

Ballads of A Cheechako & Songs of a Sourdough



Robert W. Service

Modernized edition by Arthur Strutzenberg, 2025

Originally Published by William Briggs, Toronto

1907 and 1909

Contents

Foreword	I
Ballads of a Cheechako	3
To the Man of the High North	3
Men of the High North	4
The Ballad of the Northern Lights	6
The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin	12
The Ballad of Pious Pete	16
The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill	20
The Ballad of One-Eyed Mike	23
The Ballad of the Brand	25
The Ballad of Hard-Luck Henry	29
The Man from Eldorado	31
My Friends	35
The Prospector	37
The Black Sheep	40
The Telegraph Operator	42
The Wood-Cutter	44
The Song of the Mouth-Organ	46
The Trail of Ninety-Eight	48
The Ballad of Gum-Boot Ben	52
Clancy of the Mounted Police	54
Lost	58
L'Envoi	61
Songs of a Sourdough	63
The Law of the Yukon	63
The Parson's Son	66
The Spell of the Yukon	68
The Call of the Wild	70

The Lone Trail	72
The Heart of the Sourdough	73
The Three Voices	74
The Pines	75
The Harpy	77
The Lure of Little Voices	79
The Song of the Wage-Slave	80
Grin	81
The Shooting of Dan McGrew	82
The Cremation of Sam McGee	84
My Madonna	88
Unforgotten	89
The Reckoning	90
Quatrains	91
The Men that don't Fit in	92
Music in the Bush	93
The Rhyme of the Remittance Man	95
The Low-Down White	97
The Little Old Log Cabin	98
The Younger Son	99
The March of the Dead	101
"FIGHTING MAC"	103
The Woman And The Angel	105
The Rhyme of the Restless Ones	107
New Year's Eve	109
Comfort	111
Premonition	112
The Tramps	113
L'Envoi	114

Foreword

I first discovered the poetry of Robert W. Service one night as a child, when my mother read to me from a weathered collection of his verse. I still remember her voice as she launched into “*The Cremation of Sam McGee*” — the firelight flickering in the room, the strange comfort of that icy tale, and the rhythm that made it feel like both a story and a song.

Later that same night, she read me “*Grin*,” and something in its message stayed with me — a rough, resilient courage wrapped in rhyme. Though time passed and the words faded, I recently stumbled across the poem again, and the memory of that moment returned with clarity.

This book is, in part, a tribute to that night and to the enduring voice of the man known as the Bard of the Yukon. His poems have a way of cutting through the years — bold, humorous, unflinching — and reminding us that even in the face of hardship, we can press on... and perhaps even grin.

Ballads of A Cheechako

To the Man of the High North

My rhymes are rough, and often in my rhyming
I've drifted, silver-sailed, on seas of dream,
Hearing afar the bells of Elfland chiming,
Seeing the groves of Arcadie agleam.

I was the thrall of Beauty that rejoices
From peak snow-diademed to regal star;
Yet to mine aerie ever pierced the voices,
The pregnant voices of the Things That Are.

The Here, the Now, the vast Forlorn around us;
The gold-delirium, the ferine strife;
The lusts that lure us on, the hates that hound us;
Our red rags in the patch-work quilt of Life.

The nameless men who nameless rivers travel,
And in strange valleys greet strange deaths alone;
The grim, intrepid ones who would unravel
The mysteries that shroud the Polar Zone.

These will I sing, and if one of you linger
Over my pages in the Long, Long Night,
And on some lone line lay a calloused finger,
Saying: "It's human-true—it hits me right";
Then will I count this loving toil well spent;
Then will I dream awhile—content, content.

Men of the High North

Men of the High North, the wild sky is blazing;
Islands of opal float on silver seas;
Swift splendors kindle, barbaric, amazing;
Pale ports of amber, golden argosies.
Ringed all around us the proud peaks are glowing;
Fierce chiefs in council, their wigwam the sky;
Far, far below us the big Yukon flowing,
Like threaded quicksilver, gleams to the eye.

Men of the High North, you who have known it;
You in whose hearts its splendors have abode;
Can you renounce it, can you disown it?
Can you forget it, its glory and its goad?
Where is the hardship, where is the pain of it?
Lost in the limbo of things you've forgot;
Only remain the guerdon and gain of it;
Zest of the foray, and God, how you fought!

You who have made good, you foreign faring;
You money magic to far lands has whirled;
Can you forget those days of vast daring,
There with your soul on the Top o' the World?
Nights when no peril could keep you awake on
Spruce boughs you spread for your couch in the snow;
Taste all your feasts like the beans and the bacon
Fried at the camp-fire at forty below?

Can you remember your huskies all going,
Barking with joy and their brushes in air;
You in your parka, glad-eyed and glowing,
Monarch, your subjects the wolf and the bear?
Monarch, your kingdom unravisht and gleaming;
Mountains your throne, and a river your car;
Crash of a bull moose to rouse you from dreaming;
Forest your couch, and your candle a star.

You who this faint day the High North is luring
Unto her vastness, taintlessly sweet;
You who are steel-braced, straight-lipped, enduring,
Dreadless in danger and dire in defeat:
Honor the High North ever and ever,

Whether she crown you, or whether she slay;
Suffer her fury, cherish and love her—
He who would rule he must learn to obey.

Men of the High North, fierce mountains love you;
Proud rivers leap when you ride on their breast.
See, the austere sky, pensive above you,
Dons all her jewels to smile on your rest.
Children of Freedom, scornful of frontiers,
We who are weaklings honor your worth.
Lords of the wilderness, Princes of Pioneers,
Let's have a rouse that will ring round the earth.

The Ballad of the Northern Lights

One of the Down and Out—that's me. Stare at me well, ay, stare!
Stare and shrink—say! you wouldn't think that I was a millionaire.
Look at my face, it's crimped and gouged—one of them death-mask things;
Don't seem the sort of man, do I, as might be the pal of kings?
Slouching along in smelly rags, a bleary-eyed, no-good bum;
A knight of the hollow needle, pard, spewed from the sodden slum.
Look me all over from head to foot; how much would you think I was worth?
A dollar? a dime? a nickel? Why, **I'n the wealthiest man on earth.**

No, don't you think that I'm off my base. You'll sing a different tune
If only you'll let me spin my yarn. Come over to this saloon;
Wet my throat—it's as dry as chalk, and seeing as how it's you,
I'll tell the tale of a Northern trail, and so help me God, it's true.
I'll tell of the howling wilderness and the haggard Arctic heights,
Of a reckless vow that I made, and how I STAKED THE NORTHERN LIGHTS.

Remember the year of the Big Stampede and the trail of Ninety-eight,
When the eyes of the world were turned to the North,
and the hearts of men elate;
Hearts of the old dare-devil breed thrilled at the wondrous strike,
And to every man who could hold a pan came the message, "Up and hike".
Well, I was there with the best of them, and I knew I would not fail.
You wouldn't believe it to see me now; but wait till you've heard my tale.

You've read of the trail of Ninety-eight, but its woe no man may tell;
It was all of a piece and a whole yard wide,
and the name of the brand was "Hell".
We heard the call and we staked our all; we were plungers playing blind,
And no man cared how his neighbor fared, and no man looked behind;
For a ruthless greed was born of need, and the weakling went to the wall,
And a curse might avail where a prayer would fail,
and the gold lust crazed us all.

Bold were we, and they called us three the "Unholy Trinity";
There was Ole Olson, the sailor Swede, and the Dago Kid and me.
We were the discards of the pack, the foreloopers of Unrest,
Reckless spirits of fierce revolt in the ferment of the West.
We were bound to win and we revelled in the hardships of the way.
We staked our ground and our hopes were crowned,
and we hoisted out the pay.
We were rich in a day beyond our dreams,

it was gold from the grass-roots down;
But we weren't used to such sudden wealth, and there was the siren town.
We were crude and careless frontiersmen, with much in us of the beast;
We could bear the famine worthily, but we lost our heads at the feast.

The town looked mighty bright to us, with a bunch of dust to spend,
And nothing was half too good them days, and everyone was our friend.
Wining meant more than mining then, and life was a dizzy whirl,
Gambling and dropping chunks of gold down the neck of a dance-hall girl;
Till we went clean mad, it seems to me, and we squandered our last poke,
And we sold our claim, and we found ourselves one bitter morning—broke.

The Dago Kid he dreamed a dream of his mother's aunt who died—
In the dawn-light dim she came to him, and she stood by his bedside,
And she said: "Go forth to the highest North till a lonely trail ye find;
Follow it far and trust your star, and fortune will be kind."

But I jeered at him, and then there came the Sailor Swede to me,
And he said: "I dreamed of my sister's son,
who croaked at the age of three.

From the herded dead he sneaked and said: 'Seek you an Arctic trail;
'Tis pale and grim by the Polar rim, but seek and ye shall not fail.'"

And lo! that night I too did dream of my mother's sister's son,
And he said to me: "By the Arctic Sea there's a treasure to be won.
Follow and follow a lone moose trail, till you come to a valley grim,
On the slope of the lonely watershed that borders the Polar brim."

Then I woke my pals, and soft we swore by the mystic Silver Flail,
'Twas the hand of Fate, and to-morrow straight
we would seek the lone moose trail.

We watched the groaning ice wrench free, crash on with a hollow din;
Men of the wilderness were we, freed from the taint of sin.
The mighty river snatched us up and it bore us swift along;
The days were bright, and the morning light was sweet with jewelled song.
We poled and lined up nameless streams, portaged o'er hill and plain;
We burnt our boat to save the nails, and built our boat again;
We guessed and groped, North, ever North, with many a twist and turn;
We saw ablaze in the deathless days the splendid sunsets burn.
O'er soundless lakes where the grayling makes a rush at the clumsy fly;
By bluffs so steep that the hard-hit sheep falls sheer from out the sky;
By lilled pools where the bull moose cools and wallows in huge content;
By rocky lairs where the pig-eyed bears peered at our tiny tent.
Through the black canyon's angry foam we hurled to dreamy bars,
And round in a ring the dog-nosed peaks bayed to the mocking stars.

Spring and summer and autumn went; the sky had a tallow gleam,
Yet North and ever North we pressed to the land of our Golden Dream.

So we came at last to a tundra vast and dark and grim and lone;
And there was the little lone moose trail, and we knew it for our own.
By muskeg hollow and nigger-head it wandered endlessly;
Sorry of heart and sore of foot, weary men were we.
The short-lived sun had a leaden glare and the darkness came too soon,
And stationed there with a solemn stare was the pinched, anaemic moon.
Silence and silvern solitude till it made you dumbly shrink,
And you thought to hear with an outward ear
the things you thought to think.

Oh, it was wild and weird and wan, and ever in camp o' nights
We would watch and watch the silver dance of the mystic Northern Lights.
And soft they danced from the Polar sky and swept in primrose haze;
And swift they pranced with their silver feet,
and pierced with a blinding blaze.
They danced a cotillion in the sky; they were rose and silver shod;
It was not good for the eyes of man—'twas a sight for the eyes of God.
It made us mad and strange and sad, and the gold whereof we dreamed
Was all forgot, and our only thought was of the lights that gleamed.

Oh, the tundra sponge it was golden brown, and some was a bright blood-red;
And the reindeer moss gleamed here and there
like the tombstones of the dead.
And in and out and around about the little trail ran clear,
And we hated it with a deadly hate and we feared with a deadly fear.
And the skies of night were alive with light,
with a throbbing, thrilling flame;
Amber and rose and violet, opal and gold it came.
It swept the sky like a giant scythe, it quivered back to a wedge;
Argently bright, it cleft the night with a wavy golden edge.
Pennants of silver waved and streamed, lazy banners unfurled;
Sudden splendors of sabres gleamed, lightning javelins were hurled.
There in our awe we crouched and saw with our wild, uplifted eyes
Charge and retire the hosts of fire in the battlefield of the skies.

