad of water, but don't forget  
The lurking frost in the earth beneath  
That will steal forth after the sun is set  
And show on the water its crystal teeth.

The time when most I loved my task  
These two must make me love it more  
By coming with what they came to ask.  
You'd think I never had felt before  
The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,  
The grip on earth of outspread feet,  
The life of muscles rocking soft  
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps  
(From sleeping God knows where last night,  
But not long since in the lumber camps).  
They thought all chopping was theirs of right.  
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,  
They judged me by their appropriate tool.  
Except as a fellow handled an ax,  
They had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.  
They knew they had but to stay their stay  
And all their logic would fill my head:  
As that I had no right to play  
With what was another man's work for gain.  
My right might be love but theirs was need.  
And where the two exist in twain  
Theirs was the better right—agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only where love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

# THE WHITE-TAILED HORNET

The white-tailed hornet lives in a balloon  
That floats against the ceiling of the woodshed.  
The exit he comes out at like a bullet  
Is like the pupil of a pointed gun.  
And having power to change his aim in flight,  
He comes out more unerring than a bullet.  
Verse could be written on the certainty  
With which he penetrates my best defense  
Of whirling hands and arms about the head  
To stab me in the sneeze-nerve of a nostril.  
Such is the instinct of it I allow.  
Yet how about the insect certainty  
That in the neighborhood of home and children  
Is such an execrable judge of motives  
As not to recognize in me the exception  
I like to think I am in everything—  
One who would never hang above a bookcase  
His Japanese crepe-paper globe for trophy?  
He stung me first and stung me afterward.  
He rolled me off the field head over heels,  
And would not listen to my explanations.

That's when I went as visitor to his house.  
As visitor at my house he is better.  
Hawking for flies about the kitchen door,  
In at one door perhaps and out another,  
Trust him then not to put you in the wrong.  
He won't misunderstand your freest movements.  
Let him light on your skin unless you mind  
So many prickly grappling feet at once.  
He's after the domesticated fly  
To feed his thumping grubs as big as he is.  
Here he is at his best, but even here—  
I watched him where he swooped, he pounced, he struck;  
But what he found he had was just a nailhead.

He struck a second time. Another nailhead.  
“Those are just nailheads. Those are fastened down.”  
Then disconcerted and not unannoyed,  
He stooped and struck a little huckleberry  
The way a player curls around a football.  
“Wrong shape, wrong color, and wrong scent,” I said.  
The huckleberry rolled him on his head.  
At last it was a fly. He shot and missed;  
And the fly circled round him in derision.  
But for the fly he might have made me think  
He had been at his poetry, comparing  
Nailhead with fly and fly with huckleberry:  
How like a fly, how very like a fly.  
But the real fly he missed would never do;  
The missed fly made me dangerously skeptical.

Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?  
Won't almost any theory bear revision?  
To err is human, not to, animal.  
Or so we pay the compliment to instinct,  
Only too liberal of our compliment  
That really takes away instead of gives.  
Our worship, humor, conscientiousness  
Went long since to the dogs under the table.  
And served us right for having instituted  
Downward comparisons. As long on earth  
As our comparisons were stoutly upward  
With gods and angels, we were men at least,  
But little lower than the gods and angels.  
But once comparisons were yielded downward,  
Once we began to see our images  
Reflected in the mud and even dust,  
'Twas disillusion upon disillusion.  
We were lost piecemeal to the animals,  
Like people thrown out to delay the wolves.  
Nothing but fallibility was left us,  
And this day's work made even that seem doubtful.



# A BLUE RIBBON AT AMESBURY

Such a fine pullet ought to go  
All coiffured to a winter show,  
And be exhibited, and win.  
The answer is this one has been—

And come with all her honors home.  
Her golden leg, her coral comb,  
Her fluff of plumage, white as chalk,  
Her style, were all the fancy's talk.

It seems as if you must have heard.  
She scored an almost perfect bird.  
In her we make ourselves acquainted  
With one a Sewell might have painted.

Here common with the flock again,  
At home in her abiding pen,  
She lingers feeding at the trough,  
The last to let night drive her off.

The one who gave her ankle-band,  
Her keeper, empty pail in hand,  
He lingers too, averse to slight  
His chores for all the wintry night.

He leans against the dusty wall,  
Immured almost beyond recall,  
A depth past many swinging doors  
And many litter-muffled floors.

He meditates the breeder's art.  
He has a half a mind to start,  
With her for Mother Eve, a race  
That shall all living things displace.

'Tis ritual with her to lay  
The full six days, then rest a day;  
At which rate barring broodiness  
She well may score an egg-success.

The gatherer can always tell  
Her well-turned egg's brown sturdy shell,  
As safe a vehicle of seed  
As is vouchsafed to feathered breed.

No human spectre at the feast  
Can scant or hurry her the least.  
She takes her time to take her fill.  
She whets a sleepy sated bill.

She gropes across the pen alone  
To peck herself a precious stone.  
She waters at the patent fount.  
And so to roost, the last to mount.

The roost is her extent of flight.  
Yet once she rises to the height,  
She shoulders with a wing so strong  
She makes the whole flock move along.

The night is setting in to blow.  
It scours the windowpane with snow,  
But barely gets from them or her  
For comment a complacent chirr.

The lowly pen is yet a hold  
Against the dark and wind and cold  
To give a prospect to a plan  
And warrant prudence in a man.

# A DRUMLIN WOODCHUCK

One thing has a shelving bank,  
Another a rotting plank,  
To give it cozier skies  
And make up for its lack of size.

My own strategic retreat  
Is where two rocks almost meet,  
And still more secure and snug,  
A two-door burrow I dug.

With those in mind at my back  
I can sit forth exposed to attack  
As one who shrewdly pretends  
That he and the world are friends.

All we who prefer to live  
Have a little whistle we give,  
And flash, at the least alarm  
We dive down under the farm.

We allow some time for guile  
And don't come out for a while  
Either to eat or drink.  
We take occasion to think.

And if after the hunt goes past  
And the double-barrelled blast  
(Like war and pestilence  
And the loss of common sense),

If I can with confidence say  
That still for another day,  
Or even another year,  
I will be there for you, my dear,

It will be because, though small  
As measured against the All,  
I have been so instinctively thorough  
About my crevice and burrow.

# THE GOLD HESPERIDEE

Square Matthew Hale's young grafted appletree  
Began to blossom at the age of five;  
And after having entertained the bee,  
And cast its flowers and all the stems but three,  
It set itself to keep those three alive;  
And downy wax the three began to thrive.

