

Anthology of Poems

By

Frank Lillie Pollock

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AFTER THE FIRST DAY'S BATTLE

[Munsey's Magazine, May 1903]

The strength that bore us through the battle's chances
 Draws back into the deep;
Weariness droops on our beleaguered lances,
 And God sends space for sleep.
The tide of night, sacred from wells of being,
 Flows softly overhead;
As through the gloom I gaze, with eyes deep-seeing
 As one already dead.

In our slight camp, close circled by the foemen,
 Enchanted by the night,
The iron men-at-arms, the girdled bowmen
 Dream fitfully of fight.
Beyond the ramparts, where the steel-shod charges
 Tore into mire the plain,
Dew drips on broken brands and riven targes;
 Death sleeps among the slain.

In this deep midnight of supernal vision,
 Despair and daylight done,
Life blends with death, grown equal in their mission,
 And utterly at one.
Too wise for fear and over strong for violence
 I catch their undertones,

And seem to see from spheres of starry silence
A valley white with bones.

Now at this last the lines of doom surround us,
Implacable and strong;
No mercy in the gloomy powers around us—
We mocked their powers too long!
But, unperturbed and free from hope or sorrow,
Purged clean of all the past,
We see through the red gates of fight to-morrow
Dark fields of peace at last!

A BALLAD OF BEING BROKE

[The Smart Set, October 1900]

When the last string snaps and a man goes broke,
He turns to the woods or the sea;
He cuts clean loose from the home-bred folk,
While love and honor go up like smoke,
And life is a gamble, and death is a joke,
And the universe good to see.

There's a brand-new sort of a fate for him;
They may languish early and late for him;
The bird on the wing is a mate for him,
And the hawk on the hunt goes free.

There's the brown and gloom of the forest track,
Where the deer go ghostly by;
There's the starving camp and the deadweight pack,
The moosehide lodge or the trapper's shack,
And a wolf's fierce life in the pine woods black,
And the freedom of the sky.

There's the plunging deck and the jarring screw,
And the oilskins bright with foam;
The stokehole's blaze and its naked crew,
Or the topsails drenched with the Gulf Stream dew,
And the sharp, salt breath of the landless blue,
Where a man forgets his home.

We know it, my friends of the "broke brigade,"
Pals of the plain and sea;
Single-handed and unafraid,
The artists of life and the fools of trade,
But we think we know how the game is played,
And we know where it's best to be.

There are some that may wait and pray for us;
There is luck that never will stay for us;
But the woods and the waves will make way for us
When the "broke brigade" goes free!

THE CHEAT

[The Smart Set, May 1902]

Love and I threw dice one day;
Love threw cinque and I threw tray;
"Loaded dice!" I straightway cried;
All my protests were denied.
Love, in spite of all I said,
Pocketed the stakes, and fled.
Useless further to complain—
I had lost my heart again.
And the play was false, 'tis true.
Ah, I wonder if he knew
With what intricate device
I myself had cogged the dice!

THE COWARD

[Atlantic Monthly, October 1904]

The night before the battle met
 He sang the splendor of the fray,
Till all our legions, hard beset,
 Took heart against another day.

He sang the thunder-swift attack,
 The shock of shields, the overthrow;
The shout that roared the chorus back
 Startled the camp-fires of the foe.

The harp's hour passed. Dawn heard alone
The high heroic bugles' cry;
But ere a blade had crossed his own
The singer turned his horse to fly.

They slew him as he fled the field;
But all day long the foe in vain
Shattered against our spearsmen steeled
With memory of his noble strain.

So half fell fouled into the snare,
And half sped splendid to the goal.—
What earthly tribune can declare
The doom of this divided soul?

THE END OF THE QUEST

[Atlantic Monthly, September 1902]

Unarm him here. Now wish him rest,
His was the fate of those who fail;
Who never end the knightly quest,
Nor ever find the Holy Grail.

He was the fieriest lance in all
That virgin honor called to dare;
The courtliest of the knights in hall,
The boldest at the barrière.

Joyful he took the sacred task
That led him far by flood and field;
His lady's favor at his casque,
God's cross upon his argent shield.