But all things come to an end at last, and the muskeg melted away,
And frowning down to bar our path a muddle of mountains lay.
And a gorge sheered up in granite walls, and the moose trail crept betwixt;
'Twas as if the earth had gaped too far and her stony jaws were fixt.
Then the winter fell with a sudden swoop, and the heavy clouds sagged low,

And earth and sky were blotted out in a whirl of driving snow.

We were climbing up a glacier in the neck of a mountain pass,
When the Dago Kid slipped down and fell into a deep crevasse.
When we got him out one leg hung limp, and his brow was wreathed with pain,
And he says: "'Tis badly broken, boys, and I'll never walk again.
It's death for all if ye linger here, and that's no cursed lie;
Go on, go on while the trail is good, and leave me down to die."
He raved and swore, but we tended him with our uncouth, clumsy care.
The camp-fire gleamed and he gazed and dreamed
with a fixed and curious stare.

Then all at once he grabbed my gun and he put it to his head,
And he says: "I'll fix it for you, boys"—them are the words he said.

So we sewed him up in a canvas sack and we slung him to a tree;
And the stars like needles stabbed our eyes, and woeful men were we.
And on we went on our woeful way, wrapped in a daze of dream,
And the Northern Lights in the crystal nights
came forth with a mystic gleam.

They danced and they danced the devil-dance over the naked snow;
And soft they rolled like a tide upshoaled with a ceaseless ebb and flow.
They rippled green with a wondrous sheen, they fluttered out like a fan;
They spread with a blaze of rose-pink rays never yet seen of man.
They writhed like a brood of angry snakes, hissing and sulphur pale;
Then swift they changed to a dragon vast, lashing a cloven tail.
It seemed to us, as we gazed aloft with an everlasting stare,
The sky was a pit of bale and dread, and a monster revelled there.

We climbed the rise of a hog-back range that was desolate and drear,
When the Sailor Swede had a crazy fit, and he got to talking queer.
He talked of his home in Oregon and the peach trees all in bloom,
And the fern head-high, and the topaz sky, and the forest's scented gloom.
He talked of the sins of his misspent life, and then he seemed to brood,
And I watched him there like a fox a hare, for I knew it was not good.
And sure enough in the dim dawn-light I missed him from the tent,
And a fresh trail broke through the crusted snow,
and I knew not where it went.

But I followed it o'er the seamless waste, and I found him at shut of day,
Naked there as a new-born babe—so I left him where he lay.

Day after day was sinister, and I fought fierce-eyed despair,
And I clung to life, and I struggled on, I knew not why nor where.
I packed my grub in short relays, and I cowered down in my tent,
And the world around was purged of sound like a frozen continent.

Day after day was dark as death, but ever and ever at nights,
With a brilliancy that grew and grew, blazed up the Northern Lights.

They rolled around with a soundless sound like softly bruised silk;
They poured into the bowl of the sky with the gentle flow of milk.
In eager, pulsing violet their wheeling chariots came,
Or they poised above the Polar rim like a coronal of flame.
From depths of darkness fathomless their lancing rays were hurled,
Like the all-combining search-lights of the navies of the world.
There on the roof-pole of the world as one bewitched I gazed,
And howled and grovelled like a beast as the awful splendors blazed.
My eyes were seared, yet thrall'd I peered
 through the parka hood nigh blind;
But I staggered on to the lights that shone, and never I looked behind.

There is a mountain round and low that lies by the Polar rim,
And I climbed its height in a whirl of light,
 and I peered o'er its jagged brim;
And there in a crater deep and vast, ungained, unguessed of men,
The mystery of the Arctic world was flashed into my ken.
For there these poor dim eyes of mine beheld the sight of sights—
That hollow ring was the source and spring of the mystic Northern Lights.

Then I staked that place from crown to base, and I hit the homeward trail.
Ah, God! it was good, though my eyes were blurred,
 and I crawled like a sickly snail.
In that vast white world where the silent sky
 communes with the silent snow,
In hunger and cold and misery I wandered to and fro.
But the Lord took pity on my pain, and He led me to the sea,
And some ice-bound whalers heard my moan, and they fed and sheltered me.
They fed the feeble scarecrow thing that stumbled out of the wild
With the ravaged face of a mask of death
 and the wandering wits of a child—
A craven, cowering bag of bones that once had been a man.
They tended me and they brought me back to the world, and here I am.

Some say that the Northern Lights are the glare of the Arctic ice and snow;
And some that it's electricity, and nobody seems to know.
But I'll tell you now—and if I lie, may my lips be stricken dumb—
It's a MINE, a mine of the precious stuff that men call radium.
It's a million dollars a pound, they say,
 and there's tons and tons in sight.
You can see it gleam in a golden stream in the solitudes of night.

And it's mine, all mine—and say! if you have a hundred plunks to spare,
I'll let you have the chance of your life, I'll sell you a quarter share.
You turn it down? Well, I'll make it ten, seeing as you are my friend.
Nothing doing? Say! don't be hard—have you got a dollar to lend?
Just a dollar to help me out, I know you'll treat me white;
I'll do as much for you some day . . . God bless you, sir; good-night.

The Ballad of the Black Fox Skin

There was Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike living the life of shame,
When unto them in the Long, Long Night came the man-who-had-no-name;
Bearing his prize of a black fox pelt, out of the Wild he came.

His cheeks were blanched as the flume-head foam
when the brown spring freshets flow;
Deep in their dark, sin-calcined pits were his sombre eyes aglow;
They knew him far for the fitful man who spat forth blood on the snow.

"Did ever you see such a skin?" quoth he;
"there's nought in the world so fine—
Such fullness of fur as black as the night,
such lustre, such size, such shine;
It's life to a one-lunged man like me; it's London, it's women, it's wine.

"The Moose-hides called it the devil-fox, and swore that no man could kill;
That he who hunted it, soon or late, must surely suffer some ill;
But I laughed at them and their old squaw-tales.
Ha! Ha! I'm laughing still.

"For look ye, the skin—it's as smooth as sin,
and black as the core of the Pit.
By gun or by trap, whatever the hap, I swore I would capture it;
By star and by star afield and afar, I hunted and would not quit.

"For the devil-fox, it was swift and sly, and it seemed to flee at me;
I would wake in fright by the camp-fire light, hearing its evil glee;
Into my dream its eyes would gleam, and its shadow would I see.

"It sniffed and ran from the ptarmigan I had poisoned to excess;
Unharm'd it sped from my wrathful lead ('twas as if I shot by guess);
Yet it came by night in the stark moonlight to mock at my weariness.

"I tracked it up where the mountains hunch like the vertebrae of the world;
I tracked it down to the death-still pits where the avalanche is hurled;
From the glooms to the sacerdotal snows,
where the carded clouds are curled.

"From the vastitudes where the world protrudes
through clouds like seas up-shoaled,
I held its track till it led me back to the land I had left of old—
The land I had looted many moons. I was weary and sick and cold.

"I was sick, soul-sick, of the futile chase, and there and then I swore

The foul fiend fox might scathless go, for I would hunt no more;
Then I rubbed mine eyes in a vast surprise—it stood by my cabin door.

"A rifle raised in the wraith-like gloom, and a vengeful shot that sped;
A howl that would thrill a cream-faced corpse—
and the demon fox lay dead. . . .

Yet there was never a sign of wound, and never a drop he bled.

"So that was the end of the great black fox,
and here is the prize I've won;
And now for a drink to cheer me up—I've mused since the early sun;
We'll drink a toast to the sorry ghost of the fox whose race is run."

II.

Now Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike, bad as the worst were they;
In their road-house down by the river-trail
they waited and watched for prey;
With wine and song they joyed night long, and they slept like swine by day.

For things were done in the Midnight Sun that no tongue will ever tell;
And men there be who walk earth-free, but whose names are writ in hell—
Are writ in flames with the guilty names of Fournier and Labelle.

Put not your trust in a poke of dust would ye sleep the sleep of sin;
For there be those who would rob your clothes ere yet the dawn comes in;
And a prize likewise in a woman's eyes is a peerless black fox skin.

Put your faith in the mountain cat if you lie within his lair;
Trust the fangs of the mother-wolf, and the claws of the lead-ripped bear;
But oh, of the wiles and the gold-tooth smiles
of a dance-hall wench beware!

Wherefore it was beyond all laws that lusts of man restrain,
A man drank deep and sank to sleep never to wake again;
And the Yukon swallowed through a hole the cold corpse of the slain.

III.

The black fox skin a shadow cast from the roof nigh to the floor;
And sleek it seemed and soft it gleamed, and the woman stroked it o'er;
And the man stood by with a brooding eye, and gnashed his teeth and swore.

When thieves and thugs fall out and fight there's fell arrears to pay;
And soon or late sin meets its fate, and so it fell one day
That Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike fanged up like dogs at bay.

"The skin is mine, all mine," she cried; "I did the deed alone."

"It's share and share with a guilt-yoked pair",

he hissed in a pregnant tone;

And so they snarled like malamutes over a mildewed bone.

And so they fought, by fear untaught, till haply it befell

One dawn of day she slipped away to Dawson town to sell

The fruit of sin, this black fox skin that had made their lives a hell.

She slipped away as still he lay, she clutched the wondrous fur;

Her pulses beat, her foot was fleet, her fear was as a spur;

She laughed with glee, she did not see him rise and follow her.

The bluffs uprear and grimly peer far over Dawson town;

They see its lights a blaze o' nights and harshly they look down;

They mock the plan and plot of man with grim, ironic frown.

The trail was steep; 'twas at the time when swiftly sinks the snow;

All honey-combed, the river ice was rotting down below;

The river chafed beneath its rind with many a mighty throe.

And up the swift and oozy drift a woman climbed in fear,

Clutching to her a black fox fur as if she held it dear;

And hard she pressed it to her breast—then Windy Ike drew near.

She made no moan—her heart was stone—she read his smiling face,

And like a dream flashed all her life's dark horror and disgrace;

A moment only—with a snarl he hurled her into space.

She rolled for nigh an hundred feet; she bounded like a ball;

From crag to crag she carromed down through snow and timber fall; . . .

A hole gaped in the river ice; the spray flashed—that was all.

A bird sang for the joy of spring, so piercing sweet and frail;

And blinding bright the land was dight in gay and glittering mail;

And with a wondrous black fox skin a man slid down the trail.

IV.

A wedge-faced man there was who ran along the river bank,

Who stumbled through each drift and slough, and ever slipped and sank,

And ever cursed his Maker's name, and ever "hooch" he drank.

He travelled like a hunted thing, hard harried, sore distress;

The old grandmother moon crept out from her cloud-quilted nest;

The aged mountains mocked at him in their primeval rest.

Grim shadows diapered the snow; the air was strangely mild;
The valley's girth was dumb with mirth, the laughter of the wild;
The still, sardonic laughter of an ogre o'er a child.

The river writhed beneath the ice; it groaned like one in pain,
And yawning chasms opened wide, and closed and yawned again;
And sheets of silver heaved on high until they split in twain.

From out the road-house by the trail they saw a man afar
Make for the narrow river-reach where the swift cross-currents are;
Where, frail and worn, the ice is torn and the angry waters jar.

But they did not see him crash and sink into the icy flow;
They did not see him clinging there, gripped by the undertow,
Clawing with bleeding finger-nails at the jagged ice and snow.

