

Poems



Arthur S. Bourinot

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Title: Poems

Date of first publication: 1921

Author: Arthur Bourinot (1893-1969)

Date first posted: Feb. 18, 2021

Date last updated: Feb. 18, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210273

This eBook was produced by: John Routh, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

Poems

By

Arthur S. Bourinot

(Author of Laurentian Lyrics)

PRICE ONE DOLLAR

TORONTO

THE T. H. BEST PRINTING CO.

1921

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The following poems have appeared in *The Canadian Magazine*: “Autumn Silence”, “When Peace Has Come”, “Epitaph”, “Night”, “Freiburg Camp”, “The Old Indian”, “Canada’s Fallen”. “Canada’s Fallen” was awarded the Governor-General’s prize (Veterans class), in The Canadian National Literary Competition, 1919.

“Autumn Silence” has appeared in Mr. J. W. Garvin’s “Canadian Poets”.

“Trek Song”, “Night on the Ottawa River”, “Canada’s Fallen”, and “The Snake Fence”, have been published in the “Current Poetry” page of *The Literary Digest*.

A. S. B.

433 Daly Avenue,
Ottawa.

“The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched.”

—Thoreau.

TO
NORA

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NIGHT ON THE OTTAWA RIVER

DOWN the river slowly drifting
Float the rafts of river-men,
While the light is slowly shifting
Backward o'er the hills again.

'Mid the silence rings their singing,
Voicing low the old refrain,
But the chanson gay beginning
Ends "Mironton, mirontaine".

Now the myriad lights are glowing
Whitely where the city sleeps,
While the plashing drip of rowing
Upward from the river creeps.

Low the waters murmur falling,
Moaning through the Chaudiere,
Like a whispered, ghostly calling,
Voicing deep their wild despair.

Fade the distant voices singing,
Faint recurs the low refrain,
Still the chanson gay beginning,
Dies "Mironton, mirontaine".

CANADA'S FALLEN

WE who are left must wait the years' slow healing,
 Seeing the things they loved, the life they lost—
The clouds that out the east come, huge, concealing
 The angry sunset, burnished, tempest-tossed.
How will we bear earth's beauty, visions, wonder,
 Knowing they loved them in the self-same way—
Th' exulting lightning followed by deep thunder,
 Th' exhilaration of each dawning day?
Banners of northern lights for them loom greener,
 Waving as wave's the sea-weed's streamered head;
Where bent the swaying wheat, the sun-burned gleaner
 Will find in their remembrance flowers of red.
Oh, life must be immortal for their sake:
Oh, earth will rest them gently till they wake.

WHEN PEACE HAS COME

WHEN peace has come, and I return from France,
I know the places that I'll long to see:
Those hunch-backed hills so full of old romance,
Where first frail Beauty's visions dawned for me,
And April comes, swift, dancing like a girl,
With golden tresses flowing in the breeze,
And where swart, autumn leaves disport and whirl,
In maudlin dance beneath the naked trees.

And I shall see the cottage on the hill,
With all the loveliness of summer days,
Whose memories to me are haunted still
By love's sweet voice, the witchery of her ways.
And I shall climb the path and ope the gate,
When peace has come, if peace comes not too late.

Vendôme, France, 1916.

TREK SONG

WHEN the snow has left the hollows
And the birds are flying North,
When the winds are warm with April and the rain,
Oh, it's then the footsteps falter and the weary eyesight follows
The ways that to the wilderness lead forth.

Then the heart longs for the river
With its chanting choral song
And the chain of inland waters without end.
Oh, it's then the pulses quicken and the nerves are all aquiver
To take the trail and trek among the strong.

And the fellowship of faring
Is the lure that wills you on
With the call to which you never answer no.
So it's then you'll take the highroad and the free road, never caring,
And life will lead you out to meet the dawn.

When the wilderness is calling
To the broad, untrodden floor,
And the heart responds with fervor to the wind,
Oh, it's then you'll sing the trek song, to the lilt of water falling,
And *Wanderlust* will open wide the door.

Holzminden, 1918.