They had just given themselves a little twist  
And turned from looking up and being kissed  
To looking down and yet not being sad,  
When came Square Hale with Let's see what we had;  
And two was all he counted (one he missed);  
But two for a beginning wasn't bad.

His little Matthew, also five years old,  
Was led into the presence of the tree  
And raised among the leaves and duly told,  
We mustn't touch them yet, but see and see!  
And what was green would by and by be gold.  
Their name was called the Gold Hesperidee.

As regularly as he went to feed the pig  
Or milk the cow, he visited the fruit,  
The dew of night and morning on his boot.  
Dearer to him than any barnyard brute,  
Each swung in danger on its slender twig,  
A bubble on a pipe-stem growing big.

Long since they swung as three instead of two—  
One more, he thought, to take him safely through.  
Three made it certain nothing Fate could do  
With codlin moth or rusty parasite  
Would keep him now from proving with a bite  
That the name Gold Hesperidee was right.

And so he brought them to the verge of frost.  
But one day when the foliage all went swish  
With autumn and the fruit was rudely tossed,  
He thought no special goodness could be lost  
If he fulfilled at last his summer wish,  
And saw them picked unbruised and in a dish,

Where they could ripen safely to the eating.  
But when he came to look, no apples there  
Under, or on the tree, or anywhere,  
And the light-natured tree seemed not to care!  
'Twas Sunday and Square Hale was dressed for meeting.  
The final summons into church was beating.

Just as he was without an uttered sound  
At those who'd done him such a wrong as that,  
Square Matthew Hale took off his Sunday hat  
And ceremoniously laid it on the ground,  
And leaping on it with a solemn bound,  
Danced slowly on it till he trod it flat.

Then suddenly he saw the thing he did,  
And looked around to see if he was seen.  
This was the sin that Ahaz was forbid  
(The meaning of the passage had been hid):  
To look upon the tree when it was green  
And worship apples. What else could it mean?

God saw him dancing in the orchard path,  
But mercifully kept the passing crowd  
From witnessing the fault of one so proud.  
And so the story wasn't told in Gath;  
In gratitude for which Square Matthew vowed  
To walk a graver man restrained in wrath.

# IN TIME OF CLOUDBURST

Let the downpour roil and toil!  
The worst it can do to me  
Is carry some garden soil  
A little nearer the sea.

'Tis the world-old way of the rain  
When it comes to a mountain farm  
To exact for a present gain  
A little of future harm.

And the harm is none too sure,  
For when all that was rotted rich  
Shall be in the end scoured poor,  
When my garden has gone down ditch,

Some force has but to apply,  
And summits shall be immersed,  
The bottom of seas raised dry—  
The slope of the earth reversed.

Then all I need do is run  
To the other end of the slope,  
And on tracts laid new to the sun,  
Begin all over to hope.

Some worn old tool of my own  
Will be turned up by the plow,  
The wood of it changed to stone,  
But as ready to wield as now.

May my application so close  
To so endless a repetition  
Not make me tired and morose  
And resentful of man's condition.

# A ROADSIDE STAND

The little old house was out with a little new shed  
In front at the edge of the road where the traffic sped,  
A roadside stand that too pathetically plead,  
It would not be fair to say for a dole of bread,  
But for some of the money, the cash, whose flow supports  
The flower of cities from sinking and withering faint.  
The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,  
Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts  
At having the landscape marred with the artless paint  
Of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned wrong  
Offered for sale wild berries in wooden quarts,  
Or crook-necked golden squash with silver warts,  
Or beauty rest in a beautiful mountain scene.  
You have the money, but if you want to be mean,  
Why keep your money (this crossly), and go along.  
The hurt to the scenery wouldn't be my complaint  
So much as the trusting sorrow of what is unsaid:  
Here far from the city we make our roadside stand  
And ask for some city money to feel in hand  
To try if it will not make our being expand,  
And give us the life of the moving pictures' promise  
That the party in power is said to be keeping from us.

It is in the news that all these pitiful kin  
Are to be bought out and mercifully gathered in  
To live in villages next to the theatre and store  
Where they won't have to think for themselves any more;  
While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,  
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits  
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,  
And by teaching them how to sleep the sleep all day,  
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way.

Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear  
The thought of so much childish longing in vain,

The sadness that lurks near the open window there,  
That waits all day in almost open prayer  
For the squeal of brakes, the sound of a stopping car,  
Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass,  
Just one to inquire what a farmer's prices are.  
And one did stop, but only to plow up grass  
In using the yard to back and turn around;  
And another to ask the way to where it was bound;  
And another to ask could they sell it a gallon of gas  
They couldn't (this crossly): they had none, didn't it see?

No, in country money, the country scale of gain,  
The requisite lift of spirit has never been found,  
Or so the voice of the country seems to complain.  
I can't help owning the great relief it would be  
To put these people at one stroke out of their pain.  
And then next day as I come back into the sane,  
I wonder how I should like you to come to me  
And offer to put me gently out of my pain.

# DEPARTMENTAL

An ant on the table cloth  
Ran into a dormant moth  
Of many times his size.  
He showed not the least surprise.  
His business wasn't with such.  
He gave it scarcely a touch,  
And was off on his duty run.  
Yet if he encountered one  
Of the hive's enquiry squad  
Whose work is to find out God  
And the nature of time and space,  
He would put him onto the case.  
Ants are a curious race;  
One crossing with hurried tread  
The body of one of their dead  
Isn't given a moment's arrest—  
Seems not even impressed.  
But he no doubt reports to any  
With whom he crosses antennae,  
And they no doubt report  
To the higher up at court.  
Then word goes forth in Formic:  
"Death's come to Jerry McCormic,  
Our selfless forager Jerry.  
Will the special Janizary  
Whose office it is to bury  
The dead of the commissary  
Go bring him home to his people.  
Lay him in state on a sepal.  
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.  
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.  
This is the word of your Queen."  
And presently on the scene  
Appears a solemn mortician;  
And taking formal position

With feelers calmly atwiddle,  
Seizes the dead by the middle,  
And heaving him high in air,  
Carries him out of there.  
No one stands round to stare.  
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.  
But how thoroughly departmental.