They found a note beside the hole where he had stumbled in:
"Here met his fate by evil luck a man who lived in sin,
And to the one who loves me least I leave this black fox skin."

And strange it is; for, though they searched the river all around,
No trace or sign of black fox skin was ever after found;
Though one man said he saw the tread of HOOFS deep in the ground.

The Ballad of Pious Pete

"The North has got him." –Yukonism.

I tried to refine that neighbor of mine, honest to God, I did.
I grieved for his fate, and early and late I watched over him like a kid.
I gave him excuse, I bore his abuse in every way that I could;
I swore to prevail; I camped on his trail;
 I plotted and planned for his good.
By day and by night I strove in men's sight to gather him into the fold,
With precept and prayer, with hope and despair,
 in hunger and hardship and cold.
I followed him into Gehennas of sin, I sat where the sirens sit;
In the shade of the Pole, for the sake of his soul,
 I strove with the powers of the Pit.
I shadowed him down to the scrofulous town;
 I dragged him from dissolute brawls;
But I killed the galoot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.

God knows what I did he should seek to be rid
 of one who would save him from shame.
God knows what I bore that night when he swore
 and bade me make tracks from his claim.
I started to tell of the horrors of hell,
 when sudden his eyes lit like coals;
And "Chuck it," says he, "don't persecute me
 with your cant and your saving of souls."
I'll swear I was mild as I'd be with a child,
 but he called me the son of a slut;
And, grabbing his gun with a leap and a run,
 he threatened my face with the butt.
So what could I do (I leave it to you)? With curses he harried me forth;
Then he was alone, and I was alone, and over us menaced the North.

Our cabins were near; I could see, I could hear;
 but between us there rippled the creek;
And all summer through, with a rancor that grew,
 he would pass me and never would speak.
Then a shuddery breath like the coming of Death
 crept down from the peaks far away;
The water was still; the twilight was chill; the sky was a tatter of gray.
Swift came the Big Cold, and opal and gold the lights of the witches arose;
The frost-tyrant clinched, and the valley was cinched

by the stark and cadaverous snows.
The trees were like lace where the star-beams could chase,
each leaf was a jewel agleam.
The soft white hush lapped the Northland and wrapped
us round in a crystalline dream;
So still I could hear quite loud in my ear
the swish of the pinions of time;
So bright I could see, as plain as could be,
the wings of God's angels ashine.

As I read in the Book I would oftentimes look
to that cabin just over the creek.
Ah me, it was sad and evil and bad, two neighbors who never would speak!
I knew that full well like a devil in hell
he was hatching out, early and late,
A system to bear through the frost-spangled air
the warm, crimson waves of his hate.
I only could peer and shudder and fear—'twas ever so ghastly and still;
But I knew over there in his lonely despair
he was plotting me terrible ill.
I knew that he nursed a malice accurst,
like the blast of a winnowing flame;
I pleaded aloud for a shield, for a shroud—Oh, God! then calamity came.

Mad! If I'm mad then you too are mad; but it's all in the point of view.
If you'd looked at them things gallivantin' on wings,
all purple and green and blue;
If you'd noticed them twist, as they mounted and hissed
like scorpions dim in the dark;
If you'd seen them rebound with a horrible sound,
and spitefully spitting a spark;
If you'd watched IT with dread, as it hissed by your bed,
that thing with the feelers that crawls—
You'd have settled the brute that attempted to shoot
electricity into your walls.

Oh, some they were blue, and they slithered right through;
they were silent and squashy and round;
And some they were green; they were wriggly and lean;
they writhed with so hateful a sound.
My blood seemed to freeze; I fell on my knees;
my face was a white splash of dread.
Oh, the Green and the Blue, they were gruesome to view;

but the worst of them all were the Red.
They came through the door, they came through the floor,
they came through the moss-creviced logs.
They were savage and dire; they were whiskered with fire;
they bickered like malamute dogs.
They ravined in rings like iniquitous things;
they gulped down the Green and the Blue.
I crinkled with fear whene'er they drew near,
and nearer and nearer they drew.

And then came the crown of Horror's grim crown,
the monster so loathsomely red.
Each eye was a pin that shot out and in, as, squidlike, it oozed to my bed;
So softly it crept with feelers that swept
and quivered like fine copper wire;
Its belly was white with a sulphurous light,
its jaws were a-drooling with fire.
It came and it came; I could breathe of its flame,
but never a wink could I look.
I thrust in its maw the Fount of the Law; I fended it off with the Book.
I was weak—oh, so weak—but I thrilled at its shriek,
as wildly it fled in the night;
And deathlike I lay till the dawn of the day.
(Was ever so welcome the light?)

I loaded my gun at the rise of the sun; to his cabin so softly I slunk.
My neighbor was there in the frost-freighted air,
all wrapped in a robe in his bunk.
It muffled his moans; it outlined his bones, as feebly he twisted about;
His gums were so black, and his lips seemed to crack,
and his teeth all were loosening out.
'Twas a death's head that peered through the tangle of beard;
'twas a face I will never forget;
Sunk eyes full of woe, and they troubled me so
with their pleadings and anguish, and yet
As I rested my gaze in a misty amaze on the scurvy-degenerate wreck,
I thought of the Things with the dragon-fly wings,
then laid I my gun on his neck.
He gave out a cry that was faint as a sigh, like a perishing malamute,
And he says unto me, "I'm converted," says he;
"for Christ's sake, Peter, don't shoot!"

They're taking me out with an escort about, and under a sergeant's care;
I am humbled indeed, for I'm 'cuffed to a Swede
 that thinks he's a millionaire.
But it's all Gospel true what I'm telling to you—
 up there where the Shadow falls—
That I settled Sam Noot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.

The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill

I took a contract to bury the body of blasphemous Bill MacKie,
Whenever, wherever or whatsoever the manner of death he die—
Whether he die in the light o' day or under the peak-faced moon;
In cabin or dance-hall, camp or dive, mucklucks or patent shoon;
On velvet tundra or virgin peak, by glacier, drift or draw;
In muskeg hollow or canyon gloom, by avalanche, fang or claw;
By battle, murder or sudden wealth, by pestilence, hooch or lead—
I swore on the Book I would follow and look till I found my tombless dead.

For Bill was a dainty kind of cuss, and his mind was mighty sot
On a dinky patch with flowers and grass in a civilized bone-yard lot.
And where he died or how he died, it didn't matter a damn
So long as he had a grave with frills and a tombstone "epigram".
So I promised him, and he paid the price in good cheechako coin
(Which the same I blowed in that very night down in the Tenderloin).
Then I painted a three-foot slab of pine: "Here lies poor Bill MacKie",
And I hung it up on my cabin wall and I waited for Bill to die.

Years passed away, and at last one day came a squaw with a story strange,
Of a long-deserted line of traps 'way back of the Bighorn range;
Of a little hut by the great divide, and a white man stiff and still,
Lying there by his lonesome self, and I figured it must be Bill.
So I thought of the contract I'd made with him,

and I took down from the shelf

The swell black box with the silver plate he'd picked out for hisself;
And I packed it full of grub and "hooch", and I slung it on the sleigh;
Then I harnessed up my team of dogs and was off at dawn of day.

You know what it's like in the Yukon wild when it's sixty-nine below;
When the ice-worms wriggle their purple heads
through the crust of the pale blue snow;
When the pine-trees crack like little guns in the silence of the wood,
And the icicles hang down like tusks under the parka hood;
When the stove-pipe smoke breaks sudden off, and the sky is weirdly lit,
And the careless feel of a bit of steel burns like a red-hot spit;
When the mercury is a frozen ball, and the frost-fiend stalks to kill—
Well, it was just like that that day when I set out to look for Bill.

Oh, the awful hush that seemed to crush me down on every hand,
As I blundered blind with a trail to find
through that blank and bitter land;
Half dazed, half crazed in the winter wild,

with its grim heart-breaking woes,
And the ruthless strife for a grip on life that only the sourdough knows!
North by the compass, North I pressed; river and peak and plain
Passed like a dream I slept to lose and I waked to dream again.

River and plain and mighty peak—and who could stand unawed?
As their summits blazed, he could stand undazed
at the foot of the throne of God.

North, aye, North, through a land accurst, shunned by the scouring brutes,
And all I heard was my own harsh word and the whine of the malamutes,
Till at last I came to a cabin squat, built in the side of a hill,
And I burst in the door, and there on the floor, frozen to death, lay Bill.

Ice, white ice, like a winding-sheet, sheathing each smoke-grimed wall;
Ice on the stove-pipe, ice on the bed, ice gleaming over all;
Sparkling ice on the dead man's chest, glittering ice in his hair,
Ice on his fingers, ice in his heart, ice in his glassy stare;
Hard as a log and trussed like a frog, with his arms and legs outspread.
I gazed at the coffin I'd brought for him,
and I gazed at the gruesome dead,

And at last I spoke: "Bill liked his joke; but still, goldarn his eyes,
A man had ought to consider his mates in the way he goes and dies."

Have you ever stood in an Arctic hut in the shadow of the Pole,
With a little coffin six by three and a grief you can't control?
Have you ever sat by a frozen corpse that looks at you with a grin,
And that seems to say: "You may try all day, but you'll never jam me in"?
I'm not a man of the quitting kind, but I never felt so blue
As I sat there gazing at that stiff and studying what I'd do.
Then I rose and I kicked off the husky dogs that were nosing rund about,
And I lit a roaring fire in the stove, and I started to thaw Bill out.

Well, I thawed and thawed for thirteen days, but it didn't seem no good;
His arms and legs stuck out like pegs, as if they was made of wood.
Till at last I said: "It ain't no use—he's froze too hard to thaw;
He's obstinate, and he won't lie straight, so I guess I got to—SAW."
So I sawed off poor Bill's arms and legs, and I laid him snug and straight
In the little coffin he picked hisself, with the dinky silver plate;
And I came nigh near to shedding a tear as I nailed him safely down;
Then I stowed him away in my Yukon sleigh, and I started back to town.

So I buried him as the contract was in a narrow grave and deep,
And there he's waiting the Great Clean-up,
when the Judgment sluice-heads sweep;

And I smoke my pipe and I meditate in the light of the Midnight Sun,
And sometimes I wonder if they WAS, the awful things I done.
And as I sit and the parson talks, expounding of the Law,
I often think of poor old Bill—AND HOW HARD HE WAS TO SAW.

The Ballad of One-Eyed Mike

*This is the tale that was told to me by the man with the crystal eye,
As I smoked my pipe in the camp-fire light,
and the Glories swept the sky;
As the Northlights gleamed and curved and streamed,
and the bottle of "hooch" was dry.*

A man once aimed that my life be shamed, and wrought me a deathly wrong;
I vowed one day I would well repay, but the heft of his hate was strong.
He thonged me East and he thonged me West; he harried me back and forth,
Till I fled in fright from his peerless spite
to the bleak, bald-headed North.

And there I lay, and for many a day I hatched plan after plan,
For a golden haul of the wherewithal to crush and to kill my man;
And there I strove, and there I clove through the drift of icy streams;
And there I fought, and there I sought for the pay-streak of my dreams.

So twenty years, with their hopes and fears and smiles and tears and such,
Went by and left me long bereft of hope of the Midas touch;
About as fat as a chancel rat, and lo! despite my will,
In the weary fight I had clean lost sight of the man I sought to kill.

'Twas so far away, that evil day when I prayed to the Prince of Gloom
For the savage strength and the sullen length of life to work his doom.
Nor sign nor word had I seen or heard, and it happed so long ago;
My youth was gone and my memory wan, and I willed it even so.