A WISH

SAD death will come for one of us some day,
And standing on the threshold, enter by
The portal which was once the wondrous way
The wings of Love were wont to flutter nigh—
And O, my love, when he has entered thus,
I only ask that I shall be the one
He chooses, when he comes to sunder us
Until we meet beyond the mortal sun.

Holzminden, 1917.

AUTUMN SILENCE

HOW still the quiet fields this autumn day,
The piled up sheaves no more retain their gold,
And ploughmen drive their horses o'er the mould,
While up into the hills and far away
The white road winds to where the sun's last ray
Mantles the heavens in a scarlet fold
Of glorious colour, of radiance untold,
And then the twilight turns the red to gray.

How still the quiet fields this autumn eve;
And yet we know that here, in other lands,
Red war still causes mothers' hearts to grieve
And lives are spent as countless as the sands.
O God, we ask that Thou wilt put to flight
The shadows of this quiet autumn night.

Rockliffe Camp, 1915.

VACANCIES

“Such a sleep, they sleep, the men I loved.”—Tennyson.

THEY are not here, the comrades of our childhood,
Close friends of college days,
They have left us like creatures of the wild-wood
For other ways.

And we must climb with comrades new the mountains,
The highways loved of youth,
And seal in us the welling of the fountains
Of sorrow, ruth.

O we will feel the beauty of the places
That haunted so their hearts;
O we will miss the friendship of the faces
The silence parts.

But ever midst the laughter or the sorrow
We must remember how,
They also lived with hoping for the morrow
As we do now.

And often 'neath the star light of the vastness
Often we will recall,
How they too loved the silence of the fastness
Where shadows fall.

And in their hearts the wistful love of beauty
In shy and silent life,
Was silenced when the summons came to duty
And grief was rife.

To us their youth is wondrous as the eagle
In ever heightening flight,
They will awake the visions of the regal
In darkest night.

They are not here the comrades of our childhood,
Close friends of college days,
They have left us like creatures of the wild-wood
For other ways.

Holzminden, June, 1918.

SPRING, 1916.

HOW well I know that in the months to be
 Pale Proserpine will blow the buds to fire,
 And frost-bound hills will don their new attire;
Along the lanes the poet's eye will see
A dash of blue where swift the bluebirds flee,
 And all the world will rouse at Love's desire,
 And Winter at her bidding will retire,
But all this beauty will be lost to me.

Sweet April and the red-lipped, dream-eyed May
 Will wander through the meadows with the breeze,
But how can Love and Beauty bear the day
 When death and sorrow reign across the seas?
Sad thoughts will still my heart to old delights,
And blind mine eyes to former beauteous sights.

FRANCE

IN France the fields are brown with new turned earth,
The trees stand bare and gaunt before the breeze,
Which blows across the country mad with mirth
With wailings through the silhouetted trees.

The long roads reach across the furrowed ground
And silence holds the land within her spell;
The creaking carts of peasants homeward bound
Jolt towards Vendôme's ringing vesper bell.

A Poilu in his coat once splendid blue,
Trudges to his home, returned on leave,
And all seems peace and quiet; O how few
Would think within this land that many grieve.
O France, thy strength lies not in boast or show
But silence is thy grandeur, sure and slow.

Paris, Christmas, 1916.

TO JOHN MASEFIELD

(After reading his "Sonnets and Poems".)

I TOO have searched for Beauty in this life,
For loveliness amongst the woes of men,
The spark of joy which shines from out the strife,
The will-o'-wisp's white dancing o'er the fen;
To find the spur which urges, goads the soul
To toil through depths to greater heights above
Where Beauty is the mighty, final goal
And roads to Beauty run through vales of love.

I too have sought the guerdon hard to gain.
Elusive river sweeping to the sea,
But well I know a glimpse is worth the pain
Of seeking that which ever seems to flee.
O Beauty, thou hast one disciple more,
Another traveller knocking at thy door!

Bramsbott Camp, 1916.