See where the Paynim point has cleft
The crimson cross that could not save!
See where the scimitar has reft
The favor that his lady gave!

For this poor fate he rode so far
With faith untouched by toil or time;
A perfect knight in press of war,
Stainless before the Mystic Shrine.

One finds the Rose and one the rod;
The weak achieve, the mighty fail.
None knows the dark design but God,
Who made the Knight and made the Grail.

The single eye, the steadfast heart,
The strong endurance of the day,
The patience under wound and smart—
Shall all these utterly decay?

The long adventure resteth here;
His was the lot of those who fail,
Who ride unfouled by sin or fear,
Yet never find the Holy Grail.

IN THE PARQUE CENTRAL

[The Smart Set, September 1900]

Twilight falls, and darkness after,
 Swiftly on the Southern air;
There is music, light and laughter
 In the old Havana square;
 Caballero, Cuban maid,
 On the brilliant promenade,
Flirt of fan and clink of glasses in the gaslight and the
dark,
 And the wide-mouthed, crimson flowers
 Blaze through all the perfumed hours,
When the Spanish band is playing in the Park.

To the old Castilian measure
 Slow the dark-eyed girls go past;
Tropic queens of love and pleasure,
 Spanish maid and quarter-caste;
 Inez, Tula, Mariquita,
 Marguerita, Carmencita,
From their black mantillas glancing where no prying
eye must mark;
 Happy youth who gains a glance
 From those daughters of romance,
When the band plays the *cachucha* in the Park!

Blood-red droop the blossoms wreathing
 Round the garish lamps alight,

And the sweetness of their breathing
 Burdens all the languid night.
 Through the darkness and the heat
 Throbs the fountain's liquid beat,
And a million golden fireflies mock the *cigaritto's*
spark.
 Ah, enchantment of the place,
 And the Spanish speech and grace,
And the Spanish music playing in the Park!

Love and hate awake as surely,
 Fierce as fire and black as hell,
When the girls go out demurely—
 They have done their work too well.
 Do you know, my señorita,
 Mariquita, Carmencita,
There'll be something found at daybreak that is cold
and grim and stark?
 Sorrow may your hearts discover;
 One of you shall lose a lover
When the band has finished playing in the Park.

THE LOST TRAIL

[Atlantic Monthly, May 1901]

While the drizzle falls on the slimy pavement, swelling
 The yellow gutters' flow,

And the ways are dense with the hosts of buying,
selling,

And hurrying to and fro,

I know that out in the North the winds are crying
Round the willowed shores of the long white lakes
outlying,

And the black pine woods where my old lost friends
are dwelling,

And the splendor of the snow.

I know that mysterious land of wood and river,

Where the half-breed hunters range;

The snow wraiths dancing upon the hill slopes ever,

The gray sun, low and strange;

The bull moose skulking through windrow and through
hollow,

The creak and crunch of raquettes where the trackers
follow;

The dark spruce shades where the forest dreams
forever,

But never dreams of change.

A snowshoe track leads up from the swamp and over,

Where the otter trappers passed,

To the drifted winter hut in the hemlock cover

That shields it from the blast.

Are you there, Pierre, Gaultier, as when we together,

Free in the face of the grim Canadian weather,

Learned the changeless spell of the North to hold and
love her,

And turn to her at the last?

The snowstorm blindly drives through the woods to smother

The ancient trail I knew;

The track we blazed is lost, and never other

Has marked that blind way through;

But the same great roar through the leagues of branches sweeping

Wakes the desire of a homesick heart that has long been sleeping.

O dark North woods, wild love and ruthless mother,
I call, I cry to you!

THE MUSIC-ROOM

[The Smart Set, October 1904]

Through the vast purple curtains' fold and fall

No sunbeam ever pierces to the room

Where giant bronzes brood like dreams of doom

In the deep glow from crimson tapers tall.

Most delicate and most fantastical,

The ministers of music touch the gloom

With gleam of wood, and ivory's paler bloom,

And the dim organ looms above them all.

