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THE LYNCHING BEE
AND OTHER POEMS

SOME BOOKS by WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD

THE POET OF GALILEE

THE VAUNT OF MAN and Other Poems

GLORY OF THE MORNING

(In "Wisconsin Plays," First Series)

Published by B. W. Huebsch, New York

THE FRAGMENTS OF EMPEDOCLES

(Rendered into Blank Verse)

AESOP AND HYSSOP

(Humorous Fables in Rhyme)

SOCRATES, MASTER OF LIFE

(A Companion Study to the Poet of Galilee)

Published by The Open Court Publishing Co., Chicago

LUCRETIUS

(Rendered Entire into Blank Verse)

Published by J. M. Dent and Co., London
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✓
THE LYNCHING BEE
AND OTHER POEMS

BY
WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD



θαρήσας μάλα εἰπέ θεοπρόπιον ὅτι οἶσθα . . .

ILIAD, I, 85

NEW YORK B. W. HUEBSCH, INC., 1920

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TO
THOSE IN ALL LANDS
WHO,
IN THE WORDS OF EMERSON,
"WALK AS PROPHECIES OF
THE NEXT AGE"

u. s. v. 7/1/21

FOREWORD

This volume brings together chiefly poems that attempt, by some union of imagination and criticism, to phrase the ominous turmoil of the times. It is the author's hope that it may be followed by a volume phrasing more explicitly the creative energies and purposes already so undauntedly at work.

W. E. L.

MADISON, WIS.

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I By Fire and Rope

THE LYNCHING BEE
LEO FRANK
A WAR-MOVIE

The Lynching Bee

I

HERE at the crossroads is the night so black
It swallows tree and thicket, barn and stack,
Even though the sickle of the new moon hang,
Keen as a knife, bent like a boomerang,
A witch's bangle in the Zodiac.

Black on the crossroads . . . but in skies off yonder
There broods a fiery gloom, a hectic glow,
Like the last twilight just before the thunder,
Or omens of doomed soothsayers, long ago . . .
To-day the veriest dog or mule would know
It only means a lighted town thereunder.

II

Honk, Honk!
On to the fork! Honk! Honk!
You hear?
From hand-squeezed bulb and belching conch!
Honk! Honk!
Down in the hollow now, but near.
How many there? —
Honk! Honk!
Topping the hill off there —
Behind the foremost cone of glare —
That, like the swift typhoon,
Sweeps on along each length of rut

And makes their ridges as clear cut
As in Uganda at high noon
Stand out the Mountains of the Moon.
Honk,— for the brasses and cat-gut!
Honk, Honk,— for cymbals and bassoon!
New times, new music and new fun!
Though Bottom's gone and Oberon,
With Satyr, Dwarf, and pet Baboon,
Midsummer nights have still their rites.
Honk, Honk: "We've caught the coon!"
("Honk" means they've caught the coon.)

III

They stop — they jerk — they chug — they back.
And in a monstrous ring they park,
With ghostly cones converging from the dark
Upon a central tree all split and black,
Whose limbs and leaves are caverned out of sight
In the eternity of night.
It's like a magic circle where
Snake-dancers, striped, brown, and bare,
With pouch in waving hand and horns on hair,
In old times swayed and swung
And called on Tunga-Tung,
With nasal *ang* and guttural *unk*
Around a lightning-blasted trunk,
Or hissed in chorus with a serpent-stare.
Yet nothing like this there —
It's only the sign-board of the town's,
And crossroads cottonwood by Farmer Brown's.

IV

It's only twelve true men in pants and coats
(The sort who pay their bills, and cast their votes,
Or file to jury boxes on hot afternoons) . . .
Each with a finger on a trigger,
Dragging by ropes, around his gullet tied,
With hobbled legs and arms well lashed to **side**,
The best of all buffoons —
A banjo-boy and jigger,
A hovel-doorway bawler of coarse tunes.
Like Caliban he shuffles, only bigger;
Or Ourang-outang, only larger-eyed —
A bandy-legged nigger,
Quite jerky, but all silent down inside.

V

They take the rope off at the tree — perhaps
Won't hang him after all? — These humorous chaps!
Just make him dance amid the glare
For women-folk and boys and girls back there,
Still in their seats?
Make him show off his feats? —
Stand on his head-piece while he eats
Hoe-cakes or possum sweets?
Or turn him up, and have him wag his **ears**;
Or wriggle and wrinkle scalp and brow,
Like a fly-bitten back of Holstein cow,
And throw from pate a bowl or plate,
While underneath he grins and leers? —

He'll butt his thick skull 'gainst the trunk, I think,
And then draw back, guffaw, and wink.

VI

Not so. They pay a chain out link by link.
Hear it rattle, hear it clink!
A good stout chain so much can do! —
As dancing bear and old-time showman knew,
Or bloodhound leashed at kennel door in straw.
And down along the Nile,
With Pharaoh's Sphinx in view,
The Coptic coolies, with a chain or two
Around his belly, tail, and jaw,
Aboard the freighter hoist the crocodile
For Circus or for Zoo —
A stout chain holds,
Come fear or fire, whatever's in its folds.

VII

They strip him, overalls and shirt,
They set his back against the tree,
They wind the links so tight about,
In girdles two and three. . . .
And yet it hardly seems to hurt,—
For not a word says he.
Honk! Honk!

VIII

He stands five fathoms deep in glare agrin.
Honk, Honk! Honk, Honk!
His skin-bark on the tree bark-skin,
Trunk grafted on to trunk.
Honk! Honk! . . .
The graft should take, for they are close of kin,—
Both sprung of one old soil of earth,
Both fed on rain and air and dirt from birth,
Both tough and stark and thin . . .

IX

One steps with jack-knife up. And he
Will cut the bark — of which dark tree?
Nigger or cottonwood? — With that
He gelds him like a colt or cat!
But the coon's caterwauls and wails
(Honk, Honk! Honk, Honk!)
Fall thin and blurred and flat —
While every conch-horn at him rails:
“ No more he'll spawn in bush or bed,
With cocaine crazed, with whiskey drunk,
A charcoal woolly head,
Or yellow half-breed brat! ”
Honk, Honk!

X

Another comes with brush and pot,
And smears him over, as with ointment hot.

Honk! Honk!
Good fellow, at your trellised house in town,
You boil the tar to indigo and brown,
Shimmering in sunshine, bubbling to the brim —
Why waste it at the crossroads here on him?
Tar on your driveway, rolled in grit,
Makes you a roadbed firm and fit;
Tar on your upturned row-boat sinks
In all the nail-holes, joints, and chinks;
Tar on your gadding daughter's white kid shoe
Was black, and tickled you all through;
But, brother, with the brush and pot,
Tar does no good on hide of Hottentot —
Or have you feathers in a bag or two? —
If so, by now, he'd just as lief as not.
Honk! Honk!

XI

With rags, and straw, and sticks, and other toys,
In run the women-folk and girls and boys.
They'll prod his ribs? tickle his arm-pits? sop
His sweating cheeks, as with a pantry mop?
Such crossroads pranks are not just right
For decent town-folk, it would seem. . . .
(Or is this only a midsummer dream
In innocent midnight?) . . .
Besides they haven't the heart. They drop
Their knickknacks at black ankles and bare feet,
And cool him from the spouts of cans
(Fetched from below-stairs, under washing pans
[16])

Porcelain-lined and scoured so white).
And then they all, excepting one, retreat,
Back through the length of light.

XII

This one is honored over every other,—
She is the dead child's Mother.