O MOON THAT SHINES TO-NIGHT

O MOON that shines to-night,
So softly whitely, bright,
Come to me over the hills of light
 Over the hills of dream.
Into the land of love's delight,
Out of the everlasting night,
 Over the hills of dream.

O moon that shines to-night
With softly whitening light,
Bring to me beauteous dreams and bright
 Over the hills of rest;
Bearing the wished and longed-for sight
Out of the everlasting night
 Over the hills of rest.

Holzminden, 1918.

REVELATION

I SAW you standing midst the golden-rod
That filled the fields with swaying dew-lit ore,
And marvellous was the message that you bore
Standing alone amid the flowers of God.
For Beauty dawned for me as at the nod
Of old magician learned in ancient lore
And ever after Beauty more and more
Kept calling from the boundless spaces broad.

And sometimes when the path of life loomed steep
Or bitterness seemed doomed to fill the day
This memory came as turn the tides that creep
Back to the solitude of shore and bay;
And sorrow fled as the renascent sweep
Of recollection glorified the day.

NIGHT AT HOLZMINDEN
1918

THE drummer sounds the summons to our room,
The light-encircled spiel-platz soon lies bare
And desolate, except where buildings loom,
Limning their shadows on the vacant square.
A gramophone grinds out a raucous song,
And boisterous laughs resound along the halls;
Now comes the muffling silence, slowly throng
The multitude of stars where darkness falls.

Inside the room stentorian breathings sound,
Or preparations made for nightly rest;
Without the windows silence sleeps profound;
Now comes the moon above the far hill's crest.
Asleep the buildings seem in pallid light;
Adream, we prisoners pass the peaceful night.

LONELINESS

I COULD not sleep last night for wondrous, pale,
The waning moon rose through a maze of blue,
Out of a void beyond our human hail,
And all the sleepless hours I longed for you.
For vibrant through the mystery of the night,
Swift surging from the past departed years,
There swept the consciousness of lost delight
The loneliness and longing nothing clears.
Soft distant sounds of night revived the past,
For sleep denied the oblivion of her veil,
Bestowing thoughts of you, until the last
Lone star was dimmed, until the East grew pale.
I could not sleep last night and with the morn
Returned the dull routine that must be borne.

Holzminden, December, 1917.

PROOF

O MEN who question Immortality
Behold the loveliness of earth and sky
And learn that life is not futility
But promises the spirit will not die.

I know from my brave comrades gone before
That life must be for more than earthly length,
And death is but the swiftly opened door
Leading to higher aims and greater strength.

THE WESTERN HILLS

O WESTWARD to low lying hills, O westward o'er the sea,
To where the roads are white with dust, the uplands hazed with heat,
To places where my heart would be, the winds are calling me,
O westward where my sweetheart waits, O westward shall we meet.

The roads of other lands are long, and foreign lands are fair,
The winds with blossoms scented are, and though the hills are high,
I'd sooner tread low lying hills whose summits purple wear
All cloaked with mist at break of day enshrouded by the sky.

O some there are who love the sea, all studded white with sails,
And others 'neath the tropic sun to live and die may choose;
But give to me the western hills when tired daylight fails
And casts across the western skies innumerable hues.

So when the last war bugle's blown and flags of flame are furled,
I'll follow then the lure that wills my feet toward the west,
For westward in the hills there waits the heart of all the world,
And so I'll take the road once more and reach the hills of rest.

Freiburg, October, 1917.

THE OLD INDIAN

WE walked one morning in the long ago
To see the ancient Indian's camping-place
Where he had spent so many summer days
In quietness, companioned by the trees
And blue lake water lapping wooded shores,
And dreams of deeds and prowess in the past.
The path we took meandered forest aisles,
Long vistas vanishing in traceried green,
Winding across a fairy-trodden glade
Where wild, red roses bloomed for our delight
And stalwart grew a gnarled old apple tree.
We loitered through sunned meadows million-flowered,
To pick the golden-rod or watch a hawk
Wheeling across the sky with sleepy wing,
Seeing the wild hare feeding furtive-eyed
Vanish amid the fern-leaved undergrowth.

