

# Newfoundland Verse

E. J. Pratt

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To my  
MOTHER

# Newfoundland Verse

by  
**E.J.  
Pratt**

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# NEWFOUNDLAND VERSE

## Sea Variations

### MORNING

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

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

## MASKS

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

At dawn—

A trumpeter preluding a day's pageant.

At noon—

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

Later—

A courier with sealed tidings hastening towards the  
shore.

At sunset—

A dyer steeping colors on a bay.

Again—

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

Or carving bric-a-brac upon a beach,

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

The wind blows—

And a master puts a flute to his lips.

It blows again—

And his fingers take hold of organ stops ....

## THE DESTROYER

Once more, the wind—

And thou dost go on an old familiar way

In tragic fashion,

As a corsair, pursuing his prey

With the lust of passion,

Falls like a burst of hail

On an autumn yield,

Till every reach and gulf and bay

Is left with the stubble of life and sail,

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

## IN RETREAT

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

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

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

## RE-BORN

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

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

## THE DEAD CALM

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

## The Toll of the Bells

### I

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

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

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

## II

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

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

That Iliad of Death upon the floes.

## **The Ground-Swell**

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

## **Magnolia Blossoms**

I

The year's processions mocked her as they streamed

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

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

## II

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

## III

Then a wind from the land sprang up and whipped

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

## The Ice-Floes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the rest is as a story told,

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

?

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

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

## The Shark

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

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

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

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

## **The Fog**

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

## **The Big Fellow**

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

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

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

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

## **The Morning Plunge**

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

## **In Absentia**

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

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

The world lay there beneath his eye;

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

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

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

## **The Flood Tide**

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

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

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

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

## The Pine Tree

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

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

## **In Lantern Light**

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

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

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

## **The Secret of the Sea**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Loss of the Steamship Florizel

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

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

## The Drowning

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

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

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

## Monologues and Dialogues

I

CARLO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## II

### OVERHEARD BY A STREAM

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

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

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

### III

## OVERHEARD IN A COVE

(The Old Salt Talks Back)

*Swiles*=seals.

*Quintal*=cwt.

THE SCHOLAR (*recovering from heroic seizures*)

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

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

### THE SALT.

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

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

THE SCHOLAR (*with condescension*).

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

THE SALT (*snortingly*).

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

THE SCHOLAR.

But no wit surmises  
The calculated way the wind uprises;

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

THE SALT (*fired by reminiscence*).

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

THE SCHOLAR (*with righteous warmth*).

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

### THE SALT.

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

### THE SCHOLAR.

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

## THE SALT.

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

## THE SCHOLAR.

Anatomy!  
A subject of minute research.

## THE SALT.

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

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

### THE SCHOLAR.

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

### THE SALT.

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

### THE SCHOLAR.

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

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

## THE SALT.

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

Except a burnin' fever or a freezin'?

### THE SCHOLAR.

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

### THE SALT.

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

### THE SCHOLAR.

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

By gasoline?

### THE SALT.

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

### THE SCHOLAR.

No. Allow my emendation

—  
Initiative! However, I understand.

### THE SALT.

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

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

THE SCHOLAR (*in deep spiritual reflection*).

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

THE SALT.

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

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

## THE SCHOLAR.

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

## THE SALT.

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

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

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

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

### THE SALT.

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

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

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

THE SCHOLAR (*delivering le grand coup*).

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

THE SALT (*with profound disgust*).

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

IV

THE PASSING OF JERRY MOORE

(*Juniper Hall answers the critics*).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

V.

**THE HISTORY OF JOHN JONES**

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

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

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

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

He loved his wife, as a matter of fact.

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

## **Creatures of Another Country**

### **I**

#### **THE BIRD OF PARADISE**

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

Who paid it? Bird of Paradise!