And the two glare and glare
At one another
In two eternities of hate and pain,
Yet with such monstrous union in despair,
Such hideous sameness in their haggard shapes,
The one, the other,
That you would say the twain
Seemed like a savage sister and twin-brother
Dying of hunger out among the apes.

XIII

Her hand is clutching her unsuckled breast —
You know the rest:
The bloody curls, the dainty skirt a shred,
The sprawling hand-prints on the legs and head,
Her body's little body in a shed. . . .
Then down she kneels;
You see her hunched back and her upturned heels. . . .
But not the scratch and scratch,
Not the small flame that tips the second match. . . .
And not her hands, her face, her hank of hair,—

As when a Java woman kneels in prayer,
Under a temple-hut of thatch,
Before some devil-idol standing lone,—
Not far from jungles and the tiger's lair,—
Carved from the teak-wood to a jet-black face,
With Pagan wrinkles, curving pair by pair,
With set grimace,
And two great eyeballs, staring white in stone. . . .
Whilst smoke curls roofward from its hidden base. . . .

The Mother rises . . . will depart . . .
Her duty done . . . and her desire. . . .
And as she turns, you see a strange
And quiet rapture of most uncouth change.
For from her burning marrow, her crazed heart,
She has transferred the fire
Of horror and despair
To the dumb savage there. . . .
She has transferred, she thinks, the fire to him.
Honk, Honk! let lights be dim!
(And now the lights are dim.) . . .

XIV

And for a moment is the night so black
It swallows tree and coon and all the pack,
And lets the sickle of the new moon hang,
Keen as a knife, bent like a boomerang,
A witch's bangle in the Zodiac.

XV

Gone is the light that played upon the tree,
But at the cottonwood's own base
Another light now takes its place —
And there is still so much for us to see.
Honk! Honk!

There have been many bonfires on the earth,
Born out of many moods and needs of men:
As when the maskers, in their twilight mirth
On Wessex heaths, would burn Guy Fawkes again;
As when the bustling country-side in dread
Against the Armada's coming set the beacons,
In the heroic English days, on Beachy Head,
When the midsummer sea-winds blew;
As when the village dames and Yankee deacons
Out on the common had a barbecue;
As when the boys in South and North
Still make the boxes blaze and crackle on the Fourth.
The ghouls and witches too
In olden times and regions far away
Danced at their wonted rendezvous
Upon the Brocken on the first of May,
Screaming round the bonfire's light
All through Walpurgis Night.—
Honk! Honk!

There is much fascination in a flame,—
Not least, whenever it has sprung
In intertwining tongue and tongue,
And left the one small spot from whence it came —
Faster, faster, higher, higher,

Shapes of wing, and wave, and lyre,
Shapes of demon-heads and peakèd caps
And flying smocks, and shreds and scraps
Of all fantastic things without a name.
Tongue after tongue in middle air —
Snatched from existence, how and where? —
There is much fascination in a flame —
Not least, when it is yellow, blue, and red,
With blackness for a background and a frame,
Still fuel-fed
With straw and wood and tar and kerosene,
And some organic matter still alive.—
Its witcheries of color, how they strive! —
Even though some smudge and smoke may get between.

XVI

Yet two vast bloodshot eyeballs by their might
Out-top the flame, though from the flame their light —
Two eyeballs wrought (like eyeballs of the steer's
Or dog's, or cat's, or woodchuck's, or a deer's)
By one blind Nature in a mammal's womb,—
By one Herself with neither eyes nor ears,
Nor birth, nor breath, nor doom.

The two vast eyeballs grow and grow,
Till, to the masters of the revels,
They seem the eyeballs of the devil's
Ascending from hell-fire down below.
The masters will not have it so:
A pole, all glowing charcoal at the tip,—

Zip, Zip! Zip, Zip!
Honk, Honk! Honk, Honk!
And the blind savage at the flaming tree
No more will glare so monstrously.

XVII

But on the crossroads our midsummer dream
Converts each flame into a scream, a scream —
A shriek, a shriek!
The horns honk at them as a hose at fire;
But still with every honk they come,
Shriek after shriek,
But fiercer, faster, higher!
(And all the while before, he was as dumb
As Roman martyr, schooled to turn the cheek.)
Honk, honk, away to left and right! —
Between the honking and the shrieking black
The odds (awhile) are ten to one to-night
In favor of the blazing maniac!
All ancient Africa is in his yells:
The wounded zebra's neighing, the gazelle's
Fierce whinny at the salt-lick, and the goat's;
The roars of lions, with distended throats,
Over the moonlit rocks for hollow hunger;
The bellowing elephants, with jaws agape,
And lifted trunks that thrash across their backs
Like writhing pythons or the great sea-conger,
Their monstrous hindlegs bogged beyond escape
In fire-swept jungles off their beaten tracks.
All Africa is in the negro's shrieks:

The forests with their thousand parrot-beaks,
From Nile and Congo to the Cape;
But the Gorilla, the man-ape,
With his broad, hairy, upright chest,
Seems to out-scream the rest.
All Africa is in his agony:
The human ladings at the western coast,
The slave-ship, and the storm at sea,
The naked bodies (never very old) —
Dragged, sick and crippled, from the fetid hold
And over the pitching gunwales tossed,
Both male and female, overboard,
While sharks, careening on their backs,
In the green swells with scudding foam astreak,
Ate up the blacks,
And crew and captain prayed the Lord,
Or crammed fresh oakum in the leak.
All Africa is on his lips:
The million sweats, the million bloody whips,
The million ankles festering in a cord —
The unborn baby still between the hips,
The bent gray head along the rice-swamp humming,
“O Massa Gawd, I’s’e coming.”

XVIII

His voice has come from other times and places. . . .
And hence away it carries far and far. . . .
For in mid-darkness, level with a limb,
Above the flames and smoking tar,

Ride feather-crested heads that bob at him,
With peering faces,
There — and — there — and there!
Faces, Faces,
Sudden and weird as those that loom and peep
Upon us nightly just before we sleep.
No hands, nor arms, nor tomahawks you see,
No thighs in buck-skins dyed and slashed,
No moccasin, no foot, no knee,
Not even a copper torso brave and bare
From many a war-path scarred and gashed —
But only faces, faces, faces,
Riding in the air —
Faces, faces, faces, faces,
Feather-crested with long braided hair,
Peering with an old desire
From the gloom upon the fire,
Summoned back from Otherwhere. . . .
Summoned back from What-has-been:
“ Is that a Jesuit father at the stake
Burning for his Jesus’ sake? —
He hung us crosses round our necks to save —
But when the Mohawks to our village came
They killed both squaw and brave;
We Hurons put the Mumble-Jumble to the flame.
The cross it was no good to make us win —
It was bad medicine! ”
And Seminole, Pawnee, and Sioux,
Apache, Blackfoot, Chippewa, and Crow,
Each gloats as if he saw anew
His own best captive of the long ago. . . .

XIX

The faces fade away. . . .
The Negro's cries
Have joined the uncouth sounds of Yesterday —
The incantations to the blood-red moon,
The ululations in the eclipse at noon,
The old palm-island lullabies
That ring-nosed crones were used to croon,
Squatting circle-wise. . . .
And the twelve Shadows to the fire fling
Great logs with fungus, spines, and rotted pith,
And great dead boughs with thin and sprawling arms
(Fetched from about a long abandoned spring,
And toad-stool woodlots of surrounding farms)
As if to cage in wickerwork therewith
(Like the wild people of a South-sea myth)
The Demon-in-fire from everything it harms. . . .

The Negro's corpse will take strange shapes,
As the flames gnaw it, flesh and bone;
But neither men shall see, nor apes,
For it shall burn from now alone. . . .

Alone . . . and up and up . . . and down and down. . . .
While honkers honk it back to town.

