

==The==
Empire
Builders



R. B. C. Stead

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The
Empire Builders
And Other Poems

By
Robert J. C. Stead



Toronto
William Briggs
1908

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*Not only where the shrapnel rips
The quaking earth in gory ruts,
The while the crimson life-blood drips
From mangled flesh and livid cuts,
And thirsty blades drink to the hilt—
Not only there are nations built.*

*Not only where the hungry wave
Reflects the wreck of crashing steel,
And naked seamen, grim and brave,
Fight on, from furnace-room to wheel:
Though these the Empire's bulwarks be,
The Empire is not on the sea.*

*Where'er Endeavor bares her arm
And grapples with the Things To Be,
At desk or counter, forge or farm,
On veldt or prairie, land or sea,
And men press onward, undismayed,
The Empire Builder plies his trade.*

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The Empire Builders
And Other Poems

THE EMPIRE BUILDERS.

Said the West to the East of a nation,
 “The fruit of your loins am I,
And I claim no other birthright
 And I own no other tie
But the bond that is fixed between us,
 And the blood that is yours and mine—
Yet nurture the child that is born you,
 Ere other arms entwine.”

And the West, in his youthful vigor,
 Wrought earnestly, soon and late,
As he planted the seeds of Empire,
 And knotted the thongs of Fate;
And the East in her home at the Gateway
 Mused long o’er the problem deep,
For the harvest was ripe to the sickle,
 But the reapers were fast asleep!

And she said, “In my western vineyard,
 Where the hope of my future lies,
Where those from my hearth are scattered,
 And a nation must soon arise—
There be foes more feared than the soldier
 Who comes with a hostile heel,
For the gold of an alien people
 Drives deeper than sharpest steel!

“If the land that was bought with a purchase—
 And the purchase has well been paid—
If the hope of my children’s children
 And the mainstay of my trade
Be mine, and be mine forever,
 I must quibble not at the cost,
Let the chance of my future greatness
 Through my own neglect be lost!”

MANHOOD'S ESTATE.

(Suggested by the transference of British fortresses in Canada to Canadian garrisons.)

Youth must lean on the mother's arm and obey the mother's will:

But manhood faces the world alone,

And bends its ways till they fit his own:

Yet manhood honors his mother's name, and loves his mother still.

Some said—but they spoke in ignorance, and in words of little weight

—

“The child must be a child until he reach a man's estate;

But when Ambition flaunts before, and Duty lags behind,

Maternal regulations he will scatter to the wind.”

But the mother smiled at the foolish speech, for she knew that her child
was true;

And she said, “The things that I wish of him are the things that my son
will do;

I pronounce his absolute liberty, I remove my slightest ban,

And I give him the keys of a continent, with the bidding, ‘Be a man!’”

Youth must lean on the mother's arm and obey the mother's will:

But manhood faces the world alone,

And bends its ways till they fit his own:

Yet manhood honors his mother's name, and loves his mother still.

THE MIXER.

They are fresh from all creation, from the lands beyond the seas,
Where a man accepts existence by the grace of “if you please,”
From the homes of rank and title, from the slums of want and woe,
They are coming as the cattle that have nowhere else to go;
They are haggard, huddled, homeless, frightened at—they know not
what;

With a few unique exceptions they’re a disappointing lot;
But I take ’em as I get ’em, soldier, sailor, saint and clown,
And I turn ’em out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

Oh, I take ’em from the counter, the factory, the mine,
They are rough-and-ready rascals till I lick ’em into line;
They are coming, coming, coming, from the land of Who-Knows-
Where,

Black and white and many-tinted, brown and yellow, dark and fair;
They are coming from the valley, from the prairie, from the hill,
They are coming from the “May I?” to the country of “I Will”;
And for some the smart of failure, and for some achievement’s crown,
As I roll ’em out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

In my new-made, day-old cities I apply them to the test,
Where they mix and clash and scramble with the Spirit of the West;
With the lust of gain before them, and the lust of sin within,
Where a few go down the deeper, but the many rise and win;
Where the sons of men are equal in the eyes of other men,
And the man who falls defeated rises up to fight again:
I mix ’em, mix ’em, mix ’em, in the turmoil of the town,
As I turn ’em out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

And I take 'em in the forest, where the axes bite the tree,
And I school 'em in the building of this country of the free;
In the vermin-gluttled bunk-house they can spend the stingy nights,
Where their only recreations are the "blow-outs" and the fights;
In the spring they're on the river, where the logs go racing by,
And they haven't time to wonder who will be the next to die;
There are some will ride in safety while the others quietly drown,
As I turn 'em out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

In the camps of railway builders you will find 'em by the score,
Where a man is set to doing things he never saw before,
Where they set the greenhorn handling glycerine and dynamite—
Just a stumble or a mishap and it blows him out of sight—
Where the Yankee fights with fire-arms and the Dago with his knife,
And a little bit of banter may cost a man his life;
Where they learn to reach for weapons at the signal of a frown—
There I turn 'em out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

In the silent, sunlit prairies they are list'ning to the call
That is calling, calling, calling, "Come you up, why will you fall?
Here is pay for every worker, here's reward for honest toil,
And a man may grow to heaven if his roots are in the soil."
They are putting off the old things, they are trying on the new;
In the battle with conditions they are proving what is true;
They are earnest, they are hopeful, and no hand can hold them down,
As I roll 'em out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

In the great, big, white-walled winter, when the soul cries out in dread

—

In the nameless dread of winter, when the summer hopes are dead—
When the thoughts turn backward, backward, to the land beyond the
sea,

And the weak ones and the false ones would renounce their faith in me

—

Then I curse them, starve them, freeze them, until every naked bone
Rattles in the howling blizzard, "I accept you as my own."
In the sacrament of suffering their memories I drown,
As I roll them out Canadians—all but the yellow and brown.

In the city, on the prairie, in the forest, in the camp,
In the mountain-clouds of color, in the fog-white river-damp,
From Atlantic to Pacific, from the Great Lakes to the Pole,
I am mixing strange ingredients into a common whole;
Every hope shall build upon me, every heart shall be my own,
The ambitions of my people shall be mine, and mine alone;
Not a sacrifice so great but they will gladly lay it down
When I turn them out Canadians — all but the yellow and brown.