# THE OLD BARN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE FOGS

Where's this barn's house? It never had a house,  
Or joined with sheds in ring-around a dooryard.  
The hunter scuffling leaves goes by at dusk,  
The gun reversed that he went out with shouldered.  
The harvest moon and then the hunter's moon.  
Well, the moon after that came one at last  
To close this outpost barn and close the season.  
The fur-thing, muff-thing, rocking in and out  
Across the threshold in the twilight fled him.  
He took the props down used for propping open,  
And set them up again for propping shut,  
The wide-spread double doors two stories high.  
The advantage-disadvantage of these doors  
Was that tramp taking sanctuary there  
Must leave them unlocked to betray his presence.  
They could be locked but from the outside only.  
There is a fellow on the ocean now  
Or down a mine or at the mill (I met him)  
Who slept there in a mow of meadow hay  
One night (he told me). And the barn he meant  
Was the one I meant. Our details agreed.  
We said Well twice to what we had in common,  
The old barn at the bottom of the fogs.  
Its only windows were the crevices  
All up and down it. So that waking there  
Next morning to the light of day was more  
Like waking in a cage of silver bars.  
Its locks were props—and that reminded him.  
Trust him to have his bitter politics  
Against his unacquaintances the rich  
Who sleep in houses of their own, though mortgaged.  
Conservatives, they don't know what to save.  
Consider what they treasure under glass,  
Yet leave such lovely shafts outdoors to perish.  
Would someone only act in time we vet

Might see them on a rack like famous oars,  
Their label Prop-locks, only specimens  
In chestnut now become a precious wood  
As relic of a vanished race of trees—  
When these go there will be none to replace them.  
Yes, right I was the locks were props outside;  
And it had almost given him troubled dreams  
To think that though he could not lock himself in,  
The cheapest tramp that came along that way  
Could mischievously lock him in to stay.

# ON THE HEART'S BEGINNING TO CLOUD THE MIND

Something I saw or thought I saw  
In the desert at midnight in Utah,  
Looking out of my lower berth  
At moonlit sky and moonlit earth.  
The sky had here and there a star;  
The earth had a single light afar,  
A flickering, human pathetic light,  
That was maintained against the night,  
It seemed to me, by the people there,  
With a God-forsaken brute despair.  
It would flutter and fall in half an hour  
Like the last petal off a flower.  
But my heart was beginning to cloud my mind.  
I knew a tale of a better kind.  
That far light flickers because of trees.  
The people can burn it as long as they please:  
And when their interests in it end,  
They can leave it to someone else to tend.  
Come back that way a summer hence,  
I should find it no more no less intense.  
I pass, but scarcely pass no doubt,  
When one will say "Let us put it out."  
The other without demur agrees.  
They can keep it burning as long as they please;  
They can put it out whenever they please.  
One looks out last from the darkened room  
At the shiny desert with spots of gloom  
That might be people and are but cedar,  
Have no purpose, have no leader,  
Have never made the first move to assemble,  
And so are nothing to make her tremble.  
She can think of places that are not thus  
Without indulging a "Not for us!"

*Life is not an sinister game*

LIE IS NOT SO SINISTER-grave.  
Matter of fact has made them brave.  
He is husband, she is wife.  
She fears not him, they fear not life.  
They know where another light has been,  
And more than one to theirs akin,  
But earlier out for bed tonight,  
So lost on me in my surface flight.

This I saw when waking late,  
Going by at a railroad rate,  
Looking through wreaths of engine smoke  
Far into the lives of other folk.

# THE FIGURE IN THE DOORWAY

The grade surmounted, we were riding high  
Through level mountains nothing to the eye  
But scrub oak, scrub oak and the lack of earth  
That kept the oaks from getting any girth.  
But as through the monotony we ran,  
We came to where there was a living man.  
His great gaunt figure filled his cabin door,  
And had he fallen inward on the floor,  
He must have measured to the further wall.  
But we who passed were not to see him fall.  
The miles and miles he lived from anywhere  
Were evidently something he could bear.  
He stood unshaken, and if grim and gaunt,  
It was not necessarily from want.  
He had the oaks for heating and for light.  
He had a hen, he had a pig in sight.  
He had a well, he had the rain to catch.  
He had a ten by twenty garden patch.  
Nor did he lack for common entertainment.  
That I assume was what our passing train meant.  
He could look at us in our diner eating,  
And if so moved uncurl a hand in greeting.

# AT WOODWARD'S GARDENS

A boy, presuming on his intellect,  
Once showed two little monkeys in a cage  
A burning-glass they could not understand  
And never could be made to understand.  
Words are no good: to say it was a lens  
For gathering solar rays would not have helped.  
But let him show them how the weapon worked.  
He made the sun a pin-point on the nose  
Of first one then the other till it brought  
A look of puzzled dimness to their eyes  
That blinking could not seem to blink away.  
They stood arms laced together at the bars,  
And exchanged troubled glances over life.  
One put a thoughtful hand up to his nose  
As if reminded—or as if perhaps  
Within a million years of an idea.  
He got his purple little knuckles stung.  
The already known had once more been confirmed  
By psychological experiment,  
And that were all the finding to announce  
Had the boy not presumed too close and long.  
There was a sudden flash of arm, a snatch,  
And the glass was the monkeys' not the boy's.  
Precipitately they retired back cage  
And instituted an investigation  
On their part, though without the needed insight.  
They bit the glass and listened for the flavor.  
They broke the handle and the binding off it.  
Then none the wiser, frankly gave it up,  
And having hid it in their bedding straw  
Against the day of prisoners' ennui,  
Came dryly forward to the bars again  
To answer for themselves: Who said it mattered  
What monkeys did or didn't understand?  
They might not understand a burning-glass.  
They might not understand the sun itself.  
It's knowing what to do with things that counts.



# A RECORD STRIDE

In a Vermont bedroom closet  
With a door of two broad boards  
And for back wall a crumbling old chimney  
(And that's what their toes are towards),

I have a pair of shoes standing,  
Old rivals of sagging leather,  
Who once kept surpassing each other,  
But now live even together.

They listen for me in the bedroom  
To ask me a thing or two  
About who is too old to go walking,  
With too much stress on the who.

I wet one last year at Montauk  
For a hat I had to save.  
The other I wet at the Cliff House  
In an extra-vagant wave.

Two entirely different grandchildren  
Got me into my double adventure.  
But when they grow up and can read this  
I hope they won't take it for censure.

I touch my tongue to the shoes now  
And unless my sense is at fault,  
On one I can taste Atlantic,  
On the other Pacific, salt.

One foot in each great ocean  
Is a record stride or stretch.  
The authentic shoes it was made in  
I should sell for what they would fetch.

But instead I proudly devote them  
To my museum and muse;  
So the thick-skins needn't act thin-skinned  
About being past-active shoes.