XX

At last the stench, or glow of embers, brings
The wolves, or wolf-like things. . . .
Such as on earthquake midnights prowl around

Smoulder of fallen beams and littered ground,
And tear from dead hands golden finger-rings.
But though they crouch in slow two-legged stealth,
Their hunt is not for wealth.
They paw into the cinders, as with hooks. . . .
Snatch something out,
With gloating, starveling looks
A bit of rib . . . or skull . . . or crup
Hot ash and finger knuckle
They wrap them up,
And putter round about
And chuckle
And foot it off and down the road,
Past the weasel, skunk, and toad,
The barnyard rat,
The hooting owl and the whirring bat.

XXI

But over the spot of glowing embers, listen,
The poplar's leaves are rustling like the rain
That patters on my garden-shrubs by night. . . .
The dew may glisten,
The south-wind come this way again,
And wander thither,
But the charred cottonwood has caught the blight. . . .
Its leaves shall wither.
Here on the fork, except that spot of red
(Still fierce as some primordial desire),
All lust is dead:
The lust to breed, the lust to burn;

The rut of flesh, the glut of fire. . . .
Lift up the head,
If still you can, and turn
To the great spaces of the skies.
Black . . . black . . . all black . . .
The moon has set,— perhaps elsewhere to hang,
Keen as a knife, bent like a boomerang,
A witch's bangle in the Zodiac . . .
Black . . . black . . . all black . . .
Though dawn be pregnant with her enterprise,
And stars perhaps will keep . . .
Black . . . black . . . and over yonder,
The glow is gone from all the town thereunder . . .
And all the people sleep . . . and sleep . . . and sleep.¹

¹ (You cringe and shrink? —
It makes your own eyes in their sockets ache? —
O squeamish listener, but think
It's all a midnight dream, and no one is awake;
And in the morning, with the bobolink,
We'll see together, you and I,
The flowers, the fields, the sun, the sky,
And the magnolia blossoms, white and pink.)

Leo Frank

At last ye got him ; there he swings
Above the howling people-kings.
At last ye got him ; he outstood
In innocence and hardihood
The servile court, the madman's knife,
The wreck of name and home and wife,
Still trusting God would see him through.
At last ye got him in the night,
Sick, wounded, worn, and strangely white —
Your burgher, Leo Frank, the Jew.

Ye hanged him on the gallows-tree.
He'll hang for all the years to be ;
Ye nor your children shall have power
To take him down a single hour ;
Nor wind, nor rain, nor bird of prey,
Shall eat that awful Form away,
Nor God once veil it from your view :
For 'tis no human head and limb —
Ye hanged God's Justice, hanging him,
Your burgher, Leo Frank, the Jew.

A War-Movie

*The posters at the Movie-door seemed to say:
'Ladies and gentlemen, right this way!
A jazzy tune with a bangorine,
And a classy film on a three-reel screen,
Primed with pep and with U. S. A.!—
Ladies and gentlemen, right this way!'*

*As a student of popular art and fun,
I stepped into darkness and saw*

REEL ONE

At Jackson Corners, on Lincoln Highway,
Down there in God's own Country, "I 'way,"
Under the apple-trees, behind the pickets,
In the rank quack-grass and the sumach thickets
And the black-eyed susans and the solomon seals,
Is a yard with the craziest junk on wheels:
Dead Man's rusted, rotted swappings . . .
Battered hayricks with cradles sprung;
Gravel-carts with splintered tongue;
Buggies with wind-rent window-trappings,
And the horse-hair stuffing sticking through
The mildewed seats of faded blue;
Sagging phaetons, cracked to the ribs,
With the lamps by the dash-board both askew;
Milk-wagons mouldly as old corn-cribs,
Their whipple-trees pivoted half-way round
Between the shafts still propped from the ground. . . .
One had a rain-speckled board for a prop,

With a handicraft sign, still to be read,
When the sun shone in, if you stood on your head:
WILHELM SCHNEIDER — BLACKSMITH SHOP. . . .
(A "fade-in" here and the first "close-up.") . . .
Springs and fenders of gaunt gray gigs,
Fifty grave-yard skeleton rigs,
Fit to join in a Dance of Death
With the horses that pulled and the farmers that whoa'd
(Hear the squeaking of their joints in jigs
Till the Man in the Moon seems holding his breath),
All dead together — bone, hide, and steel —
Derelicts all of the Open Road
Before the morning of the Automobile. . . .
Grease-less axles, hub-split spokes,
Nevermore to be auctioned hence . . .
Under gnarled apple-trees big as oaks,
Behind the palings of a paint-peeled fence.

But off one side,
Nearer the tangled arbor and sunk gate
And the stone hut where Schneider worked and died —
Shop, shed, and shanty merged on one estate —
There stands a Vehicle four-square in pride
That must be duly eyed,
As something full of fate:
Four low wide-fellied gorgeous wheels,
Gilded except for where the gilding peels,
Or seems to crock,
Bearing a box barred with an upright grate,
And gilded cornices of unicorns and eels,
And rearing griffins four of barbèd heels,
Though here and there the plaster's had a knock —

It's a piece of Circus rolling-stock. . . .
That day the village was in luck
When the Panther bit the Clown
And they left the hoodooed cage upon the town,
Off there among the Widow Schneider's truck. . . .

And on the Fourth the youngsters, taught
The Truths for which the Fathers fought,
Haul it away with a tackle in a span,
While the old woman screams and throws a pan,
As they trample her half-dried petticoats. . . .

— (Presto, change!) — It's one of the Floats,
Along with Cornwallis delivering his sword,
And along with the Gold-dust Twins in a Ford.
Behind the bars where the panther bled
There's a stuffed five-legged Calf instead.
(We read that he's stuffed and we see that he's dead.)
So round the street where the Circus went,
Past the Store and the Bank and the Shop-for-rent!
(See the Cadaver in the "close-up" wobble!
Hear the Orchestra going it double!)

*As often with me, I didn't get the clue;
So I sat in the darkness to see*

REEL TWO

At Jackson Corners, on Lincoln Highway,
Down there in God's own Country, "I'way,"
By the yard with the cage, in the hut of stone,
By the yard with the skeleton rigs alone,

Lived the leathery, calico Schneider crone
(As Reel Number One had purposely shown),
With the junk that her husband used to own. . . .
Ever since the couple emigrated here,
Jackson Corners pronounced them "queer"
And she pounded her mop with a bony clutch
And scolded her dog in German-Dutch
And the son of her brother's son was a Hun
Who burnt down Paris with a big squirt-gun
(If the Minister's sermon was true at all),
And crucified the gargoyles at Verdun
(As the four-minute Speaker seemed to hint in the
Hall)

Each week to the tin box nailed on the tree
She'd hobble for her *Zeitung* at the R. F. D.,
And read till sunset on her rag door-mat —
Until the Governor stopped all that!
And she used to get letters (the Postmistress said)
With the Kaiser's phiz on stamps pink-red,
Where he bragged of his devilish deeds, did he
(As whispered the Ladies at the Red Cross Bee) —
This son of her brother's son, the swine!
And nights in the yard, with a jerk in her spine
(As whispered the Children who'd stolen to see),
She'd giggle on the grass by the solomon seals,
And bang with a poker on the wagon-wheels,
And gibber in a treble the *Wacht am Rhein*,
And fling up her skirts in goose-step reels
For the Hyphenated-Spooks in the wagons that sat —
Till the loyal folk of "I'way" stopped all that!
And the day when the country went to war,
They heard her muttering in the General Store

At "Woodrow Wilson," the maltese cat!
All this and the Bonds that she didn't buy
Made Jackson Corners swear: "We'll get her! —
Couldn't afford it! — a yellow lie!
Couldn't afford it! — well, she'd better!"
Here is a "close-up" of her face —
Almost the Kaiser in a harpy grimace.
(See it a moment in the spot-light glow!
Hear the Orchestra banging below!)