We found the Indian stretched upon the plank
Serving as bed and only resting-place,
While o'er his head the overturned canoe
Fashioned the roof and shelter from the rain.
Wizened and gaunt he was and poorly clad,
With weather-beaten face whose dignity
Was deepened by the length of lonely years
And solitude in the blue Laurentian hills.

Well I remember how your joyousness
And eager, shy, expectant wonderment
Recalled to those dim eyes remote, dim days,
The glory, the sweet perishable gleam
That whiten with warm magic all the past;
And how your soft voice reassured his heart,
Emboldening him to speak of old exploits,
The times he lured the fish with lighted torch
And speared them in the shadow-haunted streams,
Or trailed the restless caribou far north

Amid a wilderness of mighty breadth
Where Manitou for immemorial years
Held sway upon the silent mountain tops.
And last he spoke of summer idleness,
When those long, langorous, indolent hours
Passed leisurely as some deep-laden barge
Floats seaward down a sluggish, oozing stream.

We took our leave, followed the homeward path,
But often after came to hear the tales
He told with guttural voice, in monotone,
Until the summer winged her southward way
And autumn in tan mantle red inwrought,
Wrapped round the hills her vivid gorgeous folds.
To-day your letter tells me he is gone
To join the company of braves and chiefs
Who held the land before our forbears came.
And so I wrote these lines commemorative
Of that momentous morning long ago.

EPITAPH

LYING in No Man's Land, he sleeps,
Sleeps as well as they who rest
In the gardens by the sea,
In the grave-yards of the west.

Sleeping in No Man's Land, he dreams,
Dreams of those in other lands;
Friends he left with pensive lips,
Those he left with waiting hands.

Dreaming beneath a foreign sky,
Death was but the evening star,
Setting now to rise again
Past the Paradisal bar.

Lying in No Man's Land, he sleeps,
Sleeps as well as they who rest
In the gardens by the sea,
In the grave-yards of the west.

France, 1917.

HOME SONG

I'm going back to Canada,
To roam the roads of white,
Where those old hills so dear to me
Rise up to reach the night.

I'll see the little lonely lake
Asleep amid the hills
Whose solitude will re-awake,
The rapture absence stills.

And one there is who waits for me,
Beyond the sunset's flare;
O, one there is I'll haste to see,
Warm sunlight on her hair.

O she will come with wistful eyes
Along the well worn path;
For us the future will arise
A glorious aftermath.

So I'll go back to Canada,
If God thus wills it so,
As weary travellers return
To lands of long ago.

FREIBURG CAMP
1917

HERE in the shadows of our cloistered walk,
Where all our life is narrowed to a square,
We prisoners sit; we sleep or read or talk,
Dreaming of halcyon summers spent elsewhere.
The towering trees strive upward to the sky
In semblance of our spirits' liberty,
Which lives on recollections ne'er to die,
Although the earthly body be not free.
And sometimes through the vaulted, cloudless blue
There dives with thundering engine, swift as light,
An albatross, all painted, yellow, new,
Volplaning housetops, vanishing in flight.
Thus do we pass our close-sequestered life,
Hoping the hopes of freedom, following strife.

CHRISTMAS AT HOLZMINDEN
1917

DESOLATE, dark and dreary
The dawning Christmas morn,
Desolate, dark and dreary
This day that Christ was born.

Quietly, slowly, softly,
The snow sinks as a cloud,
Quietly, slowly, softly,
The snow falls like a shroud.

Silently, surely, weary,
The sentries pace their beat,
Silently, surely, weary,
The lagging hours we meet.

Imprisoned, lonely, hoping,
The future is our goal,
Imprisoned, lonely, hoping,
Time takes of us her toll.

A CIVILIAN PRISONER'S FUNERAL (Germany, 1917.)

(The British Prisoners of War were interned in a barracks on the outskirts of Holzminden. Further out, on the hillside, was a camp where ten thousand French and Belgian civilians of the war area were interned. The road from the civilian camp to the cemetery was plainly visible from the barrack windows.)