THE HOMESTEADER.

Far away from the din of the city,
I dwell on the prairie alone,
With no one to praise or to pity,
And all the broad earth for my own;
The fields to allure me to labor,
The shanty to shelter my sleep,
A league and a half to a neighbor —
And Collie to watch if I weep.

Yes, this is my place of probation,
Though woefully windy and bare,
I am lord of my own habitation,
I mock at the meaning of care;
For here, on the edge of creation,
Lies, far as the vision can fling,
A kingdom that's fit for a nation —
A kingdom — and I am the king!

The grasses aglare in the morning
With crystalline radiance shine;
The dew-drops are jewels adorning,
Are jewels — and the jewels are mine;
The heat of the sun when it shineth,
The wet of the wind when it rains,
Are balm to the heart that repineth —
The Medicine-Men of the plains!

I follow the plough in the breaking,
I tap the rich treasures of Time —
The treasure is here for the taking,
And taking it isn't a crime;
I ride on the rack or the reaper
To harvest the fruit of my hand,
And daily I know that the deeper
I'm rooting my soul in the land.

They say there is wealth in the doing,
That royal and rich are the gains,
But 't isn't the wealth I am wooing
So much as the life of the plains;
For here in the latter-day morning,
Where Time to Eternity clings,
Midwife to a breed in the borning,
I behold the Beginning of Things!

When, reckless of time and of trouble,
I watch till the water-fowl comes,
Or, picking my steps in the stubble,
I steal where the prairie-hen drums;
When shooting the wolf in the brushes,
Or spearing the pike in the stream,
Or potting the crane in the rushes—
Ambition seems only a dream.

When darkness envelops creation,
And shadows lie deep on the plain,
I sit in my rude habitation
And ponder my childhood again;
Then voices come out of the distance,
Far voices from over the sea,
They call from the depths of existence—
I know they are calling to me!

The voices of song and of motion,
The voices of laughter and light,
They're calling from over the ocean—
Oh God! could I answer to-night!
The voices of friend and of lover,
The voices I knew in the past—
I turn to my pallet to smother
The thoughts that have found me at last!

* * * * *

*Greater than the measure of the heroes of renown,
He is building for the future, and no hand can hold him down;
Though they count him but a common man, he holds the Outer Gate,
And posterity will own him as the father of the State.*

GOD'S SIGNALMAN.

Well, no, I'm not superstitious,—at least, I don't call it that,—
But when someone spins a creepy yarn I don't deny it flat,
For a man who spends a lifetime with the throttle in his hand
Is bound to have adventures that he cannot understand;
I sometimes think our knowledge here is but a sorry show,—
We're only on the borderland of what there is to know.

I used to think a man could know all things that could be known;
That he should not acknowledge any power above his own;
That, however strange the circumstance, there always is a cause
That is in complete obedience to some of Nature's laws;
But I couldn't shake conviction off, no matter how I tried,
And I've changed my way of thinking since the night that Willie died.

Yes, Willie was my little son—my greatest earthly joy—
And wife and I just kind o' seemed to dote upon the boy;
When I was out on duty she would hover round the lad,
And treasure up his sayings to repeat them to his dad;
And every night, at lighting time, I knew that, without fail,
His baby lips were praying for the man out on the rail. . . .

Ah, well, for three short years we knew what such a treasure is,
And we grew ever more attached to those sweet ways of his;
When one day, swinging through the gate, I saw, with blanching face,
Mr wife as pale as ashes, and a doctor in the place. . . .
I tried to go in steady, but my knees were knocking hard,
And the light went out of heaven as I staggered up the yard.

The doctor was a friend of mine, with children of his own,
But he didn't need to tell me, for a blind man would have known
By the labored, quick-caught breathing, and the little burning brow,
That the Visitor was ready and was waiting for him now.
We sat about his bedside in silent, deep despair,
And the years rolled down upon us as we faced each other there.

'Twas a little before midnight when a ring came at the bell,
And the call-boy said, "Excuse me, sir, but I was sent to tell
You that the Limited is waiting, and there's no one else about;
They're expecting you to take her. If you don't, she can't go out."
I left the answer to my wife. With lips as white as snow,
She whispered, "Do your duty," and I said, "All right, I'll go."

My fireman knew my trouble, and in rough-and-ready way
He let me know his heart was feeling things he couldn't say;
The night was dark and moonless, but the bright stars overhead
Seemed to whisper to each other, "His little boy is dead."
The very locomotive seemed to read my thoughts aright,
And the monster sobbed in sympathy as we bulleted the night.

We'd been running fast and steady till a little after two;
All the passengers were sleeping, except, perhaps, a few
Who sat a-swapping stories in the smoker, when a sight
Met my eyes that fairly froze my blood in terror and affright—
For there, before me, standing, in the halo of the light
Was a little child outlined against the blackness of the night!

Oh, I could not be mistaken, I would know him anywhere,
With his father's mouth and forehead, and his mother's eyes and hair,
And little arms outstretched to me that seemed to coax and say,
"Come, Daddy, come and kiss me, for I'm going far away."
I flung the brake and throttle, and amid the hissing steam
The vision grew, and waned away, and vanished as a dream!

My fireman was beside me: "Your nerve is going, Jack;
Let's leave the engine here and take a walk along the track.
The exercise will do you good." I followed as he led,
Until we reached the gorge about a hundred yards ahead:
The night wind cooled my temples as we walked the bridge upon,
Till we sudden stopped with a sudden gasp— — THE CENTRE SPAN WAS
GONE!

* * * * *

You may call it hallucination, as some of the others do,
But I know that the Master took my boy that night at half-past two;
And the prayers of a hundred passengers had been offered up in vain
Had his spirit, clad in his baby dress, not stood before my train. . . .
I know I cried in my window-seat, and was otherwise ill-behaved,
But the life that I lost was more to me than all the lives he saved.

THE PRAIRIE.

The City? Oh, yes, the City
Is a good enough place for a while,
It fawns on the clever and witty,
And welcomes the rich with a smile;
It lavishes money as water,
It boasts of its palace and hall,
But the City is only the daughter—
The Prairie is mother of all!