*This sort of movie depresses me,
But I sat in the darkness to watch*

REEL THREE

At Jackson Corners, on Lincoln Highway,
Down there in God's own Country, "I'way,"
The gilded Circus-Cage
Again is in the center of the stage;
And in the center now of *it*
There glowers at the human race
Behind the bars in baffled fury-fit,
Not Panther or stuffed Calf in place,
But old crone Schneider's traitor-face!
(See her Eyes in the "close-up" pop!
Hear the Orchestra whooping it up!)

And now her ride begins. . . .
The Sheriff and the Deacon lead the jam,
On either side the rope like twins,
Each dressed in bunting as an Uncle Sam.

(Side by side in the "close-up" see
Each patriot pulling his own goatee!)
They cross the culvert, they leave the by-way;
The cage rides well down Lincoln Highway —
Down where rattled "in the days gone by"
The rigs old Schneider swapped and hoarded. . . .
Down Lincoln Highway the cage rides well.
At the District School it halts a spell!
(“Cut-in” here: “SHE COULDN’T AFFORD IT.”)
See her shaking her fist — the spy!
See the youngsters wave and yell!
Down Lincoln Highway into town,
And “the Business Section,” down, down, down,—
(See how she wriggles her lips to speak!) —
Past the Store and the Bank and the Shop-for-rent —
Each window labeled with a 100% —
Where Circus Parade and Home-floats went.
(“Flash-back” here of the five-legg’d Freak.) . . .
Till at the P. O. ends their route,
And they open the cage and drag her out —
Make her pull on the flag-staff rope,
Till the flag comes down and her fingers grope
For the Stars and Stripes she was said to hiss —
Make her print the same with a kiss,
And hoist it up to the sky once more. . . .
So Jackson Corners helps win the war!
(See the Flag in the “close-up” glow!
Hear the Orchestra banging below!) . . .

“Clear the seats for the second show!” . . .

*The next week's offering was the "Beast of Berlin,"
And my townfolk took the message in:
They caught Gretel Meyer on her porch asleep,
And rolled her on a truck in a crate for sheep.
The action was denounced by a certain set,
But the Courts haven't bothered with the case as yet.¹*

¹The tale above is based on the notorious case in Evansville, Wisconsin, with reminiscences of certain "patriotic" activities down in Iowa,—and elsewhere.

II By Court and Decree

THE HERETICS
THE BASTILLE
TOM MOONEY
THE OLD AGITATOR
THE GREAT GOD MUM

The Heretics

A ROW of bearded fellows . . . four . . .
In hand-cuffs . . . chained to an iron bar . . .
Their bare feet straining to the slimy floor . . .
Stripped to their ragged underwear . . .
Their bruises not yet hardened to a scar . . .
Four bearded chins upon four breasts in prayer.

The twilight made by one high oblong's dim
On him . . . and him . . . and him . . . and him.

Perhaps no matter . . . there's not much to see . . .
No blanket on the cold and clammy bricks. . .
No bread . . . no pitcher . . . bowl . . . or pail . . .
But once in twenty-four or thirty-six
Slow hours of this well conducted jail,
The keepers come with cups of water . . . four . . .
At which each chained man licks . . .
Come with four crusts for jaws . . .
At which each chained man gnaws . . .
(Chained man? . . . chained dog?! . . . chained bear?!)
Between the cursings . . . clubbings . . . kicks.
The keepers go . . . they climb the long stone stair . . .
And all below's the same once more —
Four bearded chins upon four breasts in prayer.

It is a quiet place . . .
Quiet for four . . . or three . . . or two . . . or one.
A little moaning . . . " Father " . . . " God " . . . " thy
face,"
And . . . " Will be done " . . . " thy will be done! "

That's all . . .
Except at times the free
Far wash and rumble of the western sea
Against the rocks beside the dungeon wall.
For though the dank brine seep and seep and seep . . .
And crumble the mortar . . . it's so silently,
At least when four are standing in their sleep.

Quiet, so quiet, while the thunders pass,
And the great winds of sunset sweep
Over the prison-island Alcatraz.

Quiet, so quiet . . . where each stands,
Two hands strung up, beside two strung-up hands . . .
They do not hear
The statesmen, far and near,
In hills, and fields, and towns above,
Proclaiming liberty to all the lands
And all the inhabitants thereof!

No motion in this damp, chill under-air . . .
A kind of stale and stagnant fog . . .
For ages pent . . .
The Spaniards brought and housed it there
Of old from some Peruvian bog . . .
And now it's poisoned by such excrement
As hollow hunger and dry thirst can spare
Of four men in a row, half-spent —
Four bearded chins upon four breasts in prayer.

Why bother? —
There has been many another . . .

For instance, Bonnevard and brother . . .
Isaac of York and sundry Jews
Who got the rack or screws . . .
And Torquemada's heretics,
For dabbling in forbidden tricks,
Were put to boil in Christian oil,
Or roasted over consecrated sticks.
There has been many another —
Why bother?

A row of bearded fellows . . . four . . .
And all because
So gentle, and long-suffering, and odd . . .
They had an understanding with their God . . .
They had the will and strength to keep the clause . . .
To bear . . . and bear . . . and bear . . . and bear . . .
They would not give their bodies up to war . . .
Four bearded chins on four dead breasts in prayer.¹

¹ I owe an apology to the authorities at Alcatraz for this poetic license—only two of the four are dead as yet, and they died only after their broken bodies had been taken down and shipped to Leavenworth, where scurvy and pneumonia finished the business.

The Bastille ¹

Is it much study now has made me mad? —
That from old tales of Indians and Kings,
Prairies and parapets I conned as lad,
I've shaped in manhood now these shadow-things,
These horror-haunted interplays
Between incongruous Yesterdays
And Landscapes Sundered by the seas in vain —
This nightmare of the grievous prisonings,
Where the Missouri flows into the Seine?

Where am I? — whither borne afar? . . .
Orion's fading star by star;
Yet the Pawnees are stealing up the Platte
To where the two block-houses are,
And Colonel Kearney in his army hat . . .
And hostages all shackled to a bar,
Standing in a stone-pit roofed from heaven
(Seven hundred . . . multiplied from seven) . . .
There is a bustle in the grassy square
Inside the barracks, under listless trees.
Louis Tournay, who'll soon give up the keys
Of eight grim towers, sits and trembles there . . .
Cholat, the vintner, is a cannoneer
And Pawnee chieftain on the last frontier;
Georget, late come from the marines at Brest,
Will hack the wooden shutters with the best;
And crouching onward, just behind the mass,

¹ Upon the fall of the Bastille, with its grim guardian Louis Tournay, its great key became the gift of Lafayette to America; Fort Leavenworth, on the Missouri, was in the 'forties a frontier army post under Colonel Kearney.

With epaulettes of golden braid,
And a familiar white cockade
That bobs above the prairie grass . . .
It's Lafayette a-coming for the key
That shall unprison them — and me!
And unto Colonel Kearney says Tournay:
“ Give up the prisoners,— for I long have known
These wooden walls had turned to stone
Four hundred years ago to-day ” . . .
(Says Colonel Kearney, “ Let them groan ”) . . .
“ And by to-morrow will be clay ” . . .

A prairie fire is blowing down the Seine,
Upon Missouri tumbles the Bastille . . .
Has the great war entirely crazed my brain,
Or have old books distorted all I feel? . . .