NOT theirs the ordinary dark display
Of carriages, twined flowers and music's moan,
But theirs the sadness of a sadder day
Abandoned and unutterably alone.

Along the stone paved road they slowly walk
In costumes nondescript and colorless;
The loveliness of earth appears to mock
The anguish hid beneath their pensiveness.

They have no solitude nor silent place
To lessen grief by calm assuaging thought.
But soon the night with sleep compelling grace
Will wrest the mind from worries war has brought.

DREAMING

I SAW warm sunlight glancing gold on leaves
Which gently swayed and tossed the light that weaves
The interlacing shadows on the ground;
Once more on uplands lone, wind swept, I found
The solitary pine tree standing bare,
The sentinel of stillness, earth and air.

I dreamed of summer evenings when the hush
Of twilight falls amid the odours lush
Of lilacs sweet, and 'top the highest tree
The vesper sparrow sings his melody
When evening draws too swiftly to its close;
And quiet calm and rapturous repose
Allayed unrest till dawn with streams of light
Dispelled the phantom dreams of fleeing night.

KEATS

IMMORTAL bard of beauty, Thou, whose pen,
 Inscribed gold charactry of thought sublime,
 Revealing all the romance of old time
And melancholy gaze of moor and glen;
Thy quest for beauty urged thee 'mid the fen
 Of smirching dust and London's sullen grime
 To raise for her an altar rich with rhyme,
Haunting the visions and the hearts of men.

Thy lines remind us of perpetual youth,
 Of pale nymphs dancing in a phantom light,
 Singing the song of warm, celestial night,
Or tell us of the loneliness of Ruth.
 The love of beauty has enriched thy name,
 While truth for guerdon gave the touch of fame.

RONDEAU

(After the French of Charles D'Orleans, 1391-1465).

THE world has changed her coverlet
Of winds that blew so bitterly,
Donning her April drapery
Of laughing sunlight, flower-inset.

And all the birds and beasts now let
Their voices praise the panoply:
The world has changed her coverlet.

The river, fountain, rivulet
Disport in jocund livery
With drops of silver jewelry:
Earth's creatures fairer garments get,
The world has changed her coverlet.

NOCTURNE

A SHIP that speeds with a crimson sail,
Aslant on a restless sea,
And in my heart the longing
That stirs unceasingly.

A wind that warms with a perfumed breath
Adrift from the dreaming earth,
And for my grief no solace
But melancholy's dearth.

A hush that haunts like a loved one's smile
In dreams of departed years,
But in the silence sadness
And unavailing tears.

The night that comes with a bat-like sweep,
A moon with the harvest light,
But O, the endless yearning
For one beyond the night.

INEVITABILITY

WE all will pass the rising and the setting
Of this our life's short span
And with us go remembrance and forgetting
The life of man.

They reach an end the parting and the meeting,
Our hopes and fears, and death,
And all must greet completion and the fleeting
Of life's last breath.

LILACS

THERE is a window in a house I know
Through which I watched the wind so softly blow
The dew-wet lilacs that they swayed as though
By spirit moved; to me, at break of day
There stole a haunting breath, a roundelay
Charming the lattice with the lure of May.

And one there was who loved the lilacs too,
And so I picked them wet with morning dew
And gave them for their beauty's thrilling hue;
The lilacs now are dreams of long ago;
Yet still is seen their dew impassioned glow
Watched from a window in a house I know.

INVOCATION

O COME once more, calm days of autumn, come,
To this our land where summer's splendor goes
The way of all the winding, wayward years
And life is cool and tranquil, calmly dim.
Among the mountains, valleys, woods, O move,
Thou spirit white of everlasting sleep,
Casting the spell of silence, rest and peace
And folding wearied hearts unto thy breast.
O still the soul of earth with thy repose,
Burning the leaves of maple fiery red,
Tingeing the hills a rainbow afterglow,
And spreading wings o'ershadowing this our land,
O burst the bonds of earth's eternal woe,
Leave us no vestige of the vaunted past,
When pomp and pageant filled the summer hours,
For we are tired of revel, carnival,
Wanting the languor, wistful loveliness
Which thou dost bring with passiveness benign.
And we will heap with pine the huge stone hearth
Where all the long, dark, solemn autumn eves
The resinous logs will render warmth and dreams,
And love will haunt the ingle's hushing light
O shed around us days with silence dim,
Thou spirit white of everlasting sleep.