And I ask all to try to forgive me  
For being as over-elated  
As if I had measured the country  
And got the United States stated.

TAKEN SINGLY

# LOST IN HEAVEN

The clouds, the source of rain, one stormy night  
Offered an opening to the source of dew;  
Which I accepted with impatient sight,  
Looking for my old skymarks in the blue.

But stars were scarce in that part of the sky,  
And no two were of the same constellation—  
No one was bright enough to identify;  
So 'twas with not ungrateful consternation,

Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed,  
“Where, where in Heaven am I? But don't tell me!”  
I warned the clouds, “by opening on me wide.  
Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me.”

# DESERT PLACES

Snow falling and night falling fast oh fast  
In a field I looked into going past,  
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,  
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.  
All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
I am too absent-spirited to count;  
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less—  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

# LEAVES COMPARED WITH FLOWERS

A tree's leaves may be ever so good,  
So may its bark, so may its wood;  
But unless you put the right thing to its root  
It never will show much flower or fruit.

But I may be one who does not care  
Ever to have tree bloom or bear.  
Leaves for smooth and bark for rough,  
Leaves and bark may be tree enough.

Some giant trees have bloom so small  
They might as well have none at all.  
Late in life I have come on fern.  
Now lichens are due to have their turn.

I bade men tell me which in brief,  
Which is fairer, flower or leaf.  
They did not have the wit to say,  
Leaves by night and flowers by day.

Leaves and bark, leaves and bark,  
To lean against and hear in the dark.  
Petals I may have once pursued.  
Leaves are all my darker mood.

## A LEAF TREADER

I have been treading on leaves all day until I am autumn-tired.  
God knows all the color and form of leaves I have trodden on and mired.  
Perhaps I have put forth too much strength and been too fierce from fear.  
I have safely trodden underfoot the leaves of another year.

All summer long they were over head, more lifted up than I.  
To come to their final place in earth they had to pass me by.  
All summer long I thought I heard them threatening under their breath.  
And when they came it seemed with a will to carry me with them to death.

They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as if it were leaf to leaf.  
They tapped at my eyelids and touched my lips with an invitation to grief.  
But it was no reason I had to go because they had to go.  
Now up my knee to keep on top of another year of snow.

# ON TAKING FROM THE TOP TO BROADEN THE BASE

Roll stones down on our head!  
You squat old pyramid,  
Your last good avalanche  
Was long since slid.

Your top has sunk too low,  
Your base has spread too wide,  
For you to roll one stone  
Down if you tried.

But even at the word  
A pebble hit the roof,  
Another shot through glass  
Demanding proof.

Before their panic hands  
Were fighting for the latch,  
The mud came in one cold  
Unleavened batch.

And none was left to prate  
Of an old mountain's case  
That still took from its top  
To broaden its base.

# THEY WERE WELCOME TO THEIR BELIEF

Grief may have thought it was grief  
Care may have thought it was care.  
They were welcome to their belief,  
The over important pair.

No, it took all the snows that clung  
To the low roof over his bed,  
Beginning when he was young,  
To induce the one snow on his head.

But whenever the roof came white  
The head in the dark below  
Was a shade less the color of night  
A shade more the color of snow.

Grief may have thought it was grief  
Care may have thought it was care.  
But neither one was the thief  
Of his raven color of hair.

# THE STRONG ARE SAYING NOTHING

The soil now gets a rumpling soft and damp,  
And small regard to the future of any weed.  
The final flat of the hoe's approval stamp  
Is reserved for the bed of a few selected seed.

There is seldom more than a man to a harrowed piece.  
Men work alone, their lots plowed far apart,  
One stringing a chain of seed in an open crease,  
And another stumbling after a halting cart.

To the fresh and black of the squares of early mould  
The leafless bloom of a plum is fresh and white;  
Though there's more than a doubt if the weather is not too cold  
For the bees to come and serve its beauty aright.

Wind goes from farm to farm in wave on wave,  
But carries no cry of what is hoped to be.  
There may be little or much beyond the grave,  
But the strong are saying nothing until they see.

# THE MASTER SPEED

No speed of wind or water rushing by  
But you have speed far greater. You can climb  
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,  
And back through history up the stream of time.  
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste,  
Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,  
But in the rush of everything to waste,  
That you may have the power of standing still—  
Off any still or moving thing you say.  
Two such as you with such a master speed  
Cannot be parted nor be swept away  
From one another once you are agreed  
That life is only life forevermore  
Together wing to wing and oar to oar.

# MOON COMPASSES

I stole forth dimly in the dripping pause  
Between two downpours to see what there was.  
And a masked moon had spread down compass rays  
To a cone mountain in the midnight haze,  
As if the final estimate were hers,  
And as it measured in her calipers,  
The mountain stood exalted in its place.  
So love will take between the hands a face . . .

# NEITHER OUT FAR NOR IN DEEP

The people along the sand  
All turn and look one way.  
They turn their back on the land.  
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass  
A ship keeps raising its hull;  
The wetter ground like glass  
Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;  
But wherever the truth may be—  
The water comes ashore,  
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.  
They cannot look in deep.  
But when was that ever a bar  
To any watch they keep?

# VOICE WAYS

Some things are never clear.  
But the weather is clear tonight,  
Thanks to a clearing rain.  
The mountains are brought up near,  
The stars are brought out bright.  
Your old sweet-cynical strain  
Would come in like you here:  
“So we won’t say nothing is clear.”

## DESIGN

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—  
Assorted characters of death and blight  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?  
What brought the kindred spider to that height,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?  
What but design of darkness to appall?—  
If design govern in a thing so small.

## ON A BIRD SINGING IN ITS SLEEP

A bird half wakened in the lunar noon  
Sang half way through its little inborn tune.  
Partly because it sang but once all night  
And that from no especial bush's height;  
Partly because it sang ventriloquist  
And had the inspiration to desist  
Almost before the prick of hostile ears,  
It ventured less in peril than appears.  
It could not have come down to us so far  
Through the interstices of things ajar  
On the long bead chain of repeated birth  
To be a bird while we are men on earth  
If singing out of sleep and dream that way  
Had made it much more easily a prey.

# AFTER-FLAKES

In the thick of a teeming snowfall  
I saw my shadow on snow.  
I turned and looked back up at the sky,  
Where we still look to ask the why  
Of everything below.

If I shed such a darkness,  
If the reason was in me,  
That shadow of mine should show in form  
Against the shapeless shadow of storm,  
How swarthy I must be.