Silent—but palpitating still with tone,

And fiery-freighted harmonies that roll

Through dusk of strange delights and sombre
sins;
Occult confessional, that hears alone,
The moaning of the organ's troubled soul,
The wailing of the haunted violins.

THE RECALL

[The Bookman, December 1901]

An ancient ghost came up the way,
(The western way, the windy way,)
Across a world of land and sea,
With greeting from afar to me:

"Hast thou forgot the open way,
(The winding way, the wandering way,)
With freedom of strong sun and rain
To clear the roving heart of pain?

"Yet still the long roads greet the sun,
And glad wayfarers one by one
Follow the gold day down the west
That once made part of thy unrest.

"Hast thou forgot the ocean way,
(The thunderous way, the wondrous way,)

The fierce enchantment of the sea,
The memory, the mystery?

"Yet still the tall ships gather home
From tropic worlds beyond the foam,
And still the outbound steamers go
Down foreign seas thou once didst know.

"Hast thou forgot the forest way,
(The shady way, the silent way,)
The thin blue camp-smokes in the dawn,
The brave bright fires when night came on?"

"Still the free forest glooms and shines
With moonlight on the silvered pines,
Although by hill and lonely shore
Their noiseless trails know thee no more."

So came an ancient ghost to me,
Idling beside a winter sea—
The lost familiar of my breast,
The spirit of the old unrest.

THE RETURN TO THE SEA

[Atlantic Monthly, June 1905]

Let us destroy the dream! She knows not of it.

Let us go back rejoicing to the sea.

Sighing is vain, and laughter shall not profit;

But fill Life's frothing cup again and quaff it

To wider hopes and greater things to be.

Time turns his tide, and turns back our distresses;

Let us return unshaken as we came.

Shall we, the wanderers, mourn for lost caresses?

Our hands are fettered by no cloudy tresses;

Ours are the hearts no starry eyes can tame.

Yet, had she heard the tones our songs could lend her,

We might have found some world of hers and mine

Sweet with perfume of summer roses tender,

And vibrant with the salt sea's strength and splendor,

And lit by stars that now shall never shine.

Nay, but she would not—nay, she could not know
them,

The flying dreams with vast and vivid wings.

Days and delights with poisoned pain below them,

Hopes, flowers, and fancies,—where shall we bestow
them?

What shall we do with all these wasted things?

Sink them in seas that give their dead up never;

A hundred fathoms deep beneath the main;

Beside the rotted wrecks of old endeavor,

So that no daring deep-sea diver ever

Can bring our worthless treasures up again.

For her the safer life of dreams crushed under,
 The petty pleasures, and the dusty way.
For us the oceanic throb and thunder,
The resonance of all the winds of wonder
 And lordly interchange of night and day.

Nay, she has chosen. Let us turn our faces,
 And go back gladly to the windy shore;
And follow far the tide's tumultuous traces
Toward the fierce flicker of adventurous places,
 And look not back, nor listen any more.

A SUNDOWN LYRIC

[Munsey's Magazine, February 1903]

The disenchantment of the day
Dissolves in dusk and disarray,
And all the forces of unrest
Blaze their red banners on the west;
 Bugling up the bands to follow
Where the rallied colors gleam,
 Over sea and hill and hollow
To the conquest of the dream.

What tales of mystery enfold
That Spanish west of blood and gold!—
Those ever undiscovered shores

That lured the grim conquistadors
Through seas uncharted, where they never
Raised the land they sought to hail.
Round the sunset world forever
Still the lost adventurers sail.

And still we follow, for we know
That where those flaming signals flow
Runs that brave road of change and chance,
The heart's desire, the world's romance;
Leading westward; ever leading
On beyond our dusk confines;
Ever on the sky receding
Faintly El Dorado shines.

They vanish down the waning west,
The fiery legions of unrest,
Toward that dim goal where dreams aspire,
The world's romance, the heart's desire.
Follow! Follow! Dusk is falling;
Flaming streamers fade and fail;
Still the bugles, dying, calling,
Hale our hearts along the trail!

[The end of *Anthology of Poems* by Frank Lillie Pollock]