The City is all artificial,
Its life is a fashion-made fraud,
Its wisdom, though learned and judicial,
Is far from the wisdom of God;
Its hope is the hope of ambition,
Its lust is the lust to acquire,
And the larger it grows, its condition
Sinks lower in pestilent mire.

The City is cramped and congested,
The haunt and the covert of crime;
The Prairie is broad, unmolested,
It points to the high and sublime;
Where only the sky is above you,
And only the distance in view,
With no one to jostle or shove you—
It's there a man learns to be true!

Where the breeze whispers over the willows,
Or sighs in the dew-laden grass,
And the rain-clouds, like big, stormy billows,
Besprinkle the land as they pass;
With the smudge-fire alight in the distance,
The wild-duck alert on the stream,
Where life is a psalm of existence,
And opulence only a dream.

Where wide as the plan of creation
The Prairies stretch ever away,
And beckon a broad invitation
To fly to their bosom, and stay;
The prairie-fire smell in the gloaming—
The water-wet wind in the spring—
An empire untrod for the roaming—
Ah, this is a life for a king!

When peaceful and pure as a river
They lie in the light of the moon,
You know that the Infinite Giver
Is stringing your spirit a-tune;
That life is not told in the telling,
That death does not whisper adieu,
And deep in your bosom up-welling,
You know that the Promise is true!

To those who have seen it and smelt it,
To those who have loved it alone,
To those who have known it and felt it—
The Prairie is ever their own;
And far though they wander, unwary,
Far, far from the breath of the plain,
A thought of the wind on the Prairie
Will set their blood rushing again.

Then you to the City who want it,
Go, grovel its gain-glutted streets,
Be one of the ciphers that haunt it,
Or sit in its opulent seats;
But for me, where the Prairies are reaching
As far as the vision can scan—
Ah, that is the prayer and the preaching
That goes to the heart of a man!

MOTHER AND SON.

The mother was rich and gracious, and the son was strong and bold,
And the bond that was fixed between them was not the bond of gold;
And they dwelt in sweet co-union, while the world looked on in awe,
For they lived and wrought by the law of Love, and not by the love of
Law.

The mother was old in the years of man, but young in the years of time,
And her face was fair and her arm was strong as a strong man in his
prime;

And some who said, "She weakens, her day is nearly done,"
So spake because they wished it. Her day was scarce begun.

And the mother said, "I have given you much, good gifts of honest
worth:—

A name that is known and honored in the corners of the earth;
A tongue that is strong and elastic, a law that is just and sound,
And the right of a man to be a man wherever my flag is found.

"The paths go down to the future, and the paths are yours to choose;
There's all for you to profit, there's all for me to lose—
For the eye of the race is onward, nor yet is the law recast,
That Youth shall live in the future, and Age shall live in the past."

On the swarthy cheek of the stalwart son there deepened a dye of
shame:—

"Mother, were I so base I should belie my mother's name;
The road may lead to the mountain-tops or the nethermost depths of
hell;
Even so; and if so you travel it, I travel the road as well.

“Ere yet I had learned in a foreign tongue to babble your name with
pride,
They thought in the guise of a common cause to wheedle me from your
side,
But I scorned the bribe of lust and power—for I read the rogues aright
—
And I fought for you in my swaddling-clothes as only a child can fight!
“’Twas not for my own existence—I had no fear for that—
For I was lean and unlikely, and they were full and fat;
But the blood—and the sense of honor—and the duty of the son—
’Twas these that clutched at a weapon and battled them ten to one!
“Think not because life is rosy that I know not what it cost—
I knew when I fell to the Ridgeway fiends, or lay in the North-shore
frost;
I knew in the flush of triumph—I knew when I fought in vain—
And the blood that was spilled at Paardeberg was the blood of Lundy’s
Lane!
“Then lead, and your son will follow, or follow, and he will lead,
And side by side, though the world deride, we will show by word and
deed
That you share with me my youthfulness, and I with you your prime,
And so it shall be till the sun shall set on the uttermost edge of Time.”

GOING HOME.

The village lights grew dim behind, the snow lay vast and white,
And silent as an icy shroud spread out upon the night;
A wan moon struggled with the clouds, and through the misty haze
The trails that branched to left and right were tangled as a maze;
The settler's horses plodded in the soft, uncertain snow;
And, stealing cautiously behind, a Thing moved to and fro.

The trail was little travelled, and the pale, sad, sickly light
Was hindrance, rather than a help, to read the road aright;
A dozen miles lay stretched between the settler and his shack:
He thought of many things that night—not once of turning back.
Above the crunching of the snow he heard the rising wind,
But never looked—and never saw—the Thing that stole behind.

The trail was lost; the horses took their way across the plain;
The settler strove to hold the course, but strove, alas, in vain;
The fickle wind seemed scarce to stay a moment at a place—
Now howling in a rear attack, now snapping at his face;
And nearing, leering, peering, in the ghastly, ghostly light,
The Thing came softly after as it followed in the night.

A light! a light! a welcome light gleamed friendly from afar:
Oh, can it be—it cannot be—'tis surely not a star?
Nay, nay, it is more warm and near, a happy farmer's home
That beckons to the wanderer, "You need no longer roam."
With eager hope they hastened on, and plied across the plain;
As often as the horses fell they rose to plunge again.

The hours moved on, the miles moved on, they followed as a dream
The waning light, the dying light, of that deceitful gleam,
And when at last it seemed the place must almost be in sight,
The light went out! Oh, perfidy! Oh, murderous, mocking light!
'Twas well the ears grew deaf before the howling of the wind,
Nor heard the ghoulish chuckle of the gloating Thing behind.

The snow lay deep; the horses floundered with the heavy sleigh,
Till, plunging in a sudden drift, they tore the tongue away;
The sleepy driver knew it not, as through his nerveless hands
His hold on life was slipping with the frozen leather bands. . . .
The night was calm and beautiful, the frost had ceased to smart. . . .
The Thing had leapt upon him and was tearing at his heart!

* * * * *

The room was warm and cosy, and the light was soft and low,
Her presence seemed to radiate a tender, girlish glow,
And when she placed her hand in his, the soft, caressing palm
Was cure for every trouble, and for every pain a balm:
And she whispered, "Sweet, my sweetheart, I'll be faithful, I'll be true;
In the springtime, in the springtime, I will cross the sea to you." . . .