It fell one night in the waning light by the Yukon's oily flow,
I smoked and sat as I marvelled at the sky's port-winey glow;
Till it paled away to an absinthe gray, and the river seemed to shrink,
All wobbly flakes and wriggling snakes and goblin eyes a-wink.

'Twas weird to see and it 'wildered me in a queer, hypnotic dream,
Till I saw a spot like an inky blot come floating down the stream;
It bobbed and swung; it sheered and hung; it romped round in a ring;
It seemed to play in a tricksome way; it sure was a merry thing.

In freakish flights strange oily lights came fluttering round its head,
Like butterflies of a monster size—then I knew it for the Dead.
Its face was rubbed and slicked and scrubbed as smooth as a shaven pate;
In the silver snakes that the water makes it gleamed like a dinner-plate.

It gurgled near, and clear and clear and large and large it grew;
It stood upright in a ring of light and it looked me through and through.

It weltered round with a woozy sound, and ere I could retreat,
With the witless roll of a sodden soul it wantoned to my feet.

And here I swear by this Cross I wear, I heard that "floater" say:
"I am the man from whom you ran, the man you sought to slay.
That you may note and gaze and gloat, and say 'Revenge is sweet',
In the grit and grime of the river's slime I am rotting at your feet.

"The ill we rue we must e'en undo, though it rive us bone from bone;
So it came about that I sought you out, for I prayed I might atone.
I did you wrong, and for long and long I sought where you might live;
And now you're found, though I'm dead and drowned, I beg you to forgive."

So sad it seemed, and its cheek-bones gleamed,
and its fingers flicked the shore;
And it lapped and lay in a weary way, and its hands met to implore;
That I gently said: "Poor, restless dead, I would never work you woe;
Though the wrong you rue you can ne'er undo, I forgave you long ago."

Then, wonder-wise, I rubbed my eyes and I woke from a horrid dream.
The moon rode high in the naked sky, and something bobbed in the stream.
It held my sight in a patch of light, and then it sheered from the shore;
It dipped and sank by a hollow bank, and I never saw it more.

*This was the tale he told to me, that man so warped and gray,
Ere he slept and dreamed, and the camp-fire gleamed
in his eye in a wolfish way—
That crystal eye that raked the sky in the weird Auroral ray.*

The Ballad of the Brand

'Twas up in a land long famed for gold, where women were far and rare,
Tellus, the smith, had taken to wife a maiden amazingly fair;
Tellus, the brawny worker in iron, hairy and heavy of hand,
Saw her and loved her and bore her away from the tribe of a Southern land;
Deeming her worthy to queen his home and mother him little ones,
That the name of Tellus, the master smith, might live in his stalwart sons.

Now there was little of law in the land, and evil doings were rife,
And every man who joyed in his home guarded the fame of his wife;
For there were those of the silver tongue and the honeyed art to beguile,
Who would cozen the heart from a woman's breast
and damn her soul with a smile.

And there were women too quick to heed a look or a whispered word,
And once in a while a man was slain, and the ire of the King was stirred;
So far and wide he proclaimed his wrath, and this was the law he willed:
"That whosoever killeth a man, even shall he be killed."

Now Tellus, the smith, he trusted his wife; his heart was empty of fear.
High on the hill was the gleam of their hearth, a beacon of love and cheer.
High on the hill they builded their bower,
where the broom and the bracken meet;
Under a grave of oaks it was, hushed and drowsily sweet.
Here he enshrined her, his dearest saint, his idol, the light of his eye;
Her kisses rested upon his lips as brushes a butterfly.
The weight of her arms around his neck was light as the thistle down;
And sweetly she studied to win his smile, and gently she mocked his frown.
And when at the close of the dusty day his clangorous toil was done,
She hastened to meet him down the way all lit by the amber sun.

Their dove-cot gleamed in the golden light, a temple of stainless love;
Like the hanging cup of a big blue flower was the topaz sky above.
The roses and lilies yearned to her,
as swift through their throng she pressed;
A little white, fragile, fluttering thing
that lay like a child on his breast.
Then the heart of Tellus, the smith, was proud,
and sang for the joy of life,
And there in the bronzing summertime he thanked the gods for his wife.

Now there was one called Philo, a scribe, a man of exquisite grace,
Carved like the god Apollo in limb, fair as Adonis in face;
Eager and winning in manner, full of such radiant charm,

Womenkind fought for his favor and loved to their uttermost harm.
Such was his craft and his knowledge, such was his skill at the game,
Never was woman could flout him, so be he plotted her shame.
And so he drank deep of pleasure, and then it fell on a day
He gazed on the wife of Tellus and marked her out for his prey.

Tellus, the smith, was merry, and the time of the year it was June,
So he said to his stalwart helpers: "Shut down the forge at noon.
Go ye and joy in the sunshine, rest in the coolth of the grove,
Drift on the dreamy river, every man with his love."
Then to himself: "Oh, Beloved, sweet will be your surprise;
To-day will we sport like children, laugh in each other's eyes;
Weave gay garlands of poppies, crown each other with flowers,
Pull plump carp from the lilies, rifle the ferny bowers.
To-day with feasting and gladness the wine of Cyprus will flow;
To-day is the day we were wedded only a twelvemonth ago."

The larks trilled high in the heavens; his heart was lyric with joy;
He plucked a posy of lilies; he sped like a love-sick boy.
He stole up the velvety pathway—his cottage was sunsteeped and still;
Vines honeysuckled the window; softly he peeped o'er the sill.
The lilies dropped from his fingers; devils were choking his breath;
Rigid with horror, he stiffened; ghastly his face was as death.
Like a nun whose faith in the Virgin is met with a prurient jibe,
He shrank—'twas the wife of his bosom in the arms of Philo, the scribe.

Tellus went back to his smithy; he reeled like a drunken man;
His heart was riven with anguish; his brain was brooding a plan.
Straight to his anvil he hurried; started his furnace aglow;
Heated his iron and shaped it with savage and masterful blow.
Sparks showered over and round him; swiftly under his hand
There at last it was finished—a hideous and infamous Brand.

That night the wife of his bosom, the light of joy in her eyes,
Kissed him with words of rapture; but he knew that her words were lies.
Never was she so beguiling, never so merry of speech
(For passion ripens a woman as the sunshine ripens a peach).
He clenched his teeth into silence; he yielded up to her lure,
Though he knew that her breasts were heaving from the fire of her paramour.
"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow"—he wove her hair in a strand,
Twisted it round his fingers and smiled as he thought of the Brand.

The morrow was come, and Tellus swiftly stole up the hill.
Butterflies drowsed in the noon-heat; coverts were sunsteeped and still.

Softly he padded the pathway unto the porch, and within
Heard he the low laugh of dalliance, heard he the rapture of sin.
Knew he her eyes were mystic with light that no man should see,
No man kindle and joy in, no man on earth save he.
And never for him would it kindle. The bloodlust surged in his brain;
Through the senseless stone could he see them, wanton and warily fain.
Horrible! Heaven he sought for, gained it and gloried and fell—
Oh, it was sudden—headlong into the nethermost hell. . . .

Was this he, Tellus, this marble? Tellus . . . not dreaming a dream?
Ah! sharp-edged as a javelin, was that a woman's scream?
Was it a door that shattered, shell-like, under his blow?
Was it his saint, that strumpet, dishevelled and cowering low?
Was it her lover, that wild thing, that twisted and gouged and tore?
Was it a man he was crushing, whose head he beat on the floor?
Laughing the while at its weakness, till sudden he stayed his hand—
Through the red ring of his madness flamed the thought of the Brand.

Then bound he the naked Philo with thongs that cut in the flesh,
And the wife of his bosom, fear-frantic, he gagged with a silken mesh,
Choking her screams into silence; bound her down by the hair;
Dragged her lover unto her under her frenzied stare.
In the heat of the hearth-fire embers he heated the hideous Brand;
Twisting her fingers open, he forced its haft in her hand.
He pressed it downward and downward; she felt the living flesh sear;
She saw the throe of her lover; she heard the scream of his fear.
Once, twice and thrice he forced her, heedless of prayer and shriek—
Once on the forehead of Philo, twice in the soft of his cheek.
Then (for the thing was finished) he said to the woman: "See
How you have branded your lover! Now will I let him go free."
He severed the thongs that bound him, laughing: "Revenge is sweet",
And Philo, sobbing in anguish, feebly rose to his feet.
The man who was fair as Apollo, god-like in woman's sight,
Hideous now as a satyr, fled to the pity of night.

*Then came they before the Judgment Seat,
and thus spoke the Lord of the Land:*

*"He who seeketh his neighbor's wife
shall suffer the doom of the Brand.*

*Brutish and bold on his brow be it stamped,
deep in his cheek let it sear,*

*That every man may look on his shame, and shudder and sicken and fear.
He shall hear their mock in the market-place,*

their fleering jibe at the feast;

*He shall seek the caves and the shroud of night,
and the fellowship of the beast.*

Outcast forever from homes of men, far and far shall he roam.

Such be the doom, sadder than death, of him who shameth a home.”

The Ballad of Hard-Luck Henry

Now wouldn't you expect to find a man an awful crank
That's staked out nigh three hundred claims, and every one a blank;
That's followed every fool stampede, and seen the rise and fall
Of camps where men got gold in chunks and he got none at all;
That's prospected a bit of ground and sold it for a song
To see it yield a fortune to some fool that came along;
That's sunk a dozen bed-rock holes, and not a speck in sight,
Yet sees them take a million from the claims to left and right?
Now aren't things like that enough to drive a man to booze?
But Hard-Luck Smith was hoodoo-proof—he knew the way to lose.

'Twas in the fall of nineteen four-leap-year I've heard them say—
When Hard-Luck came to Hunker Creek and took a hillside lay.
And lo! as if to make amends for all the futile past,
Late in the year he struck it rich, the real pay-streak at last.
The riffles of his sluicing-box were choked with speckled earth,
And night and day he worked that lay for all that he was worth.
And when in chill December's gloom his lucky lease expired,
He found that he had made a stake as big as he desired.

One day while meditating on the waywardness of fate,
He felt the ache of lonely man to find a fitting mate;
A petticoated pard to cheer his solitary life,
A woman with soft, soothing ways, a confidant, a wife.
And while he cooked his supper on his little Yukon stove,
He wished that he had staked a claim in Love's rich treasure-trove;
When suddenly he paused and held aloft a Yukon egg,
For there in pencilled letters was the magic name of Peg.

You know these Yukon eggs of ours—some pink, some green, some blue—
A dollar per, assorted tints, assorted flavors too.
The supercilious cheechako might designate them high,
But one acquires a taste for them and likes them by-and-by.
Well, Hard-Luck Henry took this egg and held it to the light,
And there was more faint pencilling that sorely taxed his sight.
At last he made it out, and then the legend ran like this—
"Will Klondike miner write to Peg, Plumhollow, Squashville, Wis.?"

That night he got to thinking of this far-off, unknown fair;
It seemed so sort of opportune, an answer to his prayer.
She flitted sweetly through his dreams, she haunted him by day,
She smiled through clouds of nicotine, she cheered his weary way.

At last he yielded to the spell; his course of love he set—
Wisconsin his objective point; his object, Margaret.

With every mile of sea and land his longing grew and grew.
He practised all his pretty words, and these, I fear, were few.
At last, one frosty evening, with a cold chill down his spine,
He found himself before her house, the threshold of the shrine.
His courage flickered to a spark, then glowed with sudden flame—
He knocked; he heard a welcome word; she came—his goddess came.
Oh, she was fair as any flower, and huskily he spoke:
"I'm all the way from Klondike, with a mighty heavy poke.
I'm looking for a lassie, one whose Christian name is Peg,
Who sought a Klondike miner, and who wrote it on an egg."