A monstrous iron key lies on my breast,
A letter lies beside it, frayed and brown:
“ America it was that did break down
Those towers of ancient tyrannies and wrongs;
So, valiant Captain of the free-born West,
Unto America this key belongs ”—
It is to General Washington addressed.

Tom Mooney

I

TOM MOONEY sits behind a grating,
Beside a corridor. (He's waiting.)
Long since he picked or peeled or bit away
The last white callous from his palms, they say.
The crick is gone from out his back;
And all the grease and grime
Gone from each finger-nail and every knuckle-crack.
(And that took time.)

II

Tom Mooney breathes behind a grating,
Beside a corridor. (He's waiting.)
The Gold-men from ten cities hear in sleep
Tom Mooney breathing — for he breathes so deep.
The Gold-men from ten cities rise from bed
To make a brass crown for Tom Mooney's head;
They gather round great oaken desks — each twists
Two copper bracelets for Tom Mooney's wrists.
And down sky-scraper basements (all their own)
They forge the spikes for his galvanic throne.
The Gold-men love the jests of old Misrule —
At ease at last, they'll laugh their fill;
They'll deck Tom Mooney king, they will —
King over knave and fool.
And from enameled doors of rearward office-vaults,
Lettered in gold with names that never crock,
They will draw back the triple iron bolts,
[42]

Then scatter from the ridges of their roofs
The affidavits of their paper-proofs
Of pallid Tomfool's low and lubber stock.

III

Tom Mooney thinks behind a grating,
Beside a corridor. (He's waiting.)
(Tom Mooney free was but a laboring man;
Tom Mooney jailed's the Thinker of Rodin.)
The workers in ten nations now have caught
The roll and rhythm of Tom Mooney's thought —
By that earth-girdling S. O. S.,
The subtle and immortal wireless
Of Man's strong justice in distress.
The Workers in ten nations think and plan:
The pick-ax little Naples man,
The rice-swamp coolies in Japan
(No longer mere embroidery on a screen),
The crowds that swarm from factory gates,
At yellow dusks with all their hates,
In Ireland, Austria, Argentine,
In England, France, and Russia far
(That slew a Czar),—
Or where the Teutons lately rent
The Iron Cross (on finding what it meant);
At yellow dusks with all their hates
From fiery shops or gas-choked mines,
From round-house, mill, or lumber-pines,
In the broad belt of these United States.
The Workers, like the Gold-men, plan and wake,—

What bodes their waking?
The Workers, like the Gold-men, something make,—
What are they making? —
The Gold-men answer often —
“ They make Tom Mooney’s coffin.”

IV

Tom Mooney talks behind a grating,
Beside a corridor. (He’s waiting.)
You cannot get quite near
Against the bars to lay your ear;
You find the light too dim
To spell the lips of him.
But, like a beast’s within a zoo
(That was of old a god to savage clans),
His body shakes at you —
A beast’s, a god’s, a man’s!
And from its ponderous, ancient rhythmic shaking
Ye’ll guess what ’tis the workers now are making.
They make for times to come
From times of old — how old! —
From sweat, from blood, from hunger, and from tears,
From scraps of hope (conserved through bitter years
Despite the might and mockery of gold),
They make, these haggard men, a bomb,—
These haggard men with shawl-wives dumb
And pinched-faced children cold,
Descendants of the oldest, earth-born stock,
Gnarled brothers of the surf, the ice, the fire, the rock,
Gray wolf and gaunt storm-bird.
[44]

They make a bomb more fierce than dynamite,—
They weld a Word.
And on the awful night
The Gold-men set Tom Mooney grinning
(If such an hour shall be in truth's despite)
They'll loose the places of much underpinning
In more than ten big cities, left and right.

The Old Agitator

So they could do it after all! . . .
They locked him up . . . the good old man . . .
Behind the grated window and the wall . . .
Stole in upon his sick-bed . . . whisked him off
Before the rumor and the wrath began . . .
Without one woodland flower of early spring
Pressed to his big palm by some workman's child.

And said the honest warden, welcoming:
"You're rather rangy, Mr. Debs, and tall" . . .
Embarrassed by a momentary cough . . .
"But we will fit you out as best we can" . . .
And the great Proletarian
He straightened up and smiled.

Ten years . . . so let it be . . . he was not wise . . .
Well shut he would not . . . could not . . . keep
Those lips, close-shorn and thin,
Below those keen, unflinching eyes,
And just above the unbearded fighting chin . . .
Those lips with furrows either side, so deep
From mirth and sorrow and unresting sleep . . .
And so they deemed it fit
He learn (like Jeremiah) silence in a pit.

So let it be . . . a state must have firm laws
And watchful citizens that balk
Against a wagging tongue . . .
And one grown gray and gaunt with too much talk,
Who has long since forgotten when to pause,
[46]

Or how to please,
May trip at last — even in democracies . . .
And, chiefly, if he tamper with the young,
And worship not the old divinities . . .
And when the charge is read him, clause by clause,
And he replies with scanty penitence,
He'll find (as found that worthy man
At whose incessant lips once Athens took offense)
The gentry of his latter audience
Most ominously niggard of applause . . .
And though even then he talk . . . as talk he can . . .
He lights (like Socrates) on no defense —
Except reiteration of his cause.

So be it . . . his was fair trial and due appeal
Under those just, majestic guarantees
That give the Stars and Stripes their destinies
Over a free (but ordered) commonweal!
That incorruptible and austere court
Of old men to this old man made report:
They made report, this row of staunch patricians,
Unto the bald lone tall man of the plebs;
They bore no grudge, they took no gold,
They may have loved him — for they too were old;
But, seated in their ancient nine positions,
They sealed the prison sunset-years for Debs —
As vindicators of those stern traditions
That tore from black Dred Scott his freeman's shirt,
And locked free child in factory dark and dirt.

So let it be . . . there's nothing for surprise . . .
The thing's so old . . . so wearisomely grim . . .

Nothing for grief . . . except the shame . . .
Grieve for the nation, not for him . . .
For he has but begun his enterprise,
And in this silence finds the lips of flame.

The Great God Mum

NEAR a gold temple in Tibet's mountain pass
Where Pro-Paganda with her hundred ears,
Her hundred wings, her hundred tongues of brass,
Has throned above a People five mad years,
Served by a mouthy Priesthood, belching cheers,
Intoning lies, and banging on a drum,
Stands the steel temple of the Great God Mum.

Forever in the shadow of the rock,
In subterranean fumes, that temple stands:
The Idol's less a Sphinx-head, more mere block,
With half-carved lips, and fingers without hands,
Both lips and fingers clamped with iron bands,
But its two eyes are symbols of distress —
Immortal Vision, immortal Speechlessness.

Amid the fumes and shadows at its feet
(If those be feet where trunk abuts on toe),
The muffled worshipers may never greet . . .
The rite is simple: enter, kneel, and go,
Mantling your portion of the Idol's woe.
The stillness, by decree, is so profound
Even Pro-Paganda's din feels more like pain than sound.

Among the worshipers, whose faith is fear,
Whose prayer itself is silence (foot and lip),
Mix hunch-back Ministrants now there, now here,
To listen well and touch with secret whip.
O, these be active in their stewardship! —
And many a cowering neophyte they seize
For gurgle, murmur, knuckle-crack, or sneeze.

And with the Hunch-backs, stealthier than they,
Mingle those Velvet-footed Yellow-ones,
Who, entering with the Fearful as to pray,
In all like them appareled for the nonce,
Trap sullen Dreamer or unwary Dunce
Into some parlous whisper, and then cite —
For public glory, or for private spite.