A little bed was fashioned in the fitful firelight flare,
A little boy was kneeling as he said his evening prayer;
And mother-hands upon his head, that fondled in his hair,
And sense of quiet comfort and respite from every care;
And a pillow white and downy, and a bed so soft and deep,
And tired lips were lisping, "Now I lay me down to sleep." . . .

Again the scene was changed: A flood of mellow, amber light,
That filled the soul with ecstasy of infinite delight;
While crystal-cadenced music tinkled through the yellow glow,
The lullabyes of childhood, the love-songs of long ago:
The sea of God on every hand in silent silver lay:
An atom fell: its circles spread through all eternity.

* * * * *

The Thing was gone; its work was done; a lump of lifeless clay
Sat crouching, crouching, crouching in the dawning of the day;
The frozen eyeballs stared upon a wilderness of snow,
And peered into the future, to the Place no man may know.
A coyote prowled about the place, and sniffed below the sleigh,
And howled a melancholy howl, and slunk in fear away.

THE MAN OF THE HOUSE.

*Sweet is the breath of the prairie, where peace and prosperity reign,
And joyous the song of the city, where all is expansion and gain;
And gay are the waves of the ocean, as they break on the beaches in
vain,
And happy the land that preserves them.*

“I ask you not for a farthing, nor gift of the measure of gold;
The Man of the House should see to the house and summon his own
household;
For his is the peace of its shelter, and his is the strength of its wall,
And his is the shame and the ruin if ever the edifice fall.

“On you—not the younger children—on you does the mantle descend,
To me you must be as a brother, to them as a father and friend;
On the Pay-Day of Retribution, when earth is in battle arrayed,
You shall rally your kin to the fighting, and no one shall make you
afraid.

“Full long have you lain in the nursing, full long have you sucked at the
breast,
The world is awaiting your coming, it faces itself to the West;
And not by the pain of compulsion, nor the ravings of those who
condemn,
But because of the blood that is in you, you shall stand as a leader of
men!”

*Bloody the breast of the prairie when torn with the trenches of hate,
Gory the streets of the city where murder and treachery wait,
And awful the terrors of ocean when aimed at the life of the State—
Unhappy the land that deserves them!*

“THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.”

TORONTO.—A post-office employé was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for stealing two money orders. He leaves a wife and five small children in destitute circumstances.—*News Despatch*.

“Thou shalt not steal,” the Angel said, as he chiselled a slab of stone,
“I give you the everlasting law that a man's own is his own,”
And then from out of the Master's mind, without a thought of shame,
He took a scroll of burnished gold and he fashioned the block—the
same.

“Thou shalt not steal,” the Church declared; “now praise we all our
God,
He hath led us up from the miry clay to the paths His feet have trod.”
So they gave their love to the things on high, and thus, with sweet
accord,
They robbed the starving souls of men to waste it on the Lord.

“Thou shalt not steal,” the Nation said, and then it turned its eyes
To a struggling state that was sapped and weak, and it seemed an easy
prize;
So the arm of the mighty nation took, with fingers dripping red,
As it stole the life of a sister state from the hands of the noble dead.

“Thou shalt not steal,” the Magnate said, “I do not like the word,
In a business sense misunderstood by the simple, common herd;
I had rather pay for the things I need,” and so, without delay,
He bought a legislature that had wisdom to obey.

“Thou shalt not steal,” the Law declares, and the sinner must pay the
price,
And the world abhors the petty thief who falls to the common vice,
But the rich and the good and the powerful may steal—if they do it
well—
And the world sends them to heaven, but it sends the poor—to hell!

THE WILD-GOOSE OVERHEAD.

When in the stillness of the night
Come uninvited fears,
And sleeplessly I analyse
The mystery of years,
The future I would fain discern—
My future, all unread:
When through the dark I hear the honk
Of wild-geese overhead.

Oh, whither does the honker go?
In swift and certain flight
He wedges through the cloud and storm
And darkness of the night;
From Idaho to Hudson Bay,
From Kansas to the Pole,
He tracks his airy wilderness
Unguided to the goal.

Uncompass'd sailor! Through the gloom
You see no beacon light,
The prickings of no chart are yours
To guide you in your flight.
You measure not the modes of man,
His wisdom you despise
As surer than the needle-point
You navigate the skies.

Ah, can I doubt the Power that leads
You safe from zone to zone
Is mindful of the man He made
In image of His own;
That though we blindly breast the gale,
Or skirt the shores of Time,
Our Pilot knows the track we take,
And guides from clime to clime?

I know not how He marks the way—
By what mysterious force—
I only know my duty is
To follow on the course;
And when at last the night is gone,
And fog and fears are fled,
I may attain the wisdom of
The wild-goose overhead.

THREE-YEAR-OLD.

Young Three-Year-Old, with your hair of gold,
And lips still shaped in baby mould;
With your laughing eyes and your joyous play,
That drive the thoughts of the world away;
And your little hand, with its trustful grip,
That fires and thrills to the finger-tip!

Ah, Three-Year-Old, it is sometimes told
That your will is strong and your heart is bold,
That all that is done is by your grace—
Absolute monarch about the place—
In the winsome way of infancy
You swing the race to its destiny.

Brave Three-Year-Old, when the years have rolled,
You will lose your grip on the things you hold—
The truth that is now revealed to you,
And the heart that is simple, but always true—
Your feet will travel a stony way,
And sigh at last for the closing day.

* * * * *

Oh, Three-Year-Old, could my arms enfold
Your little form, now stark and cold—
Could I feel the touch of your finger-tips
And catch the lisp from your baby lips—
Ah, heaven itself could not contain
Such joy, as my boy come back again!

Sleep undisturbed, though I build alone,
I lay your life for a corner-stone.

THE IDLE-RICH.

The Builder wrought on the rising wall, and oh, but the wall was fair,
And it stood four-square to the winds of God, for the Builder laid it
there;

And the Builder said, "This wall will be, 'mid the roll of hostile drums,
The rock of My chosen people when the final crisis comes."

* * * * *

Sickly, puny and pallid, languid, lazy and lost,
They suck from the soul of the nation the milk of unspeakable cost;
Gilded and gay and degraded, selfish and silly and vain,
Parasites fed by the brave and the strong, they stick like a slimy stain.