I turned and looked back upward.  
The whole sky was blue;  
And the thick flakes floating at a pause  
Were but frost knots on an airy gauze,  
With the sun shining through.

# CLEAR AND COLDER

Wind the season-climate mixer  
In my Witches' Weather Primer  
Says to make this Fall Elixir  
First you let the summer simmer,  
Using neither spoon nor skimmer,

Till about the right consistence.  
(This like fate by stars is reckoned,  
None remaining in existence  
Under magnitude the second);

Then take some left-over winter  
Far to north of the St. Lawrence.  
Leaves to strip and branches splinter,  
Bring on wind. Bring rain in torrents—  
Colder than the season warrants.

Dash it with some snow for powder.  
If this seems like witchcraft rather,  
If this seems a witches' chowder  
(All my eye and Cotton Mather!),

Wait and watch the liquor settle.  
I could stand whole dayfuls of it.  
Wind she brews a heady kettle.  
Human beings love it—love it.  
Gods above are not above it.

# UNHARVESTED

A scent of ripeness from over a wall.  
And come to leave the routine road  
And look for what had made me stall,  
There sure enough was an appletree  
That had eased itself of its summer load,  
And of all but its trivial foliage free,  
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan.  
For there there had been an apple fall  
As complete as the apple had given man.  
The ground was one circle of solid red.

May something go always unharvested!  
May much stay out of our stated plan,  
Apples or something forgotten and left,  
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

# THERE ARE ROUGHLY ZONES

We sit indoors and talk of the cold outside.  
And every gust that gathers strength and heaves  
Is a threat to the house. But the house has long been tried.  
We think of the tree. If it never again has leaves,  
We'll know, we say, that this was the night it died.  
It is very far north, we admit, to have brought the peach.  
What comes over a man, is it soul or mind—  
That to no limits and bounds he can stay confined?  
You would say his ambition was to extend the reach  
Clear to the Arctic of every living kind.  
Why is his nature forever so hard to teach  
That though there is no fixed line between wrong and right,  
There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed.  
There is nothing much we can do for the tree tonight,  
But we can't help feeling more than a little betrayed  
That the northwest wind should rise to such a height  
Just when the cold went down so many below.  
The tree has no leaves and may never have them again.  
We must wait till some months hence in the spring to know.  
But if it is destined never again to grow,  
It can blame this limitless trait in the hearts of men.

# A TRIAL RUN

I said to myself almost in prayer,  
It will start hair raising currents of air  
When you give it the livid metal-sap.  
It will make a homicidal roar.  
It will shake its cast stone reef of floor.  
It will gather speed till your nerves prepare  
To hear it wreck in a thunder-clap.  
But stand your ground  
As they say in war.  
It is cotter-pinned, it is bedded true.  
Everything its parts can do  
Has been thought out and accounted for.  
Your least touch sets it going round,  
And when to stop it rests with you.

# NOT QUITE SOCIAL

Some of you will be glad I did what I did,  
And the rest won't want to punish me too severely  
For finding a thing to do that though not forbid  
Yet wasn't enjoined and wasn't expected clearly.

To punish me over cruelly wouldn't be right  
For merely giving you once more gentle proof  
That the city's hold on a man is no more tight  
Than when its walls rose higher than any roof.

You may taunt me with not being able to flee the earth.  
You have me there, but loosely as I would be held.  
The way of understanding is partly mirth.  
I would not be taken as ever having rebelled.

And anyone is free to condemn me to death—  
If he leaves it to nature to carry out the sentence.  
I shall will to the common stock of air my breath  
And pay a death-tax of fairly polite repentance.

# PROVIDE PROVIDE

The witch that came (the withered hag)  
To wash the steps with pail and rag,  
Was once the beauty Abishag,

The picture pride of Hollywood.  
Too many fall from great and good  
For you to doubt the likelihood.

Die early and avoid the fate.  
Or if predestined to die late,  
Make up your mind to die in state.

Make the whole stock exchange your own!  
If need be occupy a throne,  
Where nobody can call *you* crone.

Some have relied on what they knew;  
Others on being simply true.  
What worked for them might work for you.

No memory of having starred  
Atones for later disregard,  
Or keeps the end from being hard.

Better to go down dignified  
With boughten friendship at your side  
Than none at all. Provide, provide!

# TEN MILLS

# TEN MILLS

## Precaution

I never dared be radical when young  
For fear it would make me conservative when old.

## The Span of Life

The old dog barks backward without getting up.  
I can remember when he was a pup.

## The Wrights' Biplane

This biplane is the shape of human flight.  
Its name might better be First Motor Kite.  
Its makers' name—Time cannot get that wrong,  
For it was writ in heaven doubly Wright.

## Assertive

Let me be the one  
To do what is done.

## Evil Tendencies Cancel

Will the blight end the chestnut?  
The farmers rather guess not.  
It keeps smouldering at the roots  
And sending up new shoots  
Till another parasite  
Shall come to end the blight.

## Pertinax

Let chaos storm!  
Let cloud shapes swarm!  
I wait for form.

### Waspish

On glossy wires artistically bent,  
He draws himself up to his full extent.  
His natty wings with self-assurance perk.  
His stinging quarters menacingly work.  
Poor egotist, he has no way of knowing  
But he's as good as anybody going.

### One Guess

He has dust in his eyes and a fan for a wing,  
A leg akimbo with which he can sing,  
And a mouthful of dye stuff instead of a sting.

### The Hardship of Accounting

Never ask of money spent  
Where the spender thinks it went.  
Nobody was ever meant  
To remember or invent  
What he did with every cent.

### Not All There

I turned to speak to God  
About the world's despair;  
But to make bad matters worse  
I found God wasn't there.

God turned to speak to me  
(Don't anybody laugh)  
God found I wasn't there—  
At least not over half.

### In Div'es' Dive

It is late at night and still I am losing,  
But still I am steady and unaccusing.

As long as the Declaration guards  
My right to be equal in number of cards,

It is nothing to me who runs the Dive.  
Let's have a look at another five.

# THE OUTLANDS

# THE VINDICTIVES

You like to hear about gold.  
A king filled his prison room  
As full as the room could hold  
To the top of his reach on the wall  
With every known shape of the stuff.  
'Twas to buy himself off his doom.  
But it wasn't ransom enough.  
His captors accepted it all,  
But didn't let go of the king.  
They made him send out a call  
To his subjects to gather them more.  
And his subjects wrung all they could wring  
Out of temple and palace and store.  
But when there seemed no more to bring,  
His captors convicted the king  
Of once having started a war,  
And strangled the wretch with a string.