Of those who err what may at last become?
The few that know, know too they may not tell,
For sacrilege against the Great God Mum;
Though hosts are haunted by the Vision-spell
Of one old Talker in a ten-years' cell. . . .
So Mystery gives Terror new control,
'Neath the Grand Lama, that pot-bellied Soul.

The folk is plagued for its Idolatries:
Between two Idols is its fate fulfilled —
Crazed by the Goddess of the Thousand Lies,
And by the God of Silence imbecilled:
Yet if the fall of Great God Mum were willed
With half the noise of Pro-Paganda's crew,
That unclean Goddess would be shattered too.

III March and Dance

(Two new songs to one old tune)

AS I LISTENED BY THE LILACS
THE PIED PIPER

As I Listened by the Lilacs¹

(The Unseen A. E. F. . . . as it might have been)

As I listened by the lilacs to the thrush this spring,

The good gray poet said another thing:

The great bell peals, and the great ships wait,
And my Captain and my comrades filing through the
gate.

The good gray poet, back from the sea

With battle-rent banner, whispered me:

Filing down the wharves with noiseless feet,
Filing under moon from a long, long street
(A long, long street with fork and bend,
And mountain sunsets at the further end) :
Shovel-hatted Puritans with funnel-mouth guns;
Eagle-feather crested bowmen bronze;
Buck-skin trappers, fringed to the thighs,
With beaver-caps frayed over buffalo eyes;
Oregon Trailers, sons and sires,
With gun-stocks charred by the prairie fires;
Grizzled Forty-niners, with picks and barrows;
Log-cabin folk with home-made harrows;
Lasso boys from the ranch-frontiers;
And girl-cornhuskers of the pioneers . . .
Filing under moon from a long, long street,
Tramp, tramp, tramp — to the great sea-fleet.

¹ Reminiscences of the three motifs of Walt Whitman's nocturne on the death of Lincoln — the twilight April star, the lilac bush, and the song of the thrush — are combined with a reminiscence of the same good gray poet's other tribute to Lincoln, "O Captain! My Captain!"

As I listened in the twilight, after the rain,

The good gray poet said again:

Filing down the piers, over waters black,
Filing through the gate from a long bivouac
(A long bivouac by the stream and the hill,
And the low white stars and the whip-poor-will):
Minute-men with eyelids damp from sleep;
Valley Forge men who limp and creep;
Yorktown men, and Lafayette men,
And Red Coats girt with their swords again;
And the great Sphinx-head with lips so tight,
With criss-cross belt, on a war-horse white.
And I saw John Brown,— and the rice-swamp blacks
Mopping the sweat with bandanas from their backs.
And I saw Marshal Grant — who but he! —
And Pickett and his men who charged for Lee;
And the blue and the gray and the gray and the blue
(Blent by the years to an olive hue);
And Schurz and his burghers with mud-spattered coats,
Banded with bunting, sobs in throats . . .
From a long bivouac, filing to the tide —
Tramp, tramp, tramp — where the big boats ride.

As I listened in the fragrance of my door-yard plat,

Said the good gray poet, in his army-hat:

Marching under moon, between long aisles
Of the dim dank heads of the creaking piles;
Marching in the mists to the eery deep,
Out of the hinterlands of old sleep:
Shadowy bulks, primeval births,
Witch-wild wonders (ours and earth's);
I saw gnarled shapes of Oaks afoot,

With leafy arms and sprawling root;
And wrinkle-skinned trunks of Elms and Pines,
With savage girdles of torn woodbines
(And elfin bands I saw between,
Midnight dewed and moony-green —
Bands of the Wild-rose trooped and trod,
And the Maidenhair and the Goldenrod);
And the Father-of-Waters, within his hands
From many a stream wet willow-wands;
And the bald Crag-heads, with a mountain pace,
In their cloudy midst the Great Stone Face;
And the Manitou-rocks with painted side,
Capped by the snows of the Great Divide . . .
Out of the hinterlands of old sleep,
Marching under moon to the edge of the deep,
Marching in the sea-mist (phantoms? no!) —
Tramp, tramp, tramp — to the ships below.

*The good gray poet of things that are
Whispered by the lilacs under one moist star:*
Singing in the night, past towers and tiers,
Singing through the gate and down the piers:
Memorial voices, profiles known,
From north and south, from east and west,
Prophet figures, higher than the rest,
Like wraiths of statues, bronze and stone:
Knee-buckled Franklin, with bony wrist
And faggots of the lightning bunched in fist;
Lithe as the west-wind, calm as the sun,
Peering down the moonglade, Emerson
(Peering down an alley, out to sea,
Where the transports leave his vision free);

And bearded Bryant, as cloaked for the rain,
And the lion-head of good Mark Twain;
And midst a hundred, with strange awe
In a garland of grass myself I saw;
All singing in the night to one low tune —
Tramp, tramp, tramp — in the April moon:
“ MY CAPTAIN LEANS BY THE GANGWAY SIDE,
AWAITING US AND THE TURNING TIDE —
WITH BENDED HEAD AND ARMS ON BREAST,
AWAITING US FOR THE GREAT SEA-QUEST.”

West of Chicago,
April, 1918.

The Pied Piper

“Never before have four hundred million rats followed the lure of the shrill pipe of the rat-catcher.” Nicolai, *Biology of War*.

THE huge Pied Piper, in a giant dance,
Began his piping on the fields of France.
The huge Pied Piper, with a fife of steel,
Danced through the nations, toe and heel.
Four crazed years, under winds and the moon,
The Millions followed in a jigging rigadoun.

For his legs were hosed in striped bands,
And his sleeves were striped to the fingering hands,
And his cape was striped to his piping throat,
And the striped cap fluttered to step and note . . .
Stripes up and down, and left and right . . .
Red, green, yellow, black, blue, white . . .
Speckled between with star and crest —
But the red stripes O! they outnumbered the rest.
And when failed the lure of his garments pied,
He juggled new bunting from his vest inside.
So four crazed years, under winds and the moon,
The Millions followed in a jigging rigadoun.

With a fife of steel to puckered lips,
And two cheeks puffing for his finger-tips,
He shrilled each tune of the lure of war,
And danced each measure of his repertoire:
He piped and he jigged of fear and hate,
Of love of country and glory of state;
And he piped of God and he piped of man —

This giant Jester, this Charlatan.
And for those who loathed his piping shrill
He piped a tune more alluring still:
“ Then hurry to my piping, more than ever,
To *end* my piping now or never! ”
And four crazed years, under winds and the moon,
The Millions followed in a jigging rigadoon.

And the few still slack, as he flung pied cape,
And the few still slack, as he piped his jape,
O the few still slack, as each million reels
Jigging to the river, behind his heels,
They whipped or they hanged to bar or tree,
And passed with the piper down the lea . . .

To a red, red river, all the host,—
And the Piper walked, like a shadow or ghost . . .
And the Piper walked, like Christ on the sea
In the sunset-storm of Galilee . . .
And he danced on the waters, to his latest tune,
And the Millions perished in a jigging rigadoon.

IV Piston-Rod and Belted-Wheel

THE TRAIN

THE SHOPS

The Train

ACROSS my window bars,
Across the twilight swamp beyond the lake,
Moves like a caravan or glimmering snake
(With syren whistle on the evening air
Out to the low mists and the first high stars
And crossroads brown and bare),—
Moves on from woods to woods the train of cars.

Are those her own lights in a fiery line?
Or does the great sun still
Through some deep hollow of a western hill
Upon her far panes shine?

A train so often touches me with wonder . . .