And the only kind of reply that came  
Out of that vision of tropical flame  
    Was that little ruffle of passion.  
A tango of color from scarlet to green  
Evolved as I watched the beauty preen  
    Her plumes in that maddening fashion.  
So I left the Bird of the Garden to call,  
This time, upon the Bird of the Hall;  
For my temples beat with the throb of fire,  
And I could not find in that land of Desire  
A cooling wind, or water, or ice  
To quench a fever in Paradise.

And the only answer I got in the Hall  
Was a glance of repulse from the belle of the Ball,  
    With a little ruffle of passion;  
Though I had a right to ask, I am sure,  
Who sent that tiara for her coiffure,  
    And that latest corsage of fashion.  
Not those the jewels I gave her to wear,  
Not those the drops that hung from her ear;  
And my fever burned like a thirst in Sahara,  
When that osprey swung above the tiara,  
And I knew no wind, nor water, nor ice  
Might cool this hell in Paradise.

## THE EPIGRAPHER

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

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

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

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

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

From that time onward to the end,

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

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

\* \* \* \* \*

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

#### L'ENVOI.

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

### **Ode to December, 1917**

Was ever night so wild as this—this bleak December

night!

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

Are all its ancient charms in sorrow laid away?

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

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

In tongueless language inarticulate through tears.

Why passed with such inevitable speed

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

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

How sweet the flowers grew in the woods last May!

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

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

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

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

Fled are they all;  
The flowers and the birds,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Newfoundland**

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

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

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

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

*Scattered on boom*

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

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

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

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

## **Flashlights and Echoes**

From the Years of 1914 and 1915

I

### **A COAST**

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

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

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

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

## II

### LATER

*(A man speaks)*

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

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

Don't look so frightened. What—again?

The lifeboat! They are hailing me.

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

### III

*(A woman speaks).*

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

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

### IV

#### **MORNING**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## V

### **GREAT TIDES**

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

Huge hands! You rear our bulwarks up

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

## VI

### THE AFTER-CALM

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

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

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

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

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

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

## VII

### SCENES FROM AFAR

*(A Battlefield)*

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

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

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

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

Draw near and watch the morning break!

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

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

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

## A DIRGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

And in those rutted acres

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

## IX

### THE SEED MUST DIE

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

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

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

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

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

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

## X

### **COME NOT THE SEASONS HERE**

Comes not the springtime here,  
Though the snowdrop came,

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

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

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

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

On a glacial stone.

XI

**ON THE SHORE**

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

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

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

## XII

### BEFORE A BULLETIN BOARD

*(After Beaumont-Hamél)*

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

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

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

## XIII

### BEFORE AN ALTAR

*(After Gneudecourt)*

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

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

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

#### XIV

### **SNOWFALL ON A BATTLE-FIELD**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **The Great Mother**

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

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

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

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

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

## **In Memoriam**

### I

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

The other died of wounds at Passchendaele."

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

## II

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

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

## The Hidden Scar

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

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

## Evening

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

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

## **In a Beloved Home**

*(To W. H. G.)*

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

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

# The Conclusion of "Rachel"

*(A story of the sea)*

IN MEMORY OF R. S. LE D.

\* \* \* \* \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Fragment from a Story

### I

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

.....

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

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

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

### JULIAN.

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

### THADDEUS.

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

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

JULIAN.

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

THADDEUS.

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

JULIAN.

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

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

THADDEUS.

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

JULIAN.

How?

THADDEUS.

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

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

JULIAN.

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

THADDEUS.

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

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

JULIAN.

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

THADDEUS.

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

JULIAN.

This tangled, sacrificial thread has grown

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

### THADDEUS.

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

### JULIAN.

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

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

## II

### A LATER SPRING

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

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

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

Azaleas, arethusas.

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

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

.....

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

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

*(Thaddeus, walking through a field in the direction of*

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

## THADDEUS.

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

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

JULIAN.

You would infect the blood  
Of an old man.

## THADDEUS.

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

## JULIAN.

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

## THADDEUS.

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

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

JULIAN.

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

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