Born of the fat, soft-handed, nurtured in studied ease,
With none but themselves to live for, and none but themselves to
please;

Days that are lost in loafing, nights that are spent in sin—
Playing at life in the midst of life where others are out to win!

Holding themselves a people better than common clay,
Turning aside with scorning to pass by another way
The man who has gripped with the present—these are the la-de-daws
Who blate of "the lower classes," and laugh at a common cause.

True, they are sons of the people, up from the earth they came—
But they hold their low beginning as though it were a shame—
Shaming the blood that bore them, shaming the land they stain,
Selling their souls for an idle life and counting the sale a gain!

These are the sores of a nation, these are its putrid spots;
Their wealth its greatest danger, their lives its blackest blots;
These are the modern lepers, white with the lucre-itch—
The hopeless, helpless, useless, indolent Idle-Rich!

* * * * *

The Builder paused in His work on the wall, and the wall was strong
and fair,
And He tried each brick ere He placed it in for the weight that a brick
will bear,
And along with the bricks of adamant he came on a brick of straw,
And He flung the fraud on the rubbish-heap, for such is the Builder's
law.

THE SON OF MARQUIS NODDLE.

He is brand-new out from England, and he thinks he knows it all—

(There's a bloomin' bit o' goggle in his eye)

The "colonial" that crosses him is going to get a fall—

(There's a seven-pound revolver on his thigh).

He's a son of Marquis Noddle, he's a nephew of an earl,

In the social swim of England he has got 'em all awlirl,

He's as confident as Cæsar and as pretty as a girl—

Oh, he's out in deadly earnest, do or die.

They will spot him in the cities by the cowhide on his feet—

(They were built for crushing cobble-stones at 'ome)

And the giddy girls will giggle when they see him on the street—

(There's a brand-new cowboy hat upon his dome).

He has come from home and kindred to the land beyond the sea,

To the far-famed land of plenty, to the country of the free,

But he can't forget he owns it from Cape Race to Behring Sea—

He is coming just as Cæsar would to Rome.

When his pile is getting slender he'll go looking for a job,

(And he thinks he ought to get it, don'tche-know)

But he finds that he must mingle with the common city mob,

(How *can* they think that he would sink so low?).

So he hikes him to the country, where the rustics will be proud

To salute him when they meet him, and to whisper, nice and loud,

"He's the son of Marquis Noddle,—you would know him in a crowd"—

They will pay him there the homage that they owe.

In the little country village he will manufacture mirth—
 (For it's there they take the measure of a swell)
They will soon proceed to teach him that he doesn't own the earth
 (With a quit-claim on the sun and moon as well).
They will show him that the country isn't altogether slow,
And that they can travel any pace that he's a mind to go,
He will be a right good fellow till they run him out of dough—
 Oh, it is a tale of merriment they tell!

So to keep his bones together he goes working on a farm,
 (Where they get up at a little after two)
Where they think to take him down a peg will not do any harm,
 (And they sleep when there is nothing else to do).
Where they work him like a nigger nearly twenty hours a day,
And they don't disguise the fact that they consider him a jay,
And he eats so much and sleeps so much he isn't worth his pay—
 Oh, it doesn't matter that his blood is blue.

He decides to do a season as a cowboy in the West,
 (Where they call a man a boy until he's dead)
And he tries to walk a-swagger with a military chest,
 (And he isn't overslept or overfed).
They will set him breaking bronchos, though it's little to his mind;
With many new-learned epithets he'll perforate the wind—
How can he know the boys have stuck a thistle on behind?
 He will end the exhibition on his head.

They will fill him full of liquor that'll frizzle his inside,
 (In the cooler he can square it with his God)
He will spend his nights in places where the *demi-monde* reside,
 (In the morning he'll be minus watch and wad).
They'll abuse him as a youngster, they will mock him as a man,
They'll make his life a thorny path in every way they can,
Till he curses his existence and the day that it began,
 And he wishes he was rotting in the sod.

He will write long tales to England, tales of bitterness and woe,
 (They will print 'em in the papers over there)
He will tell them pretty nearly everything he doesn't know,
 (And they'll take it all for gospel over there).
He will tell them that the country isn't fit for gentlemen,
That any who escape from it do not come back again,
He is handy with his language and he wields a bitter pen—
 To the truth of each assertion he would swear.

He's a growler, he's a growser, he's a nuisance, he's a bum,
 (And the country hasn't any room for such)
And they class him in the papers as "European scum,"
 (They would rather have the Irish or the Dutch).
He's the butt of every jester, he's the mark of every joke,
He is wearing borrowed trousers—he has put his own in soak—
He's a useless good-for-nothing, beaten, buffeted, and broke,
 And of sympathy he won't get overmuch.

* * * * *

In a dozen years you'll find him with a section of his own,
 (He had to learn his lesson at the start)
With a happy wife and children he is trying to atone—
 (For he loves the country now with all his heart).
He's a son of dear old England, he's a hero, he's a brick;
He's the kind you may annihilate but you can never lick,
For he played and lost, and played and lost, and stayed and took the
 trick;
In a world of men he'll play a manly part.

THE PLOUGH.

What power is this that stands behind the steel?—
A homely implement of blade and wheel—
Neglected by the margin of the way,
And flashing back the blaze of dying day;
Or dragging slow across the yellow field
In silent prophecy of lavish yield,
It marks the pace of innocence and toil,
And taps the boundless treasure of the soil.

Before you came the red-man rode the plain,
Untitled lord of Nature's great domain;
The shaggy herds, knee-deep in mellow grass,
The lazy summer hours were wont to pass;
The wild-goose nested by the water side;
The coyote roamed upon the prairie wide;
The black bear trod the woods in solemn night;
The lynx stole through the bushes in the night.

No sound of toil was heard in all the land;
No joyous laugh or voice of sharp command;
No cloud of smoke from iron funnels thrown
Was through the autumn hazes gently blown;
No edge of steel tore up the virgin sod;
No church its shining finger turned to God;
No tradesman labored over bench and tool;
No children chattered on their way to school.

But all the land lay desolate and bare,
Its wealth of plain, its forest riches rare
Unguessed by those who saw it through their tears,
And Nature—miser of a thousand years—
Was adding still to her immense reserve
That shall supply the world with brawn and nerve:
But all lay silent, useless, and unused,
And useless 'twas because it was unused.