But really that gold was not half  
That a king might have hoped to compel—  
Not a half, not a third, not a tithe.  
The king had scarce ceased to writhe,  
When hate gave a terrible laugh,  
Like a manhole opened to Hell.  
If gold pleased the conqueror, well,  
That gold should be the one thing  
The conqueror henceforth should lack.  
They gave no more thought to the king.  
All joined in the game of hide-gold.  
They swore all the gold should go back  
Deep into the earth whence it came.  
Their minds ran on cranny and crack.  
All joined in the maddening game.  
The tale is still boastingly told  
Of many a treasure by name

That vanished into the black  
And put out its light for the foe.

That self-sack and self-overthrow,  
That was the splendidest sack  
Since the forest Germans sacked Rome  
And took the gold candlesticks home.

One Inca prince on the rack,  
And late in his last hour alive,  
Told them in what lake to dive  
To seek what they seemed so to want.  
They dived and nothing was found.  
He told them to dive till they drowned.  
The whole fierce conquering pack  
Hunted and tortured and raged.  
There were suns of story and vaunt  
They searched for into Brazil  
Their tongues hanging out unassuaged.

But the conquered grew meek and still.  
They slowly and silently aged.  
They kept their secrets and died,  
Maliciously satisfied.  
One knew of a burial hole  
In the floor of a tribal cave,  
Where under deep ash and charcoal  
And cracked bones, human and beast,  
The midden of feast upon feast,  
Was coiled in its last resting grave  
The great treasure wanted the most,  
The great thousand-linked gold chain,  
Each link of a hundred weight,  
That once between post and post  
(In-leaning under the strain),  
And looped ten times back and forth,  
Had served as a palace gate.

Some said it had gone to the coast,  
Some over the mountains east,  
Some into the country north,  
On the backs of a single-file host,  
Commanded by one sun-priest,  
And raising a dust with a train  
Of flashing links in the sun.  
No matter what some may say.  
(The saying is never done.)  
There bright in the filth it lay  
Untarnished by rust and decay.  
And be all plunderers curst.

“The best way to hate is the worst.  
'Tis to find what the hated need,  
Never mind of what actual worth,  
And wipe that out of the earth.  
Let them die of unsatisfied greed,  
Of unsatisfied love of display,  
Of unsatisfied love of the high,  
Unvulgar, unsoiled, and ideal.  
Let their trappings be taken away.  
Let them suffer starvation and die  
Of being brought down to the real.”

# THE BEARER OF EVIL TIDINGS

The bearer of evil tidings,  
When he was halfway there,  
Remembered that evil tidings  
Were a dangerous thing to bear.

So when he came to the parting  
Where one road led to the throne  
And one went off to the mountains  
And into the wild unknown,

He took the one to the mountains.  
He ran through the Vale of Cashmere,  
He ran through rhododendrons  
Till he came to the land of Pamir.

And there in a precipice valley  
A girl of his age he met  
Took him home to her bower,  
Or he might be running yet.

She taught him her tribe's religion:  
How ages and ages since  
A princess en route from China  
To marry a Persian prince

Had been found with child; and her army  
Had come to a troubled halt.  
And though a god was the father  
And nobody else at fault,

It had seemed discreet to remain there  
And neither go on nor back.  
So they stayed and declared a village  
There in the land of the Yak.

And the child that came of the princess  
Established a royal line,  
And his mandates were given heed to  
Because he was born divine.

And that was why there were people  
On one Himalayan shelf,  
And the bearer of evil tidings  
Decided to stay there himself.

At least he had this in common  
With the race he chose to adopt:  
They had both of them had their reasons  
For stopping where they had stopped.

As for his evil tidings,  
Belshazzar's overthrow,  
Why hurry to tell Belshazzar  
What soon enough he would know?

# IRIS BY NIGHT

One misty evening, one another's guide,  
We two were groping down a Malvern side  
The last wet fields and dripping hedges home.  
There came a moment of confusing lights,  
Such as according to belief in Rome  
Were seen of old at Memphis on the heights  
Before the fragments of a former sun  
Could concentrate anew and rise as one.  
Light was a paste of pigment in our eyes.  
And then there was a moon and then a scene  
So watery as to seem submarine;  
In which we two stood saturated, drowned.  
The clover-mingled rowan on the ground  
Had taken all the water it could as dew,  
And still the air was saturated too,  
Its airy pressure turned to water weight.  
Then a small rainbow like a trellis gate,  
A very small moon-made prismatic bow,  
Stood closely over us through which to go.  
And then we were vouchsafed the miracle  
That never yet to other two befell  
And I alone of us have lived to tell.  
A wonder! Bow and rainbow as it bent,  
Instead of moving with us as we went,  
(To keep the pots of gold from being found)  
It lifted from its dewy pediment  
Its two mote-swimming many-colored ends,  
And gathered them together in a ring.  
And we stood in it softly circled round  
From all division time or foe can bring  
In a relation of elected friends.

# BUILD SOIL

# BUILD SOIL—A POLITICAL PASTORAL

Why Tityrus! But you've forgotten me.  
I'm Meliboeus the potato man,  
The one you had the talk with, you remember,  
Here on this very campus years ago.  
Hard times have struck me and I'm on the move.  
I've had to give my interval farm up  
For interest, and I've bought a mountain farm  
For nothing down, all-out-doors of a place,  
All woods and pasture only fit for sheep.  
But sheep is what I'm going into next.  
I'm done forever with potato crops  
At thirty cents a bushel. Give me sheep.  
I know wool's down to seven cents a pound.  
But I don't calculate to sell my wool.  
I didn't my potatoes. I consumed them.  
I'll dress up in sheep's clothing and eat sheep.  
The Muse takes care of you. You live by writing  
Your poems on a farm and call that farming.  
Oh I don't blame you. I say take life easy.  
I should myself, only I don't know how.  
But have some pity on us who have to work.  
Why don't you use your talents as a writer  
To advertise our farms to city buyers,  
Or else write something to improve food prices.  
Get in a poem toward the next election.

Oh Meliboeus, I have half a mind  
To take a writing hand in politics.  
Before now poetry has taken notice  
Of wars, and what are wars but politics  
Transformed from chronic to acute and bloody?

I may be wrong, but Tityrus to me  
The times seem revolutionary bad.