The lassie gazed at him a space, her cheeks grew rosy red;
She gazed at him with tear-bright eyes, then tenderly she said:
"Yes, lonely Klondike miner, it is true my name is Peg.
It's also true I longed for you and wrote it on an egg.
My heart went out to someone in that land of night and cold;
But oh, I fear that Yukon egg must have been mighty old.
I waited long, I hoped and feared; you should have come before;
I've been a wedded woman now for eighteen months or more.
I'm sorry, since you've come so far, you ain't the one that wins;
But won't you take a step inside—I'LL LET YOU SEE THE TWINS."

The Man from Eldorado

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's just arrived in town,
In moccasins and oily buckskin shirt.
He's gaunt as any Indian, and pretty nigh as brown;
He's greasy, and he smells of sweat and dirt.
He sports a crop of whiskers that would shame a healthy hog;
Hard work has racked his joints and stooped his back;
He slops along the sidewalk followed by his yellow dog,
But he's got a bunch of gold-dust in his sack.

He seems a little wistful as he blinks at all the lights,
And maybe he is thinking of his claim
And the dark and dwarfish cabin where he lay and dreamed at nights,
(Thank God, he'll never see the place again!)
Where he lived on tinned tomatoes, beef embalmed and sourdough bread,
On rusty beans and bacon furred with mould;
His stomach's out of kilter and his system full of lead,
But it's over, and his poke is full of gold.

He has panted at the windlass, he has loaded in the drift,
He has pounded at the face of oozy clay;
He has taxed himself to sickness, dark and damp and double shift,
He has labored like a demon night and day.
And now, praise God, it's over, and he seems to breathe again
Of new-mown hay, the warm, wet, friendly loam;
He sees a snowy orchard in a green and dimpling plain,
And a little vine-clad cottage, and it's—Home.

II.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's had a bite and sup,
And he's met in with a drouthy friend or two;
He's cached away his gold-dust, but he's sort of bucking up,
So he's kept enough to-night to see him through.
His eye is bright and genial, his tongue no longer lags;
His heart is brimming o'er with joy and mirth;
He may be far from savory, he may be clad in rags,
But to-night he feels as if he owns the earth.

Says he: "Boys, here is where the shaggy North and I will shake;
I thought I'd never manage to get free.
I kept on making misses; but at last I've got my stake;
There's no more thawing frozen muck for me.

I am going to God's Country, where I'll live the simple life;
I'll buy a bit of land and make a start;
I'll carve a little homestead, and I'll win a little wife,
And raise ten little kids to cheer my heart."

They signified their sympathy by crowding to the bar;
They bellied up three deep and drank his health.
He shed a radiant smile around and smoked a rank cigar;
They wished him honor, happiness and wealth.
They drank unto his wife to be—that unsuspecting maid;
They drank unto his children half a score;
And when they got through drinking very tenderly they laid
The man from Eldorado on the floor.

III.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's only starting in
To cultivate a thousand-dollar jag.
His poke is full of gold-dust and his heart is full of sin,
And he's dancing with a girl called Muckluck Mag.
She's as light as any fairy; she's as pretty as a peach;
She's mistress of the witchcraft to beguile;
There's sunshine in her manner, there is music in her speech,
And there's concentrated honey in her smile.

Oh, the fever of the dance-hall and the glitter and the shine,
The beauty, and the jewels, and the whirl,
The madness of the music, the rapture of the wine,
The languorous allurements of a girl!
She is like a lost madonna; he is gaunt, unkempt and grim;
But she fondles him and gazes in his eyes;
Her kisses seek his heavy lips, and soon it seems to him
He has staked a little claim in Paradise.

"Who's for a juicy two-step?" cries the master of the floor;
The music throbs with soft, seductive beat.
There's glitter, gilt and gladness; there are pretty girls galore;
There's a woolly man with moccasins on feet.
They know they've got him going; he is buying wine for all;
They crowd around as buzzards at a feast,
Then when his poke is empty they boost him from the hall,
And spurn him in the gutter like a beast.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's painting red the town;
Behind he leaves a trail of yellow dust;

In a whirl of senseless riot he is ramping up and down;
There's nothing checks his madness and his lust.
And soon the word is passed around—it travels like a flame;
They fight to clutch his hand and call him friend,
The chevaliers of lost repute, the dames of sorry fame;
Then comes the grim awakening—the end.

IV.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he gives a grand affair;
There's feasting, dancing, wine without restraint.
The smooth Beau Brummels of the bar, the faro men, are there;
The tin horns and purveyors of red paint;
The sleek and painted women, their predacious eyes aglow—
Sure Klondike City never saw the like;
Then Muckluck Mag proposed the toast, "The giver of the show,
The livest sport that ever hit the pike."

The "live one" rises to his feet; he stammers to reply—
And then there comes before his muddled brain
A vision of green vastitudes beneath an April sky,
And clover pastures drenched with silver rain.
He knows that it can never be, that he is down and out;
Life leers at him with foul and fetid breath;
And then amid the revelry, the song and cheer and shout,
He suddenly grows grim and cold as death.

He grips the table tensely, and he says: "Dear friends of mine,
I've let you dip your fingers in my purse;
I've crammed you at my table, and I've drowned you in my wine,
And I've little left to give you but—my curse.
I've failed supremely in my plans; it's rather late to whine;
My poke is mighty weasened up and small.
I thank you each for coming here; the happiness is mine—
And now, you thieves and harlots, take it all."

He twists the thong from off his poke; he swings it o'er his head;
The nuggets fall around their feet like grain.
They rattle over roof and wall; they scatter, roll and spread;
The dust is like a shower of golden rain.
The guests a moment stand aghast, then grovel on the floor;
They fight, and snarl, and claw, like beasts of prey;
And then, as everybody grabbed and everybody swore,
The man from Eldorado slipped away.

V.

He's the man from Eldorado, and they found him stiff and dead,
Half covered by the freezing ooze and dirt.
A clotted Colt was in his hand, a hole was in his head,
And he wore an old and oily buckskin shirt.
His eyes were fixed and horrible, as one who hails the end;
The frost had set him rigid as a log;
And there, half lying on his breast, his last and only friend,
There crouched and whined a mangy yellow dog.

My Friends

The man above was a murderer, the man below was a thief;
And I lay there in the bunk between, ailing beyond belief;
A weary armful of skin and bone, wasted with pain and grief.

My feet were froze, and the lifeless toes were purple and green and gray;
The little flesh that clung to my bones,
 you could punch it in holes like clay;
The skin on my gums was a sullen black, and slowly peeling away.

I was sure enough in a direful fix, and often I wondered why
They did not take the chance that was left and leave me alone to die,
Or finish me off with a dose of dope—so utterly lost was I.

But no; they brewed me the green-spruce tea,
 and nursed me there like a child;
And the homicide he was good to me, and bathed my sores and smiled;
And the thief he starved that I might be fed,
 and his eyes were kind and mild.

Yet they were woefully wicked men, and often at night in pain
I heard the murderer speak of his deed and dream it over again;
I heard the poor thief sorrowing for the dead self he had slain.

I'll never forget that bitter dawn, so evil, askew and gray,
When they wrapped me round in the skins of beasts
 and they bore me to a sleigh,
And we started out with the nearest post an hundred miles away.

I'll never forget the trail they broke, with its tense, unuttered woe;
And the crunch, crunch, crunch as their snowshoes sank
 through the crust of the hollow snow;
And my breath would fail, and every beat of my heart was like a blow.

And oftentimes I would die the death, yet wake up to life anew;
The sun would be all ablaze on the waste, and the sky a blighting blue,
And the tears would rise in my snow-blind eyes
 and furrow my cheeks like dew.

And the camps we made when their strength outplayed
 and the day was pinched and wan;
And oh, the joy of that blessed halt, and how I did dread the dawn;
And how I hated the weary men who rose and dragged me on.

And oh, how I begged to rest, to rest—the snow was so sweet a shroud;

And oh, how I cried when they urged me on, cried and cursed them aloud;
Yet on they strained, all racked and pained,
 and sorely their backs were bowed.

And then it was all like a lurid dream, and I prayed for a swift release
From the ruthless ones who would not leave me to die alone in peace;
Till I wakened up and I found myself at the post of the Mounted Police.

And there was my friend the murderer, and there was my friend the thief,
With bracelets of steel around their wrists, and wicked beyond belief:
But when they come to God's judgment seat—may I be allowed the brief.

The Prospector

I strolled up old Bonanza, where I staked in ninety-eight,
A-purpose to revisit the old claim.
I kept thinking mighty sadly of the funny ways of Fate,
And the lads who once were with me in the game.
Poor boys, they're down-and-outers, and there's scarcely one to-day
Can show a dozen colors in his poke;
And me, I'm still prospecting, old and battered, gaunt and gray,
And I'm looking for a grub-stake, and I'm broke.

I strolled up old Bonanza. The same old moon looked down;
The same old landmarks seemed to yearn to me;
But the cabins all were silent, and the flat, once like a town,
Was mighty still and lonesome-like to see.
There were piles and piles of tailings where we toiled with pick and pan,
And turning round a bend I heard a roar,
And there a giant gold-ship of the very newest plan
Was tearing chunks of pay-dirt from the shore.

It wallowed in its water-bed; it burrowed, heaved and swung;
It gnawed its way ahead with grunts and sighs;
Its bill of fare was rock and sand; the tailings were its dung;
It glared around with fierce electric eyes.
Full fifty buckets crammed its maw; it bellowed out for more;
It looked like some great monster in the gloom.
With two to feed its sateless greed, it worked for seven score,
And I sighed: "Ah, old-time miner, here's your doom!"

The idle windlass turns to rust; the sagging sluice-box falls;
The holes you digged are water to the brim;
Your little sod-roofed cabins with the snugly moss-chinked walls
Are deathly now and mouldering and dim.
The battle-field is silent where of old you fought it out;
The claims you fiercely won are lost and sold;
But there's a little army that they'll never put to rout—
The men who simply live to seek the gold.

The men who can't remember when they learned to swing a pack,
Or in what lawless land the quest began;
The solitary seeker with his grub-stake on his back,
The restless buccaneer of pick and pan.
On the mesas of the Southland, on the tundras of the North,
You will find us, changed in face but still the same;

And it isn't need, it isn't greed that sends us faring forth—
It's the fever, it's the glory of the game.

For once you've panned the speckled sand and seen the bonny dust,
Its peerless brightness blinds you like a spell;
It's little else you care about; you go because you must,
And you feel that you could follow it to hell.
You'd follow it in hunger, and you'd follow it in cold;
You'd follow it in solitude and pain;
And when you're stiff and batted down let someone whisper "Gold",
You're lief to rise and follow it again.

Yet look you, if I find the stuff it's just like so much dirt;
I fling it to the four winds like a child.
It's wine and painted women and the things that do me hurt,
Till I crawl back, beggared, broken, to the Wild.
Till I crawl back, sapped and sodden, to my grub-stake and my tent—
There's a city, there's an army (hear them shout).
There's the gold in millions, millions, but I haven't got a cent;
And oh, it's me, it's me that found it out.

It was my dream that made it good, my dream that made me go
To lands of dread and death disprized of man;
But oh, I've known a glory that their hearts will never know,
When I picked the first big nugget from my pan.
It's still my dream, my dauntless dream, that drives me forth once more
To seek and starve and suffer in the Vast;
That heaps my heart with eager hope, that glimmers on before—
My dream that will uplift me to the last.