THE SNAKE FENCE

FAST disappearing emblem of old days
When man first trod the frontier wilderness
Sowing the seed which later grew to dress
The axe-cleared land, with miles of sunlit maize.

Along haphazard windings, zig-zag ways,
In April bluebirds flew all azure plumed,
Beside the lowest logs the Blood-root bloomed
Unconscious of the brilliant noontide blaze.

But now the logs lie rotting in the grass
Or feed the fires of chill October eves;
Of former landscapes progress only leaves
A vestige which eventually will pass.
Thus gradually the old-time glamour fades
And fading, dies, as wind through forest glades.

RECOLLECTIONS

HOW long ago it seems since last we met,
How long ago, but memory sees thee yet,
When sunlight was awakening the woods
And chestnut buds were burgeoning with hoods.
How beautiful the earth was on that day!
For with her wand, the arch enchantress May
Had touched the flowers long lulled in opiate sleep
And near the pines th' arbutus 'gan to creep,
And spring with mystic minstrelsy had wrought
Her magic in the meadows; warm winds brought
The susurrus of sounds, foretelling years
Replete with songs and laughter, rife with tears;
O spring had found our hearts and planted deep
The restlessness the years of youth must reap.
Thus was the world and still I see thee stand
 With parted eager lips and every strand
Of dark brown hair that floated from the brim
Of thy broad hat and fluttered with the whim
Of playful, wastrel winds that passed, delayed,
Then whispered, homeward, westward through the glade.
And oft we strayed together in the sun,
Pulling the daisies' petals, one by one,
Watching the river slowly stealing by,
Hearing the flicker's rushing, strident cry,
Or when the mood would change there'd come to me
Commingling with the season's melody,
Half murmured snatches of some ancient song,
Ringing through our laughter all the day live-long.

“Love in the world of old
 Fashioned his house with pride
Deep in the heart of a wood
 High on the lone hillside.
Building the laughter and song,
 Forming the mirth and the fears,
Giving the gifts of the heart

Into the hands of the years.

“Love in the world of old
Fashioned his færy shrine,
White for the hope of the years
Tall as the towering pine;
Weaving the shadowy dreams,
Dowering the earth with desire,
Lifting the soul of man
Out of the depths of the mire.”

And though long years have slowly rolled away
Since last we met and since our hearts were gay
Yet still I see thee with thy listening smile,
At those dim times when we were wont to while
The hours away, dream-drifting o'er the lake,
Or when we heard the far-off loon awake
The star-lit stillness with its 'verberant cry
While echo answered from the hills on high.
O all the world was wondrous in our eyes,
Enchanting as the setting sun which dyes
The evening heavens crimson, till the night
Comes on invisible wings, in silent flight.
So came the night of war across the earth
And mystic beauty, trembling in her birth,
Fled till the glorious sunrise of the world
Will flaunt the skies, a flag of peace unfurled.
O then will come the marvellous days once more
When April laughs outside each open door
And love goes roaming gypsy-like and free
Among the hills and valleys homewardly.

Holzminden, 1917.

A PRAYER IN TIME OF PEACE

Now war is done and kultur is laid low
Among unutterable things, we pray
And ask, O God, that Thou wilt lay
The seed which in the future years will grow
The flower of peace, supplanting flowers of woe,
Until the world, long wrapped in weary grey,
Donning her raiment of eternal May,
Will hear no more the flourished trumpet blow.

Grant us, O Lord, the gift of open minds,
A League of Nations, pledged that war shall cease;
Let wisdom, faith and comradeship increase,
Not unforgetful of the ties that bind
To those who gave, and giving all, designed
A permanent and everlasting peace.

Throckley, England, 1919.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Poems* by Arthur Bourinot]