She comes from mighty places of the earth,
With canyons and black waters under;
She crawled up mountains, and she leapt the firth;
She skirted cataracts, with her own thunder.
She plunged into the regions of the rain
That crossed her iron course,
And in an hour out she fared again
With nothing lost of all her flame and force.
She cut through ice-age and moraine,
Round bends of blasted outcrop autumn-vined,
Through limestone tunnels of the paleozoic,
Then puffed her clouds to clouds above the plain,
In overplus of all her stress and strain,
Unconscious, blind —

And yet a thing heroic
With her long wails, like triumph over pain.

What monsters of the elder earth
With sagging bellies of tremendous girth
Traversed such rolling spaces far? —
And yet the forces of her moving are
Of still more ancient birth:
Not sluggish feed of oozy fern and grass,
But sun's own fire and cosmic steam and gas.

She came from mighty places, and she goes
(Far from my window here and me),
Whatever lightning flares or tempest blows,
On to the mightiest the round earth knows —
Head onward to the sea:

Past orchards, of their apples shorn
(Empty of all but of the robin's empty nest),
Ponds, pastures, quarries, and sawn stumps of trees,
Or where the stacks of tented corn
Upon the stubble prairie rest
Like rows of Indian old tepees.

Past more than these:
Past the coke-ovens burning into morn,
And the long houses of the factories;
Past the suburban marshes and gray dumps,
And scraggly willow clumps,
Past picture-boards with their grotesqueries —
Their lettered lure of promised hopes —
Cigars, cathartics, soaps,—

Past here and there a college on a hill,
And the white cupolas for telescopes.

Things man has done or will.

These will she pass or has already passed,
To come at last,
The dust and soot upon her plates and shards,
With shriek and clanging bell,
With puff-balls from reverberant pulsations,
Into the midnight coruscations
Of the Yards —
Where end the rails she rode so long and well,
In caverned spots of green and white and red,
And blotches of huge shadows, quick or dead,
And thousand shimmering wires criscross overhead,
And poles with zigzag arm or horizontal spar.

Here her prodigious sisters are . . .

And from her sides she belches then,
By hundreds, men — and men — and men,
With empires in the brain,
Empires of gold, of sword, of voice, of pen,
Of love or heresy or hate,—
The which, expanding in the rhythmic sway
Of her large motions through the night and day,
The continental train
Herself did half, or more than half, create!

The Shops

A boy, I'd cycle with my thoughts for friend,
Lured to the distant factories at town's-end . . .
Out where the chugging tractor patched the road
Before you cross the river at the bend.

Those houses . . . they were long and red and low,
With endless windows, all one barren row . . .
And sometimes there would be, I think, in each
A bended head with neither nod nor speech;
And sometimes pallid profiles, to and fro;
And sometimes windows, even in the day,
All lighted with a lurid inner glow
That swept the pallid profiles quite away. . . .

Inside the whirring halls and windowed wings,
One afternoon I saw the awful things,—
And touched the men who didn't seem afraid,
Whatever flared, or swung, or whirled, or roared . . .

Those houses . . . not like houses in our ward . . .

A sense of Something mighty being made
That must have been begun so long ago . . .
I thought it would be big enough when done . . .
Some parts perhaps were ready down below . . .
To heave up half our highways in the sun
And lay us others, terrible and new,
To other places, known as yet to none . . .

To-day some older persons think so too.

V Deep Sea and High Hill

SALVAGE OF THE SEA
THE MOUNTAIN OF SKULLS

Salvage of the Sea

I

THE sun comes forth
Over the Giants' Causeway and the main,
The winds blow south and north,
The tides still take the starlight and the rain:
And now ride home the ships of war,
And ships of salvage now ride out again.
Peace sweeps all waters that the battle swept. . . .
The deep with old indifference has kept
And with the same indifference will restore.

II

I've marked the divers down the sea,
Plying about each tilted hull their tasks. . . .
They gleam in armor (though it clank not here);
They shake their heads in bulbous ribbed casques
With tanks (like knapsacks) on their shoulder-blades;
And peer, or seem to peer,
From monstrous mouthless goggle-masks:
And they become to me
(Down in these yellow-glaring everglades)
Like ghostly vagrants, reft of gun or spear,
Strayed from those multitudes of warrior-shades
Dead before Jesus — or but yesteryear.

III

I see the hoisted hulls, between huge backs
Of wave-washed cylinders like floating stacks. . . .
In one long line they're sailing down the blue
Into the roads, for salvo and review. . . .
And Enterprise on tiptoe strains her hundred necks.
To her no foundered derelicts are these:
But the great argosies.

IV

I see the salvage on a long, long quay:
The bars of bullion-gold re-won
(From which all wars begin, we say);
The grain up-heaped and dried
(The mouths for which 'twas reaped have died);
The sword, the knife, the cartridge-belt, the gun
(But wherefore? — now that wars, we know, are done);
The corpses, uniformed in drab or gray,
Or silks, or swaddling-clout
(Has Enterprise the hands to lay them out,
Or has the glutted earth still room to-day,
Or will they speak, revisiting the sun?). . . .
I see the salvage and I turn away.

V

The ships of salvage bring not back to me
Aught that I wished might be —
They bring not back from the eternal deep
[68]

The things whereof our wisest prophets spoke:
Nor ocean-vision winnowed of all smoke,
Nor sea-redemption of mankind's lost sleep,—
Nor one green weed they bring
As sea-bright garmenting
For the white body of gaunt Victory
Lying in terror on the barren steep.

The Mountain of Skulls

I

ALL guns are silent . . . "I have won," he saith,
And girds his ample cloak . . .
He . . . who? . . . Not Pershing, Haig, or Foch?!
"Old Hindenburg?" some jokester whispereth
(For when we win, we joke). . . .

He . . . *who?* . . . The great King, DEATH.

And in the quiet of the armistice
He takes a long, long journey in his mirth
(No Marshal takes a furlough such as this)
Through many lands of earth . . .

Gathering the skulls . . .

To Archangel among the Arctic gulls . . .
By Kiao-chow's eagle-dedicated rocks . . .
Along the Tigris on to Bagdad gate . . .
The Syrian foothills and old temple blocks . . .
By palm and date . . .
And desert . . . and the mud-flats of the Nile . . .
Pylons and papyrus reeds . . .
And Tanganika's swamps and jungle weeds,
And tropic-leaves, green-glazed as tile . . .
And back . . . gleaning in holes of shells,
Or in mired cartwheels, or in poisoned wells . . .
Back . . . he goes . . . and goes . . .
To the rent sand-spits of the Dardanelles . . .
And gaunt Armenian plateaus . . .

[70]

Gathering the skulls . . .

In the Carpathian snows . . .

On Alpine crags . . . and under each crevasse . . .

(He digs and pulls

For, where they fell, straightway they froze) . . .

In the Masurian morass

(Battalion by battalion in stark rows) . . .

And Serbia's oaken mountain pass . . .

And Flanders' poppy fields . . . (again . . . again) . . .

(Loosening from wire, tearing masks away,

Dragging from skeleton airplanes in burnt grass) . . .

And Marne and forests of Ardennes . . .

And roofless villages, all one Pompeii . . .

Gathering the skulls . . .

Down the Atlantic deeps . . . and shallows . . .

The mid-abyss . . . the continental shelf . . .

Forgetting child-bed, hospital, and gallows,

To fetch the rest he does betake himself . . .

Although for these

He pries out many a port-hole, many a hatch,

Before he culls

From strangled necks upon the hunched knees . . .

.

By Falkland islands and Antarctic gulls . . .

And under seven seas.

Gathering the skulls . . .

Picking off bits of skin in ghostly light

Amid the storm-winds' lulls . . .