Perhaps I am stark crazy, but there's none of you too sane;
It's just a little matter of degree.
My hobby is to hunt out gold; it's fortified in my brain;
It's life and love and wife and home to me.
And I'll strike it, yes, I'll strike it; I've a hunch I cannot fail;
I've a vision, I've a prompting, I've a call;
I hear the hoarse stampeding of an army on my trail,
To the last, the greatest gold camp of them all.

Beyond the shark-tooth ranges sawing savage at the sky
There's a lowering land no white man ever struck;
There's gold, there's gold in millions, and I'll find it if I die,
And I'm going there once more to try my luck.
Maybe I'll fail—what matter? It's a mandate, it's a vow;

And when in lands of dreariness and dread
You seek the last lone frontier, far beyond your frontiers now,
 You will find the old prospector, silent, dead.

You will find a tattered tent-pole with a ragged robe below it;
 You will find a rusted gold-pan on the sod;
You will find the claim I'm seeking,
 with my bones as stakes to show it;
But I've sought the last Recorder, and He's—God.

The Black Sheep

"The aristocratic ne'er-do-well in Canada frequently finds his way into the ranks of the Royal North-West Mounted Police." –Extract.

Hark to the ewe that bore him:

"What has muddied the strain?

Never his brothers before him

Showed the hint of a stain."

Hark to the tups and wethers;

Hark to the old gray ram:

"We're all of us white, but he's black as night,

And he'll never be worth a damn."

I'm up on the bally wood-pile at the back of the barracks yard;

"A damned disgrace to the force, sir", with a comrade standing guard;

Making the bluff I'm busy, doing my six months hard.

"Six months hard and dismissed, sir." Isn't that rather hell?

And all because of the liquor laws and the wiles of a native belle—

Some "hooch" I gave to a siwash brave who swore that he wouldn't tell.

At least they SAY that I did it. It's so in the town report.

All that I can recall is a night of revel and sport,

When I woke with a "head" in the guard-room,

and they dragged me sick into court.

And the O. C. said: "You are guilty", and I said never a word;

For, hang it, you see I couldn't—I didn't know WHAT had occurred,

And, under the circumstances, denial would be absurd.

But the one that cooked my bacon was Grubbe, of the City Patrol.

He fagged for my room at Eton, and didn't I devil his soul!

And now he is getting even, landing me down in the hole.

Plugging away on the wood-pile; doing chores round the square.

There goes an officer's lady—gives me a haughty stare—

Me that's an earl's own nephew—that is the hardest to bear.

To think of the poor old mater awaiting her prodigal son.

Tho' I broke her heart with my folly, I was always the white-haired one.

(That fatted calf that they're cooking will surely be overdone.)

I'll go back and yarn to the Bishop; I'll dance with the village belle;

I'll hand round tea to the ladies, and everything will be well.

Where I have been won't matter; what I have seen I won't tell.

I'll soar to their ken like a comet. They'll see me with never a stain;
But will they reform me?—far from it. We pay for our pleasure with pain;
But the dog will return to his vomit, the hog to his wallow again.

I've chewed on the rind of creation, and bitter I've tasted the same;
Stacked up against hell and damnation, I've managed to stay in the game;
I've had my moments of sorrow; I've had my seasons of shame.

That's past; when one's nature's a cracked one,
it's too jolly hard to mend.
So long as the road is level, so long as I've cash to spend.
I'm bound to go to the devil, and it's all the same in the end.

The bugle is sounding for stables; the men troop off through the gloom;
An orderly laying the tables sings in the bright mess-room.
(I'll wash in the prison bucket, and brush with the prison broom.)

I'll lie in my cell and listen; I'll wish that I couldn't hear
The laugh and the chaff of the fellows swigging the canteen beer;
The nasal tone of the gramophone playing "The Bandolier".

And it seems to me, though it's misty, that night of the flowing bowl,
That the man who potlatched the whiskey and landed me into the hole
Was Grubbe, that Unmerciful Bounder, Grubbe, of the City Patrol.

The Telegraph Operator

I will not wash my face;
I will not brush my hair;
I "pig" around the place—
There's nobody to care.
Nothing but rock and tree;
Nothing but wood and stone,
Oh, God, it's hell to be
Alone, alone, alone!

Snow-peaks and deep-gashed draws
Corral me in a ring.
I feel as if I was
The only living thing
On all this blighted earth;
And so I frowst and shrink,
And crouching by my hearth
I hear the thoughts I think.

I think of all I miss—
The boys I used to know;
The girls I used to kiss;
The coin I used to blow:
The bars I used to haunt;
The racket and the row;
The beers I didn't want
(I wish I had 'em now).

Day after day the same,
Only a little worse;
No one to grouch or blame—
Oh, for a loving curse!
Oh, in the night I fear,
Haunted by nameless things,
Just for a voice to cheer,
Just for a hand that clings!

Faintly as from a star
Voices come o'er the line;
Voices of ghosts afar,
Not in this world of mine;
Lives in whose loom I grope;
Words in whose weft I hear

Eager the thrill of hope,
Awful the chill of fear.

I'm thinking out aloud;
I reckon that is bad;
(The snow is like a shroud)–
Maybe I'm going mad.
Say! wouldn't that be tough?
This awful hush that hugs
And chokes one is enough
To make a man go "bugs".

There's not a thing to do;
I cannot sleep at night;
No wonder I'm so blue;
Oh, for a friendly fight!
The din and rush of strife;
A music-hall aglow;
A crowd, a city, life–
Dear God, I miss it so!

Here, you have moped enough!
Brace up and play the game!
But say, it's awful tough–
Day after day the same
(I've said that twice, I bet).
Well, there's not much to say.
I wish I had a pet,
Or something I could play.

Cheer up! don't get so glum
And sick of everything;
The worst is yet to come;
God help you till the Spring.
God shield you from the Fear;
Teach you to laugh, not moan.
Ha! ha! it sounds so queer–
Alone, alone, alone!

The Wood-Cutter

*The sky is like an envelope,
 One of those blue official things;
 And, sealing it, to mock our hope,
 The moon, a silver wafer, clings.
 What shall we find when death gives leave
 To read—our sentence or reprieve?*

I'm holding it down on God's scrap-pile, up on the fag-end of earth;
 O'er me a menace of mountains, a river that grits at my feet;
 Face to face with my soul-self, weighing my life at its worth;
 Wondering what I was made for, here in my last retreat.

Last! Ah, yes, it's the finish. Have ever you heard a man cry?
 (Sobs that rake him and rend him, right from the base of the chest.)
 That's how I've cried, oh, so often; and now that my tears are dry,
 I sit in the desolate quiet and wait for the infinite Rest.

Rest! Well, it's restful around me; it's quiet clean to the core.
 The mountains pose in their ermine, in golden the hills are clad;
 The big, blue, silt-freighted Yukon seethes by my cabin door,
 And I think it's only the river that keeps me from going mad.

By day it's a ruthless monster, a callous, insatiate thing,
 With oily bubble and eddy, with sudden swirling of breast;
 By night it's a writhing Titan, sullenly murmuring,
 Ever and ever goaded, and ever crying for rest.

It cries for its human tribute, but me it will never drown.
 I've learned the lore of my river; my river obeys me well.
 I hew and I launch my cordwood, and raft it to Dawson town,
 Where wood means wine and women, and, incidentally, hell.

Hell and the anguish thereafter. Here as I sit alone
 I'd give the life I have left me to lighten some load of care:
 (The bitterest part of the bitter is being denied to atone;
 Lips that have mocked at Heaven lend themselves ill to prayer.)

*Impotent as a beetle pierced on the needle of Fate;
 A wretch in a cosmic death-cell, peaks for my prison bars;
 'Whelmed by a world stupendous, lonely and listless I wait,
 Drowned in a sea of silence, strewn with confetti of stars.*

See! from far up the valley a rapier pierces the night,
 The white search-ray of a steamer. Swiftly, serenely it nears;

A proud, white, alien presence, a glittering galley of light,
Confident-poised, triumphant, freighted with hopes and fears.

I look as one looks on a vision; I see it pulsating by;
I glimpse joy-radiant faces; I hear the thresh of the wheel.
Hoof-like my heart beats a moment; then silence swoops from the sky.
Darkness is piled upon darkness. God only knows how I feel.

Maybe you've seen me sometimes; maybe you've pitied me then—
The lonely waif of the wood-camp, here by my cabin door.
Some day you'll look and see not; futile and outcast of men,
I shall be far from your pity, resting forevermore.

*My life was a problem in ciphers, a weary and profitless sum.
Slipsbod and stupid I worked it, dazed by negation and doubt.
Ciphers the total confronts me. Oh, Death, with thy moistened thumb,
Stoop like a petulant schoolboy, wipe me forever out!*

The Song of the Mouth-Organ

(With apologies to the singer of the "Song of the Banjo".)

I'm a homely little bit of tin and bone;
I'm beloved by the Legion of the Lost;
I haven't got a "vox humana" tone,
And a dime or two will satisfy my cost.
I don't attempt your high-falutin' flights;
I am more or less uncertain on the key;
But I tell you, boys, there's lots and lots of nights
When you've taken mighty comfort out of me.

I weigh an ounce or two, and I'm so small
You can pack me in the pocket of your vest;
And when at night so wearily you crawl
Into your bunk and stretch your limbs to rest,
You take me out and play me soft and low,
The simple songs that trouble your heartstrings;
The tunes you used to fancy long ago,
Before you made a rotten mess of things.

Then a dreamy look will come into your eyes,
And you break off in the middle of a note;
And then, with just the dreariest of sighs,
You drop me in the pocket of your coat.
But somehow I have bucked you up a bit;
And, as you turn around and face the wall,
You don't feel quite so spineless and unfit—
You're not so bad a fellow after all.

Do you recollect the bitter Arctic night;
Your camp beside the canyon on the trail;
Your tent a tiny square of orange light;
The moon above consumptive-like and pale;
Your supper cooked, your little stove aglow;
You tired, but snug and happy as a child?
Then 'twas "Turkey in the Straw" till your lips were nearly raw,
And you hurled your bold defiance at the Wild.

Do you recollect the flashing, lashing pain;
The gulf of humid blackness overhead;
The lightning making rapiers of the rain;
The cattle-horns like candles of the dead

You sitting on your bronco there alone,
In your slicker, saddle-sore and sick with cold?
Do you think the silent herd did not hear "The Mocking Bird",
Or relish "Silver Threads among the Gold"?

Do you recollect the wild Magellan coast;
The head-winds and the icy, roaring seas;
The nights you thought that everything was lost;
The days you toiled in water to your knees;
The frozen ratlines shrieking in the gale;
The hissing steeps and gulfs of livid foam:
When you cheered your messmates nine with "Ben Bolt" and "Clementine",
And "Dixie Land" and "Seeing Nellie Home"?

Let the jammy banjo voice the Younger Son,
Who waits for his remittance to arrive;
I represent the grimy, gritty one,
Who sweats his bones to keep himself alive;
Who's up against the real thing from his birth;
Whose heritage is hard and bitter toil;
I voice the weary, smeary ones of earth,
The helots of the sea and of the soil.

I'm the Steinway of strange mischief and mischance;
I'm the Stradivarius of blank defeat;
In the down-world, when the devil leads the dance,
I am simply and symbolically meet;
I'm the irrepressive spirit of mankind;
I'm the small boy playing knuckle down with Death;
At the end of all things known, where God's rubbish-heap is thrown,
I shrill impudent triumph at a breath.

I'm a humble little bit of tin and horn;
I'm a byword, I'm a plaything, I'm a jest;
The virtuoso looks on me with scorn;
But there's times when I am better than the best.
Ask the stoker and the sailor of the sea;
Ask the mucker and the hewer of the pine;
Ask the herder of the plain, ask the gleaner of the grain—
There's a lowly, loving kingdom—and it's mine.