The question is whether they've reached a depth  
Of desperation that would warrant poetry's  
Leaving love's alternations, joy and grief,  
The weather's alternations, summer and winter,  
Our age-long theme, for the uncertainty  
Of judging who is a contemporary liar—  
Who in particular, when all alike  
Get called as much in clashes of ambition.  
Life may be tragically bad, and I  
Make bold to sing it so, but do I dare  
Name names and tell you who by name is wicked?  
Whittier's luck with Skipper Ireson awes me.  
Many men's luck with Greatest Washington  
(Who sat for Stuart's portrait, but who sat  
Equally for the nation's Constitution).  
I prefer to sing safely in the realm  
Of types, composite and imagined people:  
To affirm there is such a thing as evil  
Personified, but ask to be excused  
From saying on a jury "Here's the guilty."

I doubt if you're convinced the times are bad.  
I keep my eye on Congress, Meliboeus.  
They're in the best position of us all  
To know if anything is very wrong.  
I mean they could be trusted to give the alarm  
If earth were thought about to change its axis,  
Or a star coming to dilate the sun.  
As long as lightly all their live-long sessions,  
Like a yard full of school boys out at recess  
Before their plays and games were organized,  
They yelling mix tag, hide-and-seek, hop-scotch,  
And leap frog in each other's way,—all's well.  
Let newspapers profess to fear the worst!  
Nothing's portentous, I am reassured.

Is socialism needed, do you think?

We have it now. For socialism is  
An element in any government.  
There's no such thing as socialism pure—  
Except as an abstraction of the mind.  
There's only democratic socialism  
Monarchic socialism—oligarchic,  
The last being what they seem to have in Russia.  
You often get it most in monarchy,  
Least in democracy. In practice, pure,  
I don't know what it would be. No one knows.  
I have no doubt like all the loves when  
Philosophized together into one—  
One sickness of the body and the soul.  
Thank God our practice holds the loves apart  
Beyond embarrassing self-consciousness  
Where natural friends are met, where dogs are kept,  
Where women pray with priests. There is no love.  
There's only love of men and women, love  
Of children, love of friends, of men, of God,  
Divine love, human love, parental love,  
Roughly discriminated for the rough.

Poetry, itself once more, is back in love.

Pardon the analogy, my Meliboeus,  
For sweeping me away. Let's see, where was I?

But don't you think more should be socialized  
Than is?

What should you mean by socialized?

Made good for everyone—things like inventions—  
Made so we all should get the good of them—  
All, not just great exploiting businesses.

We sometimes only get the bad of them.  
In your sense of the word ambition has  
Been socialized—the first propensity  
To be attempted. Greed may well come next.  
But the worst one of all to leave uncurbed,  
Unsocialized, is ingenuity:  
Which for no sordid self-aggrandizement,  
For nothing but its own blind satisfaction  
(In this it is as much like hate as love)  
Works in the dark as much against as for us.  
Even while we talk some chemist at Columbia  
Is stealthily contriving wool from jute  
That when let loose upon the grazing world  
Will put ten thousand farmers out of sheep.  
Everyone asks for freedom for himself,  
The man free love, the business man free trade,  
The writer and talker free speech and free press.  
Political ambition has been taught,  
By being punished back, it is not free:  
It must at some point gracefully refrain.  
Greed has been taught a little abnegation  
And shall be more before we're done with it.  
It is just fool enough to think itself  
Self-taught. But our brute snarling and lashing taught it.  
None shall be as ambitious as he can.  
None should be as ingenious as he could,  
Not if I had my say. Bounds should be set  
To ingenuity for being so cruel  
In bringing change unheralded on the unready.

I elect you to put the curb on it.

Were I dictator, I'll tell you what I'd do.

What should you do?

I'd let things take their course

And then I'd claim the credit for the outcome.

You'd make a sort of safety-first dictator.

Don't let the things I say against myself  
Betray you into taking sides against me,  
Or it might get you into trouble with me.  
I'm not afraid to prophesy the future,  
And be judged by the outcome, Meliboeus.  
Listen and I will take my dearest risk.  
We're always too much out or too much in.  
At present from a cosmical dilation  
We're so much out that the odds are against  
Our ever getting inside in again.  
But inside in is where we've got to get.  
My friends all know I'm interpersonal.  
But long before I'm interpersonal  
Away 'way down inside I'm personal.  
Just so before we're international  
We're national and act as nationals.  
The colors are kept unmixed on the palette,  
Or better on dish plates all around the room,  
So the effect when they are mixed on canvas  
May seem almost exclusively designed.  
Some minds are so confounded intermental  
They remind me of pictures on a palette  
"Look at what happened. Surely some God pinxit.  
Come look at my significant mud pie."  
It's hard to tell which is the worse abhorrence  
Whether it's persons pied or nations pied.  
Don't let me seem to say the exchange, the encounter,  
May not be the important thing at last.  
It well may be. We meet—I don't say when—  
But must bring to the meeting the maturest,  
The longest-saved-up, raciest, localest  
We have strength of reserve in us to bring.

Tityrus, sometimes I'm perplexed myself  
To find the good of commerce. Why should I  
Have to sell you my apples and buy yours?  
It can't be just to give the robber a chance  
To catch them and take toll of them in transit.  
Too mean a thought to get much comfort out of.  
I figure that like any bandying  
Of words or toys, it ministers to health.  
It very likely quickens and refines us.

To market 'tis our destiny to go.  
But much as in the end we bring for sale there  
There is still more we never bring or should bring;  
More that should be kept back—the soil for instance  
In my opinion,—though we both know poets  
Who fall all over each other to bring soil  
And even subsoil and hardpan to market.  
To sell the hay off, let alone the soil,  
Is an unpardonable sin in farming.  
The moral is, make a late start to market.  
Let me preach to you, will you Meliboeus?

Preach on. I thought you were already preaching.  
But preach and see if I can tell the difference.

Needless to say to you, my argument  
Is not to lure the city to the country.  
Let those possess the land and only those,  
Who love it with a love so strong and stupid  
That they may be abused and taken advantage of  
And made fun of by business, law and art;  
They still hang on. That so much of the earth's  
Unoccupied need not make us uneasy.  
We don't pretend to complete occupancy.  
The world's one globe, human society  
Another softer globe that slightly flattened  
Rests on the world, and clinging slowly rolls.

We have our own round shape to keep unbroken.  
The world's size has no more to do with us  
Than has the universe's. We are balls,  
We are round from the same source of roundness.  
We are both round because the mind is round,  
Because all reasoning is in a circle.  
At least that's why the universe is round.