You came. Straightway the silent plain
Grew mellow with the glow of golden grain;
The axes in the solitary wood
Rang out where stately oak and maple stood;
The land became alive with busy din,
And as the many settled, more came in;
The world looked on in wonder and dismay—
The building of a nation in a day!

By lake and river, rock and barren waste,
A peaceful army toiled in eager haste;
Ten thousand workers sweating in the sun
Pressed on the task so recently begun;
Their outworks every day were forced ahead—
And every day they gave their toll of dead—
Until at length the double lines of steel
Received the steaming steed and whirling wheel!

Where yesterday the lazy bison lay
A city glitters in the sun to-day;
His paths are turned to streets of wood and stone,
And thousands tread the way he trod alone;
The mighty hum of industry and trade
Fills all the place where once he held parade,
And far away the unheard river's play
Makes joyous night still brighter than the day!

Upon the plains a thousand towns arise,
And quickly each to be a city tries;
The sound of trade is heard on every hand,
And sturdy men rise to possess the land;
Awhile they lingered, thinking it a dream,
But now they flow in a resistless stream
That seems to fill the prairie far and near,
Yet in its vastness soon they disappear.

Where once the silent red-man spurned the ground
A land of peace and plenty now is found,
A land by Nature destined to be great,
Where every man is lord of his estate;
Where men may dwell together in accord,
And honest toil receive its due reward;
Where loyal friends and happy homes are made,
And culture follows hard the feet of trade.

This you have made it: Is it vain to hope
The sons of such a land will climb and grope
Along the undiscovered ways of life,
And neither seek nor be found shunning strife,
But ever, beckoned by a high ideal,
Press onward, upward, till they make it real;
With feet sure planted on their native sod,
And will and aspirations linked with God?

THE PAINTERS.

Into the soul of a poet

 A thought unbidden flew,
And he fashioned words to metre
 And he laid them out in view;
And he knew that the thing he had spoken
 And the words he had placed in rhyme
Had come from before Creation,
 From the Starting-Post of Time!

All things are in the Beginning,
 All things are to the End,
Though few may know the secret,
 And none may comprehend;
And some must paint in error,
 And some must paint aright;
For some paint in the shadow,
 And some paint in the light.

Not his is success or failure,
 Not his is the boast or blame,
He fashioned the Thing as he saw it,
 He gave the Thought as it came;
And if doubtful and dim the vision,
 And faulty and vague the phrase,
The vision was not of his making—
 Not his is the blame or praise.

For some may paint in plaster,
 And some may paint in stone,
And some may paint in company,
 And some must paint alone;
And some may paint in sorrow,
 And some may paint in jest,
But only the Master Painter
 Shall say who paints the best.

THE SUFFERERS.

There's a breed that is born to suffer,
 To carry the sin of the age,
And it matters not the condition,
 And it matters not the wage,
Nor where in the wide creation
 The lure of the light they see—
There's a breed that is born to suffer,
 As ever the breed must be.

Not for them is the peace of pleasure,
 Or the comfort of content;
Ever they bear the burden,
 Though weary they be, and bent;
Their days are spent in labor,
 Their nights are spent in pain:
There's a breed that is born to suffer,
 That others may reap the gain.

They are not of one flag or nation;
 They are not of one color or race;
They are not of one school of thinking;
 They are not of one class or place;
But the blood of the breed is in them
 And will not let them lie:
There's a breed that is born to suffer,
 And suffer they must, or die.

When the world is lax and lazy,
 Or sleeping in sweet content,
The breed is hard at the business
 For which the breed was sent;
And straining with brain and muscle,
 In saintliness or sin,
They pry at the gates of knowledge
 That all may enter in.

For the Thought that demands expression;
For the Purpose that will attain;
For the Thing that must be discovered,
They carry the weight of pain;
For the Truth that needs revealing,
For the Law that is still unknown—
These are the calls they answer,
And make the call their own.

The world knows not that they labor,
The world knows not of the need,
The world knows not of the doing
Until it beholds the Deed;
And some it accepts with gladness,
And some it rejects with scorn,
But the sufferer had to do it,
For to that end was he born.

And so in the hours of darkness
They try the untrodden ways,
There's never a path leads onward
But the path their efforts blaze;
And little they care for labor,
Though weary and dark the night;
There's a breed that is born to suffer—
To suffer is their delight!

*The world may read the verses,
But it will not understand,
For it does not know the workers,
Nor the way the work is planned;
But the Men of the Midnight Effort—
To them will the truth be known,
For the breed that was born to suffer
Have a language of their own.*

WANDERING BOY.

Brave were the words as he went away;

Loyal and true:

Heavy the hearts he left that day;

Little he knew:

Little he knew of the plans they laid,

Little he knew of the price they paid,

Little he knew of the tears that strayed

Over the two.

Gay were the hopes as they urged him on;

Subtle and sly:

Black was the night when the hopes were gone;

Wondering why:

Weary and lone were the ways he went;

Dreary and dull were the days he spent;

Ever the lure of his discontent

Bidding him try.

Ever the sun sets in the West;

Yellow and gold:

Ever a face to a window prest:

Can it behold,

Large in the lens of the dying light,

Wandering Boy, in joy or plight,

Trudging sturdily into the night,

Fearless and bold?

Mother may wait till her hair be gray;

Slumbering pain:

Mother may wait till she pass away,

Praying in vain:

Feet that have entered the Western Door

Never return to the paths of yore:

Wandering Boy comes nevermore,

Never again!

THE BLIND THAT WAS NEVER DRAWN.

She lived on a lonely homestead,
Mother of children four,
And the poor and the lost and the friendless
Found refuge at her door;
And when night came down in the winter,
And howled with dismal din,
She set a light in the window
To guide the wanderer in.

For it was a rule of the household,
From darkness unto dawn
The light should burn in the window,
And never the blind be drawn;
And wanderers out on the prairie,
Perplexed in the stormy night,
Found safety through its signal
And blessed the kindly light.

'Twas but a little kindness,
'Twas but a little cost,
But it seemed the gate of heaven
To travellers in the frost;
Weary and weak and bewildered,
Floundering on in despair,
They caught the gleam from the window,
And found salvation there.