The Trail of Ninety-Eight

I.

Gold! We leapt from our benches. Gold! We sprang from our stools.
Gold! We wheeled in the furrow, fired with the faith of fools.
Fearless, unfound, unfitted, far from the night and the cold,
Heard we the clarion summons, followed the master-lure—Gold!

Men from the sands of the Sunland; men from the woods of the West;
Men from the farms and the cities, into the Northland we pressed.
Graybeards and striplings and women, good men and bad men and bold,
Leaving our homes and our loved ones, crying exultantly—”Gold!”

Never was seen such an army, pitiful, futile, unfit;
Never was seen such a spirit, manifold courage and grit.
Never has been such a cohort under one banner unrolled
As surged to the ragged-edged Arctic, urged by the arch-tempter—Gold.

”Farewell!” we cried to our dearests; little we cared for their tears.
”Farewell!” we cried to the humdrum and the yoke of the hireling years;
Just like a pack of school-boys, and the big crowd cheered us good-bye.
Never were hearts so uplifted, never were hopes so high.

The spectral shores flitted past us, and every whirl of the screw
Hurled us nearer to fortune, and ever we planned what we’d do—
Do with the gold when we got it—big, shiny nuggets like plums,
There in the sand of the river, gouging it out with our thumbs.

And one man wanted a castle, another a racing stud;
A third would cruise in a palace yacht like a red-necked prince of blood.
And so we dreamed and we vaunted, millionaires to a man,
Leaping to wealth in our visions long ere the trail began.

II.

We landed in wind-swept Skagway. We joined the weltering mass,
Clamoring over their outfits, waiting to climb the Pass.
We tightened our girths and our pack-straps; we linked on the Human Chain,
Struggling up to the summit, where every step was a pain.

Gone was the joy of our faces, grim and haggard and pale;
The heedless mirth of the shipboard was changed to the care of the trail.
We flung ourselves in the struggle, packing our grub in relays,
Step by step to the summit in the bale of the winter days.

Floundering deep in the sump-holes, stumbling out again;
Crying with cold and weakness, crazy with fear and pain.
Then from the depths of our travail, ere our spirits were broke,
Grim, tenacious and savage, the lust of the trail awoke.

"Klondike or bust!" rang the slogan; every man for his own.
Oh, how we flogged the horses, staggering skin and bone!
Oh, how we cursed their weakness, anguish they could not tell,
Breaking their hearts in our passion, lashing them on till they fell!

For grub meant gold to our thinking, and all that could walk must pack;
The sheep for the shambles stumbled, each with a load on its back;
And even the swine were burdened, and grunted and squealed and rolled,
And men went mad in the moment, huskily clamoring "Gold!"

Oh, we were brutes and devils, goaded by lust and fear!
Our eyes were strained to the summit; the weaklings dropped to the rear,
Falling in heaps by the trail-side, heart-broken, limp and wan;
But the gaps closed up in an instant, and heedless the chain went on.

Never will I forget it, there on the mountain face,
Antlike, men with their burdens, clinging in icy space;
Dogged, determined and dauntless, cruel and callous and cold,
Cursing, blaspheming, reviling, and ever that battle-cry—"Gold!"

Thus toiled we, the army of fortune, in hunger and hope and despair,
Till glacier, mountain and forest vanished, and, radiantly fair,
There at our feet lay Lake Bennett, and down to its welcome we ran:
The trail of the land was over, the trail of the water began.

III.

We built our boats and we launched them. Never has been such a fleet;
A packing-case for a bottom, a mackinaw for a sheet.
Shapeless, grotesque, lopsided, flimsy, makeshift and crude,
Each man after his fashion builded as best he could.

Each man worked like a demon, as prow to rudder we raced;
The winds of the Wild cried "Hurry!" the voice of the waters, "Haste!"
We hated those driving before us; we dreaded those pressing behind;
We cursed the slow current that bore us; we prayed to the God of the wind.

Spring! and the hillsides flourished, vivid in jewelled green;
Spring! and our hearts' blood nourished envy and hatred and spleen.
Little cared we for the Spring-birth; much cared we to get on—
Stake in the Great White Channel, stake ere the best be gone.

The greed of the gold possessed us; pity and love were forgot;
Covetous visions obsessed us; brother with brother fought.
Partner with partner wrangled, each one claiming his due;
Wrangled and halved their outfits, sawing their boats in two.

Thuswise we voyaged Lake Bennett, Tagish, then Windy Arm,
Sinister, savage and baleful, boding us hate and harm.
Many a scow was shattered there on that iron shore;
Many a heart was broken straining at sweep and oar.

We roused Lake Marsh with a chorus, we drifted many a mile;
There was the canyon before us—cave-like its dark defile;
The shores swept faster and faster; the river narrowed to wrath;
Waters that hissed disaster reared upright in our path.

Beneath us the green tumult churning, above us the cavernous gloom;
Around us, swift twisting and turning, the black, sullen walls of a tomb.
We spun like a chip in a mill-race; our hearts hammered under the test;
Then—oh, the relief on each chill face!—we soared into sunlight and rest.

Hand sought for hand on the instant. Cried we, "Our troubles are o'er!"
Then, like a rumble of thunder, heard we a canorous roar.
Leaping and boiling and seething, saw we a cauldron afume;
There was the rage of the rapids, there was the menace of doom.

The river springs like a racer, sweeps through a gash in the rock;
Buts at the boulder-ribbed bottom, staggers and rears at the shock;
Leaps like a terrified monster, writhes in its fury and pain;
Then with the crash of a demon springs to the onset again.

Dared we that ravening terror; heard we its din in our ears;
Called on the Gods of our fathers, juggled forlorn with our fears;
Sank to our waists in its fury, tossed to the sky like a fleece;
Then, when our dread was the greatest, crashed into safety and peace.

But what of the others that followed, losing their boats by the score?
Well could we see them and hear them, strung down that desolate shore.
What of the poor souls that perished? Little of them shall be said—
On to the Golden Valley, pause not to bury the dead.

Then there were days of drifting, breezes soft as a sigh;
Night trailed her robe of jewels over the floor of the sky.
The moonlit stream was a python, silver, sinuous, vast,
That writhed on a shroud of velvet—well, it was done at last.

There were the tents of Dawson, there the scar of the slide;

Swiftly we poled o'er the shallows, swiftly leapt o'er the side.
Fires fringed the mouth of Bonanza; sunset gilded the dome;
The test of the trail was over—thank God, thank God, we were Home!

The Ballad of Gum-Boot Ben

*He was an old prospector with a vision bleared and dim.
He asked me for a grubstake, and the same I gave to him.
He hinted of a hidden trove, and when I made so bold
To question his veracity, this is the tale he told.*

"I do not seek the copper streak, nor yet the yellow dust;
I am not fain for sake of gain to irk the frozen crust;
Let fellows gross find gilded dross, far other is my mark;
Oh, gentle youth, this is the truth—I go to seek the Ark.

"I prospected the Pelly bed, I prospected the White;
The Nordenscold for love of gold I piked from morn till night;
Afar and near for many a year I led the wild stampede,
Until I guessed that all my quest was vanity and greed.

"Then came I to a land I knew no man had ever seen,
A haggard land, forlornly spanned by mountains lank and lean;
The nitchies said 'twas full of dread, of smoke and fiery breath,
And no man dare put foot in there for fear of pain and death.

"But I was made all unafraid, so, careless and alone,
Day after day I made my way into that land unknown;
Night after night by camp-fire light I crouched in lonely thought;
Oh, gentle youth, this is the truth—I knew not what I sought.

"I rose at dawn; I wandered on. 'Tis somewhat fine and grand
To be alone and hold your own in God's vast awesome land;
Come woe or weal, 'tis fine to feel a hundred miles between
The trails you dare and pathways where the feet of men have been.

"And so it fell on me a spell of wander-lust was cast.
The land was still and strange and chill, and cavernous and vast;
And sad and dead, and dull as lead, the valleys sought the snows;
And far and wide on every side the ashen peaks arose.

"The moon was like a silent spike that pierced the sky right through;
The small stars popped and winked and hopped in vastitudes of blue;
And unto me for company came creatures of the shade,
And formed in rings and whispered things that made me half afraid.

"And strange though be, 'twas borne on me that land had lived of old,
And men had crept and slain and slept where now they toiled for gold;
Through jungles dim the mammoth grim had sought the oozy fen,
And on his track, all bent of back, had crawled the hairy men.

"And furthermore, strange deeds of yore in this dead place were done.
They haunted me, as wild and free I roamed from sun to sun;
Until I came where sudden flame uplit a terraced height,
A regnant peak that seemed to seek the coronal of night.

"I scaled the peak; my heart was weak, yet on and on I pressed.
Skyward I strained until I gained its dazzling silver crest;
And there I found, with all around a world supine and stark,
Swept clean of snow, a flat plateau, and on it lay—the Ark.

"Yes, there, I knew, by two and two the beasts did disembark,
And so in haste I ran and traced in letters on the Ark
My human name—Ben Smith's the same. And now I want to float
A syndicate to haul and freight to town that noble boat."

*I met him later in a bar and made a gay remark
Anent an ancient miner and an option on the Ark.
He gazed at me reproachfully, as only toppers can;
But what he said I can't repeat—he was a bad old man.*

Clancy of the Mounted Police

In the little Crimson Manual it's written plain and clear
That who would wear the scarlet coat shall say good-bye to fear;
Shall be a guardian of the right, a sleuth-hound of the trail—
In the little Crimson Manual there's no such word as "fail"—
Shall follow on though heavens fall, or hell's top-turrets freeze,
Half round the world, if need there be, on bleeding hands and knees.
It's duty, duty, first and last, the Crimson Manual saith;
The Scarlet Rider makes reply: "It's duty—to the death."
And so they sweep the solitudes, free men from all the earth;
And so they sentinel the woods, the wilds that know their worth;
And so they scour the startled plains and mock at hurt and pain,
And read their Crimson Manual, and find their duty plain.
Knights of the lists of unrenown, born of the frontier's need,
Disdainful of the spoken word, exultant in the deed;
Unconscious heroes of the waste, proud players of the game,
Props of the power behind the throne, upholders of the name:
For thus the Great White Chief hath said, "In all my lands be peace",
And to maintain his word he gave his West the Scarlet Police.

Livid-lipped was the valley, still as the grave of God;
Misty shadows of mountain thinned into mists of cloud;
Corpselike and stark was the land, with a quiet that crushed and awed,
And the stars of the weird sub-arctic glimmered over its shroud.

Deep in the trench of the valley two men stationed the Post,
Seymour and Clancy the reckless, fresh from the long patrol;
Seymour, the sergeant, and Clancy—Clancy who made his boast
He could cinch like a bronco the Northland,
and cling to the prongs of the Pole.

Two lone men on detachment, standing for law on the trail;
Undismayed in the vastness, wise with the wisdom of old—
Out of the night hailed a half-breed telling a pitiful tale,
"White man starving and crazy on the banks of the Nordenscöld."

Up sprang the red-haired Clancy, lean and eager of eye;
Loaded the long toboggan, strapped each dog at its post;
Whirled his lash at the leader; then, with a whoop and a cry,
Into the Great White Silence faded away like a ghost.

The clouds were a misty shadow, the hills were a shadowy mist;
Sunless, voiceless and pulseless, the day was a dream of woe;

Through the ice-rifts the river smoked and bubbled and hissed;
Behind was a trail fresh broken, in front the untrodden snow.