If what you're preaching is a line of conduct,  
Just what am I supposed to do about it?  
Reason in circles?

No, refuse to be  
Seduced back to the land by any claim  
The land may seem to have on man to use it.  
Let none assume to till the land but farmers.  
I only speak to you as one of them.  
You shall go to your run-out mountain farm,  
Poor cast-away of commerce, and so live  
That none shall ever see you come to market—  
Not for a long long time. Plant, breed, produce,  
But what you raise or grow, why feed it out,  
Eat it or plow it under where it stands  
To build the soil. For what is more accursed  
Than an impoverished soil pale and metallic?  
What cries more to our kind for sympathy?  
I'll make a compact with you, Meliboeus,  
To match you deed for deed and plan for plan.  
Friends crowd around me with their five year plans  
That Soviet Russia has made fashionable.  
You come to me and I'll unfold to you  
A five year plan I call so, not because  
It takes ten years or so to carry out,  
Rather because it took five years at least  
To think it out. Come close, let us conspire—  
In self-restraint, if in restraint of trade.  
You will go to your run-out mountain farm

And do what I command you. I take care

And do what I command you. I take care  
To command only what you meant to do  
Anyway. That is my style of dictator.  
Build soil. Turn the farm in upon itself  
Until it can contain itself no more,  
But sweating-full, drips wine and oil a little.  
I will go to my run-out social mind  
And be as unsocial with it as I can.  
The thought I have, and my first impulse is  
To take to market—I will turn it under.  
The thought from that thought—I will turn it under.  
And so on to the limit of my nature.  
We are too much out, and if we won't draw in  
We shall be driven in. I was brought up  
A state-rights free-trade Democrat. What's that?  
An inconsistency. The state shall be  
Laws to itself, it seems, and yet have no  
Control of what it sells or what it buys.  
Suppose someone comes near me who in rate  
Of speech and thinking is so much my better  
I am imposed on, silenced and discouraged.  
Do I submit to being supplied by him  
As the more economical producer,  
More wonderful, more beautiful producer?  
No I unostentatiously move off  
Far enough for my thought-flow to resume.  
Thought product and food product are to me  
Nothing compared to the producing of them.  
I sent you once a song with the refrain:

Let me be the one  
To do what is done—

My share at least lest I be empty-idle.  
Keep off each other and keep each other off.  
You see the beauty of my proposal is  
It needn't wait on general revolution.  
I bid you to a one-man revolution

I told you to a one-man revolution—  
The only revolution that is coming.  
We're too unseparate out among each other—  
With goods to sell and notions to impart.  
A youngster comes to me with half a quatrain  
To ask me if I think it worth the pains  
Of working out the rest, the other half.  
I am brought guaranteed young prattle poems  
Made publicly in school, above suspicion  
Of plagiarism and help of cheating parents.  
We congregate embracing from distrust  
As much as love, and too close in to strike  
And be so very striking. Steal away  
The song says. Steal away and stay away.  
Don't join too many gangs. Join few if any.  
Join the United States and join the family—  
But not much in between unless a college.  
Is it a bargain, Shepherd Meliboeus?

Probably but you're far too fast and strong  
For my mind to keep working in your presence.  
I can tell better after I get home,  
Better a month from now when cutting posts  
Or mending fence it all comes back to me  
What I was thinking when you interrupted  
My life-train logic. I agree with you  
We're too unseparate. And going home  
From company means coming to our senses.

# TO A THINKER

The last step taken found your heft  
Decidedly upon the left.  
One more would throw you on the right.  
Another still—you see your plight.  
You call this thinking, but it's walking.  
Not even that, it's only rocking,  
Or weaving like a stabled horse:  
From force to matter and back to force,  
From form to content and back to form,  
From norm to crazy and back to norm,  
From bound to free and back to bound,  
From sound to sense and back to sound.  
So back and forth. It almost scares  
A man the way things come in pairs.  
Just now you're off democracy  
(With a polite regret to be),  
And leaning on dictatorship;  
But if you will accept the tip,  
In less than no time, tongue and pen,  
You'll be a democrat again.  
A reasoner and good as such,  
Don't let it bother you too much  
If it makes you look helpless please  
And a temptation to the tease.  
Suppose you've no direction in you,  
I don't see but you must continue  
To use the gift you do possess,  
And sway with reason more or less.  
I own I never really warmed  
To the reformer or reformed,  
And yet conversion has its place  
Not half way down the scale of grace.  
So if you find you must repent  
From side to side in argument,  
At least don't use your mind too hard,  
But trust my instinct—I'm a bard.

# AFTERTHOUGHT

# A MISSIVE MISSILE

Some one in ancient Mas d'Azil  
Once took a little pebble wheel  
And dotted it with red for me,  
And sent it to me years and years—  
A million years to be precise—  
Across the barrier of ice:  
Two round dots and a ripple streak,  
So vivid as to seem to speak.  
But what imperfectly appears  
Is whether the two dots were tears,  
Two tear drops, one for either eye,  
And the wave line a shaken sigh.  
But no, the color used is red.  
Not tears but drops of blood instead.  
The line must be a jagged blade.  
The sender must have had to die,  
And wanted someone now to know  
His death was sacrificial-votive.  
So almost clear and yet obscure.  
If only anyone were sure  
A motive then was still a motive.  
O you who bring this to my hand,  
You are no common messenger  
(Your badge of office is a spade).  
It grieves me to have had you stand  
So long for nothing. No reply—  
There is no answer, I'm afraid,  
Across the icy barrier  
For my obscure petitioner.  
Suppose his ghost is standing by  
Importunate to give the hint  
And be successfully conveyed.  
How anyone can fail to see  
Where perfectly in form and tint  
The metaphor, the symbol lies!

Why will I not analogize?  
(I do too much in some men's eyes.)  
Oh slow uncomprehending me,  
Enough to make a spirit moan  
Or rustle in a bush or tree.  
I have the ochre-written flint,  
The two dots and the ripple line.  
The meaning of it is unknown,  
Or else I fear entirely mine,  
All modern, nothing ancient in't,  
Unsatisfying to us each.  
Far as we aim our signs to reach,  
Far as we often make them reach,  
Across the soul-from-soul abyss,  
There is an aeon-limit set  
Beyond which they are doomed to miss.  
Two souls may be too widely met.  
That sad-with-distance river beach  
With mortal longing may beseech;  
It cannot speak as far as this.



# TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in accents has been retained.

[The end of *A Further Range* by Robert Frost]