And some were old and needy,
And some were young and strong,
And some had walked the right road,
And some had walked the wrong;
But here was warmth and lodging
And food for every guest,
And all had quiet comfort,
And all had peace and rest.

No more the mortal candle
Beams from the window-pane;
The eyes that seek its signal
Must seek, alas, in vain!
But far along the unknown way
Clear shines a beacon light,
And wanderers press homeward
Through the darkness of the night.

A PRAIRIE HEROINE.

They were running out the try-lines, they were staking out the grade;
Through the hills they had to measure, through the sloughs they had to
wade;

They were piercing unknown regions, they were crossing nameless
streams,

With the prairie for a pillow and the sky above their dreams,
They were mapping unborn cities in the age-long pregnant clay:
When they came upon a little mound across the right-of-way.

There were violets growing on it, and a buttercup or two,
That whispered of affection ever old and ever new,
And a little ring of whitewashed stones, bright in the summer sun,
But of marble slab or granite pile or pillar there was none;
And across the sleeping prairie lay a little, low-built shack,
With a garden patch before it and a wheat-field at its back.

“Well, boys, we’d better see him, and he hadn’t ought to kick,
For we’ll give him time to move it if he does it pretty quick.”
But scarcely had the foreman spoke when straight across the farm
They saw the settler coming with a rifle on his arm;
Some would ha’ hiked for cover but they had no place to run,
But most of them decided they would stay and see the fun.

The farmer was the first to speak: “I hate to interfere,
And mighty glad I am to see the railway comin’ near,
But before you drive your pickets across this piece of land
You ought to hear the story, or you will not understand:
It’s the story of a girl who was as true as she was brave,
And all that now remains of her is in that little grave.

“I didn’t want to bring her when I hit the trail out West,
I knew I shouldn’t do it, and I did my level best
To coax her not to come out for a year or two, at least,
But to stay and take it easy with her friends down in the East;
But while I coaxed and argued I was feelin’ mighty glum,
And right down in my heart I kep’ a-hopin’ she would come.

“Well, by rail and boat and saddle we got out here at last,
A-livin’ in the future, and forgettin’ of the past;
We built ourselves a little home, and in our work and care
It seemed to me she always took what was the lion’s share;
God knows just what she suffered, but she hid it with a smile,
And made out that she thought I was the only thing worth while.

“She stood it through the summer and the warm, brown days of fall,
And of all the voices calling her she would not hear the call;
But when the winter settled with its cold, white pall of snow
She seemed to whiten with it, but she thought I didn’t know;
She tried to keep her spirits up and laugh my fears away,
But I saw her growing thin and ever weaker day by day.

“At last I couldn’t stand it any longer, so I said,
‘I think you’d better try and spend a day or two in bed
While I go for a doctor. It’s only sixty miles.’
She gave a little wistful look, half hidden in her smiles,
And said, ‘Perhaps you’d better, though I think I’ll be all right
When the spring comes.’ . . . Well, I started out that night.

“I made the trip on horseback, and we floundered on all night,
And reached our destination in the early morning light.
But the doctor had gone out of town,—just where, no one could say,
And a lump rose in my chest that fairly took my breath away.
But I daren’t stay there thinking, and my search for him was vain,
So I bought some wine and brandy and I started home again.

“Forgetful of my horse, I spent the whole night on the road,
Till early in the morning he collapsed beneath his load;
I saw the brute was done for, and although it made me cry,
I hacked into his jug’lar vein and left him there to die;
And then I shouldered the supplies and staggered on alone,
And thinking of my wife’s distress, I quite forgot my own.

“She must ha’ watched all night for me, for in the morning grey
She saw me stagger in the snow and fall beside the way,
And God knows how she did it—she was only skin and bone—
But she came out here and found me and dragged me home alone,
And she took the precious liquor that had cost us all so dear,
And poured it down this worthless hulk that’s standin’ blattin’ here. . . .

“I guess you know what happened: I lived, she passed away;
I robed her in her wedding-dress and laid her in the clay;
And every spring I plant the flowers that grow upon her grave,
For I hold the spot as sacred as the Arimathæan’s cave;
And when the winter snows have come, and all is white and still,
I spread a blanket on the mound to keep out frost and chill.

“Folks say I’ve got a screw loose, that I’ve gone to acting queer,
But I sometimes hear her speaking, and I know she’s always near;
And sometimes in the night I feel the pressure of her hand
And for a blessed hour I share with her the Promised Land:—
Let man or devil undertake to desecrate my dead
And as sure as God’s in heaven I will pump him full of lead.”

They were rough-and-ready railway men who stood about the spot,
They were men that lied and gambled, they were men that drank and
fought,

But some of them were sneezing, and some were coughing bad,
And some were blowing noses on anything they had;
And some of them were swallowing at lumps that shouldn’t come,
And some were swearing softly, and some were simply dumb.

At last the foreman found his voice: “I guess your claim is sound;
I wouldn’t care to run a track across that piece of ground. . . .
We’ll have to change our lay-out . . . but I hope . . . we have the grace
To build a fitting monument to mark that holy place;
Put me down for a hundred; now, boys, how much for you?”
And they answered in a chorus, “We’ll see the business through.”

* * * * *

The passengers upon a certain railway o’er the plain
See a shining shaft of marble from the windows of the train,
But they do not know the story of the girl-wife in the snow
And the broken-hearted farmer with his lonely load of woe,
And none of them have guessed that the deflection in the line
Is the railway-builders’ tribute to a prairie heroine.

JUST BE GLAD.

Feelin' kind o' all run down?

Mighty bad:

Sick and tired o' life in town?

Don't be sad:

What you're needing isn't rest:

Square your shoulders, raise your chest;

Pack your turkey; go out West—

Just be glad!

Gone astray in No-Man's-Land?

Silly lad!

Ought to have your carcass tanned

With a gad:

Should ha' kept the narrow track:

Never mind, you can't go back;

Things may not be quite so black—

Just be glad!

Gone and blown in all your cash

On a fad?

Livin' now on soup and hash?

Writin' Dad?

Don't you do it. Here's a tip:

Keep a good stiff upper lip;

Needn't fall because you slip—

Just be glad!

Friends refuse to help you out?

Don't get mad!