Black skin . . . and bronze . . . and yellow . . .
But chiefly white, or what had once been white,
Beside white fellow . . . and white fellow . . .
Skulls . . . skulls . . . some broad . . . some long . . .
Some strong . . .
Some brittle . . .
Some big . . . and some so little . . .
Little.
He takes them all . . . with one same set grimace . . .
To his own place. . . .

II

Which now becomes the Mountain of the Skulls
At the red river of the Great Mogul's
Red realms of silence in the sunset waste.
A red-white cone, in no green forest based,
It rises alone into a blood-red sky,
Out of its own bleak talus of gray chalk,
Girt with still clouds of ashen-red on high
(Like smoke that lingers when the last winds die),
Above the twisted slag of vanished fire
And rainless pits of dust that once was mire,
Over eternal fields of alkali . . .

It glares in mute and changeless after-glow
Over a glassy, crimson stream that never flows . . .
Changeless . . . as if, between the time
Of stars and setting sun,
Great Death upon that desolated clime
His last great work had done —

Blasting the very laws of day and night,
To gloat forever on that sight.

There is no stir, except the hollow roll
Of some lone skull, down like a bowl . . .
At horrible intervals . . . when the Mountain quakes
From deep, deep under,
As the still living earth shudders and shakes
With subterranean thunder.

III

Know you who built this Mountain of the Skulls,
Who piled these socket-heads — these husks and hulls?
Death knows who piled, who built . . .
All the long ages of the race of man
For this must share the guilt!
The deep inveteracy of thought and act,
Forging from age to age the new machines
(From chariots scythed, to tanks and submarines),
Becoming tradition in each court and clan
With sanctions from romance and fact,
Had made a habit of a monstrous means,
Until the gesture of gun and sword and lance,
The quick-step, the salute, the bugle-blast,
Grew man's fixed nature by inheritance,
And this To-day was born from out the Past.

Know you who reared this grinning pyramid
Of hairless polls with neither lip nor lid?
Death knows . . . and this true verse . . .

The European gamesters, sleek and fat,
(Or wiry, gray, and bowing from the hip),
For this must share the curse!
A hundred years about the board adept
They played for this or that
(A coast, or isle, or stream, or mine, or ship),
An even hundred years and never slept . . .
While gold-laced lackeys brought them wine to sip . . .
Beside the bank-book and the tall silk hat . . .
And one or two we justly deem the worse
Free not all others from the awful curse.

Know you what built this monument of state,
For the Eternal Potentate?
He knows . . . he knows:
The embowelled pest of all-contagious hate,
That in men's entrails did distill
The toxin whence their thinking did create
The devil-foemen each set out to kill.

He knows . . . he knows:
The tender instincts, fatal as they work,
Of hearth and home and orchard-plot and kirk,
The passion and the pride we name divine,
The dear, dear land and landscape, yours and mine,
One passion, where whatever river flows —
The same by Rhone or Rhine.

He knows . . . he knows:
That exaltation in transfigured eyes,
That insane dance of love beyond all love,
That fierce infection of self-sacrifice
[74]

(All other primal instincts far above),
The god's intoxication,—
As seized the Corybantes in old woods,
And maddened the Maenads by the Phrygian floods,—
The supreme ecstasy of immolation . . .
Save that the god was not the God of Birth,
Or of New Wine that gladdeneth —
Not the Great Mother, Earth,
Not Dionysus — but Eternal Death.

What raised Skull Mountain to the sky? —
He knows . . . he knows:
That cunning power of self-doomed mankind
Revenge, rage, ruin, greed, to justify
By concepts deftly put, whereby
It gives itself — by self conceived, combined,
Out of the welter of its corporate life,
The intolerable chaos of its stress and strife —
Reasons and rhetoric of how-and-why,
Which seem a light to who before were blind,
And urge a cause and strengthen hosts to die,
As reason summons from around, behind,
The quickened faith, the prayer on high, —
Till Thought and Ethic, vision-eyed
(By the great Ironist's best master-stroke
Since from the ape the man awoke),
End in one suicide.

IV

And yet there are who round that Mount would grope,
Saying they too, like Death, can count the loss . . .

Saying, no less, it is the Mount of Hope . . .
Saying, " We'll crown it with a golden cross."

V

Know you the Mountain of the Skulls
At the red river of the Great Mogul's
Red realms of silence in the sunset sands? —
Know you it *really* — what it *is* — and *was*?
By all the dead of all the lands,
The loves, the hopes, the death-pangs (day or night)
(Or short or long)
That housed in all these empty shells
(Where now not even the living blow-flies buzz,
Or wild bees build their cells),
By this vast generation, robbed of light,
Of flowers, of children, poesy, and song,—
In name of future good, to right . . .
(So we have said) . . . to right the present wrong,—
By all the dead of all the lands,
We'll swear this Mountain stands,
In Kingdom of Great Death forever stands,
To speak to Life one word forevermore,
On every sea and shore:
No League of Peace (though that awhile might save,
If one same law upon each capitol,
Upon each arch and architrave,
Were clearly, deeply carved),
No League nor Law will do:
But those despisèd few
[76]

In every land who did refuse each call —
The dungeon-chained, the dungeon-starved —
Must be the prophets of the New.
Until the few are all.

VI Scraps of Paper

(Untorn)

THE PROPHET

THE PLEDGE

MAY-NIGHT

TO THE DEAD DOUGHBOYS

The Prophet

(*A Prophecy*)

INTO a world of Blood and Flame
The Prophet with his Voices came.

And the Battle stopped and the People said:
“For ourselves, our children, and our dead!”

And he journeyed by sea in times of awe
To write in a Temple the Book of the Law.

But (housed with Greed, and Feud, and Wit)
New worlds of Blood and Flame he writ. . . .

With the Prophet's Voices the People in wrath
Scourged the Prophet from their Path.

With the Prophet's Voices themselves they wrought
The Book of the Law whereof he taught.

For out of the People, blind and dumb,
The Prophet's Voices, unknown, had come.

The Pledge

(For Robert M. La Follette)

IN the Valley of Decision,
Down the Road of Things-that-are,
You gave to us a vision,
You appointed us a star,
And through Cities of Derision
We followed you from far.

On the Hills beyond To-morrow,
On the Road of Things-to-do,
With that strength of hand we borrow
As we borrow soul from you,
We know not sloth nor sorrow
And will build your vision true.

May-Night

BLUE are the twilight heavens above the hill,
A yellow half-moon's high within the blue,
And rosy May-night clouds are soft and still,
And all the world beside is shut from view.
The plum-trees, whitening buds and greening shoots,
Close in the dusky cottage; and beyond
The wood-thrush in the hazel-thicket flutes,
And frogs are croaking in the unseen pond.

It is the old, the odorous privacy
That once had been both peace and gentle song,
But now how such an evening troubles me
After earth's five most awful years of wrong . . .
Whilst inland, from the plains, the crags, the sea,
With all the stars the dead men's armies throng.

To the Dead Doughboys

(After Versailles)

BE nothing in this book construed
Against your Hope and Hardihood:
They mourn you most who're most dismayed
To see your Golden Stars betrayed.

NOTE. Of the preceding collection, *The Heretics* and *Tom Mooney* are reprinted from *The Liberator*; *The Old Agitator* is reprinted from *The Milwaukee Leader*; *As I Listened by the Lilacs* from *The Wisconsin Literary Magazine*, *Leo Frank* from *The Wisconsin State Journal*, and *The Pledge* from *The Capitol Times*. *The Bastille* is to be printed in *The World Tomorrow* and *The Prophet* in *Young Democracy*.

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