You would be a lazy lout

If they had.

Do not envy place or pelf;

Praise the Lord, you've got your health;

Dig in! Be a man yourself—

Just be glad!

All the world may say or do,

Good or bad,

Isn't anything to you—

Just be glad!

Though you work at book or trade,

Though you work with pen or spade,

Hump yourself—you'll make the grade—

Just be glad!

THE CHARITY WARD.

*Is't well to boast of Empire and brag of Britain's might,
Is't well to sing of her soldiers or hurry them into the fight,
Is't well to raise your anthem for the King upon his throne,
While ye leave the Mother Country to bear the load alone?*

Many the winds that rise and fall to the flag that ye call your own,
And ye walk secure to the ends of earth wherever that flag is known;
Safe as a child in its mother's arms ye come and ye go at will,
And ye take it all for granted—and your Mother pays the bill.

Never a wave that beats your shore but knows her floating steel,
Never a sand in your harbor fronts but knows her iron keel,
Never a child in your inland towns but lisps of her “hearts of oak,”
And the breath that ye breathe as the air of God is thick with her
sulphur-smoke.

Truly ye come of a nation, sired of an unwhipped breed,
Girding yourself with vigor, virile in thought and deed,
Tracking the trackless future, making its hopes your own
As ye reap the fruit—the peace and power—the Motherland hath sown.

Truly ye love your Mother—never more loyal word
Than boast ye make of Britain by British ear was heard—
Valiant are ye, and haughty, mighty in speech and song,
But ye turn your eyes to heaven when the hat is passed along.

Dreaming your dreams and visions—making your dreams come true—
Offering not of your substance, offering words in lieu—
Large in your little dealings, small in your great affairs,
Proud of the land that bore ye, but blind to the load she bears.

Ye give of your blood on occasion—and royal and clean the gift—
But ye know the load is heavy and ye do not stoop to lift;
And hers is all the burden, and yours is all the shame—
The charity-ward of the Empire, a nation only in name!

*Is't well to boast of Empire and brag of Britain's might,
Is't well to sing of her soldiers or hurry them into the fight,
Is't well to raise your anthem for the King upon his throne,
While ye leave the Mother Country to bear the load alone?*

THE PRODIGALS.

Knee-deep our prairies link the seas,
Flood-full our voiceless rivers wend;
We hold unturned the larder keys
On which the future years depend:
And shall we suffer alien throngs
Usurp the land to us belongs?

What though we are to fortune born
And all our paths are paved with gold?
We flaunt our folly up to scorn
Because we keep not what we hold:
Why should we rob our right of birth
To foster all the breeds of earth?

We picture with unfeigned dismay
Man-glutted lands of other flags,
They multiply but to decay,
With senile sires and harping hags;
Why hasten we to emulate
These helpless tragedies of Fate?

The land our children's sons will need,
That hand we have wide open thrown
To heathen knaves of other breed
And paunchy pirates of our own:
We give away earth's greatest prize,
And pat ourselves, and call us wise.

No father he who to the slums
For husband to his child would send,
And no one worthy of her comes
She lives a maiden to the end:
Yet we have placed our virgin trust
In spawn of Continental lust.

If dumb we be to Reason's cries—

Our children's cause she pleads in vain—

Our outraged sons at length will rise

And seize their heritage again;

And fools, who prate of vested right,

Will either cease to prate—or fight.

The land is ours, the land will keep,

And Time is nowise near its end;

We hold our birthright all too cheap

Its sacredness to comprehend;

In after years our sons will say,

“Why frittered ye the land away?”

THE SEER.

In the dingy dusk of his deerskin tent sat the chief of a dying race,
And the lake that lapt at his wigwam door threw back a frowning face,
And a sightless squaw at the centre-pole crooned low in a hybrid
speech,

When a man of God swept round the point and landed on the beach.

The heavy eyes grew bright with fire, the lips shaped to a sneer —
“Welcome, my paleface brother, what good news brings you here?
Are you come with the voice of healing, with the book of your
blameless breed,

To soothe my soul with comfort while my body gnaws with need?

“Welcome, O paleface brother; come, what have you to fear?
Mayhap the redskin chieftain can teach as well as hear;
And while we sing your sacred songs and breathe your mystic prayer,
Who knows what inspiration may come on the ev’ning air? . . .

“Listen; you are a scholar, schooled in the paleface lore:
’Tis said a dying saint may sometimes see the shining shore;
That closing eyes peer far beyond the realm of mortal sight,—
Who knows but that a dying race may read the road aright?

“A dying race! We know it; the land is ours no more,
No more we roam the prairies as in the days of yore;
The brave, free spirit that was ours is crushed and passed away,
And bodies without spirits are predestined to decay.

“No matter. In the summertime the flowers bloom in the grass,
The startled insects flood the fields and chirrup as you pass,
The birds sing in the bushes; but before the wintry blast
The flowers and the insects and the little birds are past.

“Yet once again the spring will come, the flowers will bloom again,
And insects chirrup blithely where the former ones are lain;
The white snows of the wintertime will vanish in the heat,
And out-door life and color will follow their defeat.

“Can the paleface read the riddle? Has he eyes to see the signs?
Or thinketh he that snow will lie forever on the pines?
That housed-up life can triumph for the mastery of state,
Or cushioned chairs produce a race destined to dominate?

“Behold, the things your hands have done, the power your arts have
won—

Behold, these things shall vanish as the snow before the sun;
The snow that smothered out the red—ah, hear it if you can—
Shall leave the earth as suddenly, *and leave it brown and tan.*

“Hear ye a little lesson—surely ye know its worth—
Only an out-door nation can be master of the earth;
Soon as ye seek your couches, soft with the spoils of trade—
See well to your outer trenches before the mines are laid!

“Hear ye a little lesson—can ye the truth divine?
Milk ye may mix with water, and water will mix with wine;
Mix as ye may on your prairies, mix in your hope, and toil,
But know in all your mixing that water won’t mix with oil!”

In the dingy dusk of his deerskin tent sat the chief of a dying race,
And the glow of holy prophecy lit up his rugged face,
And the fading light of the setting sun fell far on an eastern land,—
And who shall save the paleface if he will not understand?

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 *The Empire Builders and Other Poems*, by Robert J. C. Stead.]