Ahead of the dogs ploughed Clancy, haloed by steaming breath;
Through peril of open water, through ache of insensate cold;
Up rivers wantonly winding in a land affianced to death,
Till he came to a cowering cabin on the banks of the Nordenscold.

Then Clancy loosed his revolver, and he strode through the open door;
And there was the man he sought for, crouching beside the fire;
The hair of his beard was singeing, the frost on his back was hoar,
And ever he crooned and chanted as if he never would tire:— *"I panned and
I panned in the shiny sand,
and I sniped on the river bar;
But I know, I know, that it's down below
that the golden treasures are;
So I'll wait and wait till the floods abate,
and I'll sink a shaft once more,
And I'd like to bet that I'll go home yet
with a brass band playing before."*

He was nigh as thin as a sliver, and he whined like a Moose-hide cur;
So Clancy clothed him and nursed him as a mother nurses a child;
Lifted him on the toboggan, wrapped him in robes of fur,
Then with the dogs sore straining started to face the Wild.

Said the Wild, "I will crush this Clancy, so fearless and insolent;
For him will I loose my fury, and blind and buffet and beat;
Pile up my snows to stay him; then when his strength is spent,
Leap on him from my ambush and crush him under my feet.

"Him will I ring with my silence, compass him with my cold;
Closer and closer clutch him unto mine icy breast;
Buffet him with my blizzards, deep in my snows enfold,
Claiming his life as my tribute, giving my wolves the rest."

Clancy crawled through the vastness; o'er him the hate of the Wild;
Full on his face fell the blizzard; cheering his huskies he ran;
Fighting, fierce-hearted and tireless, snows that drifted and piled,
With ever and ever behind him singing the crazy man.

*"Sing hey, sing ho, for the ice and snow,
And a heart that's ever merry;
Let us trim and square with a lover's care
(For why should a man be sorry?)*

*A grave deep, deep, with the moon a-peep,
A grave in the frozen mould.
Sing hey, sing ho, for the winds that blow,
And a grave deep down in the ice and snow,
A grave in the land of gold."*

Day after day of darkness, the whirl of the seething snows;
Day after day of blindness, the swoop of the stinging blast;
On through a blur of fury the swing of staggering blows;
On through a world of turmoil, empty, inane and vast.

Night with its writhing storm-whirl, night despairingly black;
Night with its hours of terror, numb and endlessly long;
Night with its weary waiting, fighting the shadows back,
And ever the crouching madman singing his crazy song.

Cold with its creeping terror, cold with its sudden clinch;
Cold so utter you wonder if 'twill ever again be warm;
Clancy grinned as he shuddered, "Surely it isn't a cinch
Being wet-nurse to a looney in the teeth of an arctic storm."

The blizzard passed and the dawn broke, knife-edged and crystal clear;
The sky was a blue-domed iceberg, sunshine outlawed away;
Ever by snowslide and ice-rip haunted and hovered the Fear;
Ever the Wild malignant poised and panted to slay.

The lead-dog freezes in harness—cut him out of the team!
The lung of the wheel-dog's bleeding—shoot him and let him lie!
On and on with the others—lash them until they scream!
"Pull for your lives, you devils! On! To halt is to die."

There in the frozen vastness Clancy fought with his foes;
The ache of the stiffened fingers, the cut of the snowshoe thong;
Cheeks black-raw through the hood-flap, eyes that tingled and closed,
And ever to urge and cheer him quavered the madman's song.

Colder it grew and colder, till the last heat left the earth,
And there in the great stark stillness the bale fires glinted and gleamed,
And the Wild all around exulted and shook with a devilish mirth,
And life was far and forgotten, the ghost of a joy once dreamed.

Death! And one who defied it, a man of the Mounted Police;
Fought it there to a standstill long after hope was gone;
Grinned through his bitter anguish, fought without let or cease,
Suffering, straining, striving, stumbling, struggling on.

Till the dogs lay down in their traces, and rose and staggered and fell;
Till the eyes of him dimmed with shadows,
and the trail was so hard to see;
Till the Wild howled out triumphant, and the world was a frozen hell—
Then said Constable Clancy: "I guess that it's up to me."

Far down the trail they saw him,
and his hands they were blanched like bone;
His face was a blackened horror, from his eyelids the salt rheum ran;
His feet he was lifting strangely, as if they were made of stone,
But safe in his arms and sleeping he carried the crazy man.

So Clancy got into Barracks, and the boys made rather a scene;
And the O. C. called him a hero, and was nice as a man could be;
But Clancy gazed down his trousers at the place where his toes had been,
And then he howled like a husky, and sang in a shaky key:

*"When I go back to the old love that's true to the finger-tips,
I'll say: 'Here's bushels of gold, love,'
and I'll kiss my girl on the lips;
'It's yours to have and to hold, love.'
It's the proud, proud boy I'll be,
When I go back to the old love that's waited so long for me."*

Lost

*"Black is the sky, but the land is white—
 (O the wind, the snow and the storm!)—
 Father, where is our boy to-night?
 Pray to God he is safe and warm." "Mother, mother, why should you fear?
 Safe is he, and the Arctic moon
 Over his cabin shines so clear—
 Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."*

"It's getting dark awful sudden. Say, this is mighty queer!
 Where in the world have I got to? It's still and black as a tomb.
 I reckoned the camp was yonder, I figured the trail was here—
 Nothing! Just draw and valley packed with quiet and gloom;
 Snow that comes down like feathers, thick and gobby and gray;
 Night that looks spiteful ugly—seems that I've lost my way.

"The cold's got an edge like a jackknife—it must be forty below;
 Leastways that's what it seems like—it cuts so fierce to the bone.
 The wind's getting real ferocious; it's heaving and whirling the snow;
 It shrieks with a howl of fury, it dies away to a moan;
 Its arms sweep round like a banshee's, swift and icily white,
 And buffet and blind and beat me. Lord! it's a hell of a night.

"I'm all tangled up in a blizzard. There's only one thing to do—
 Keep on moving and moving; it's death, it's death if I rest.
 Oh, God! if I see the morning, if only I struggle through,
 I'll say the prayers I've forgotten since I lay on my mother's breast.
 I seem going round in a circle; maybe the camp is near.
 Say! did somebody holler? Was it a light I saw?
 Or was it only a notion? I'll shout, and maybe they'll hear—
 No! the wind only drowns me—shout till my throat is raw.

"The boys are all round the camp-fire wondering when I'll be back.
 They'll soon be starting to seek me; they'll scarcely wait for the light.
 What will they find, I wonder, when they come to the end of my track—
 A hand stuck out of a snowdrift, frozen and stiff and white.
 That's what they'll strike, I reckon; that's how they'll find their pard,
 A pie-faced corpse in a snowbank—curse you, don't be a fool!
 Play the game to the finish; bet on your very last card;
 Nerve yourself for the struggle. Oh, you coward, keep cool!

"I'm going to lick this blizzard; I'm going to live the night.
 It can't down me with its bluster—I'm not the kind to be beat.

On hands and knees will I buck it; with every breath will I fight;
It's life, it's life that I fight for—never it seemed so sweet.
I know that my face is frozen; my hands are numblike and dead;
But oh, my feet keep a-moving, heavy and hard and slow;
They're trying to kill me, kill me, the night that's black overhead,
The wind that cuts like a razor, the whipcord lash of the snow.
Keep a-moving, a-moving; don't, don't stumble, you fool!
Curse this snow that's a-piling a-purpose to block my way.
It's heavy as gold in the rocker, it's white and fleecy as wool;
It's soft as a bed of feathers, it's warm as a stack of hay.
Curse on my feet that slip so, my poor tired, stumbling feet—
I guess they're a job for the surgeon, they feel so queerlike to lift—
I'll rest them just for a moment—oh, but to rest is sweet!
The awful wind cannot get me, deep, deep down in the drift.”

*“Father, a bitter cry I heard,
Out of the night so dark and wild.
Why is my heart so strangely stirred?
'Twas like the voice of our erring child.”*

*“Mother, mother, you only heard
A waterfowl in the locked lagoon—
Out of the night a wounded bird—
Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon.”*

Who is it talks of sleeping? I'll swear that somebody shook
Me hard by the arm for a moment, but how on earth could it be?
See how my feet are moving—awfully funny they look—
Moving as if they belonged to a someone that wasn't me.
The wind down the night's long alley bowls me down like a pin;
I stagger and fall and stagger, crawl arm-deep in the snow.
Beaten back to my corner, how can I hope to win?
And there is the blizzard waiting to give me the knockout blow.

Oh, I'm so warm and sleepy! No more hunger and pain.
Just to rest for a moment; was ever rest such a joy?
Ha! what was that? I'll swear it, somebody shook me again;
Somebody seemed to whisper: “Fight to the last, my boy.”
Fight! That's right, I must struggle. I know that to rest means death;
Death, but then what does death mean?—ease from a world of strife.
Life has been none too pleasant; yet with my failing breath
Still and still must I struggle, fight for the gift of life.

Seems that I must be dreaming! Here is the old home trail;
 Yonder a light is gleaming; oh, I know it so well!
 The air is scented with clover; the cattle wait by the rail;
 Father is through with the milking; there goes the supper-bell.

Mother, your boy is crying, out in the night and cold;
 Let me in and forgive me, I'll never be bad any more:
 I'm, oh, so sick and so sorry: please, dear mother, don't scold—
 It's just your boy, and he wants you. . . . Mother, open the door. . . .

*"Father, father, I saw a face
 Pressed just now to the window-pane!
 Oh, it gazed for a moment's space,
 Wild and wan, and was gone again!"*

*"Mother, mother, you saw the snow
 Drifted down from the maple tree
 (Oh, the wind that is sobbing so!
 Weary and worn and old are we)—
 Only the snow and a wounded loon—
 Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."*

L'Envoi

We talked of yesteryears, of trails and treasure,
Of men who played the game and lost or won;
Of mad stampedes, of toil beyond all measure,
Of camp-fire comfort when the day was done.
We talked of sullen nights by moon-dogs haunted,
Of bird and beast and tree, of rod and gun;
Of boat and tent, of hunting-trip enchanted
Beneath the wonder of the midnight sun;
Of bloody-footed dogs that gnawed the traces,
Of prisoned seas, wind-lashed and winter-locked;
The ice-gray dawn was pale upon our faces,
Yet still we filled the cup and still we talked.

The city street was dimmed. We saw the glitter
Of moon-picked brilliants on the virgin snow,
And down the drifted canyon heard the bitter,
Relentless slogan of the winds of woe.
The city was forgot, and, parka-skirted,
We trod that leagueless land that once we knew;
We saw stream past, down valleys glacier-girted,
The wolf-worn legions of the caribou.
We smoked our pipes, o'er scenes of triumph dwelling;
Of deeds of daring, dire defeats, we talked;
And other tales that lost not in the telling,
Ere to our beds uncertainly we walked.

And so, dear friends, in gentler valleys roaming,
Perhaps, when on my printed page you look,
Your fancies by the firelight may go homing
To that lone land that haply you forsook.
And if perchance you hear the silence calling,
The frozen music of star-yearning heights,
Or, dreaming, see the seines of silver trawling
Across the sky's abyss on vasty nights,
You may recall that sweep of savage splendor,
That land that measures each man at his worth,
And feel in memory, half fierce, half tender,
The brotherhood of men that know the North.

Songs of a Sourdough

The Law of the Yukon

This is the law of the Yukon, and ever she makes it plain:
"Send not your foolish and feeble; send me your strong and your sane.
Strong for the red rage of battle; sane, for I harry them sore;
Send me men girt for the combat, men who are grit to the core;
Swift as the panther in triumph, fierce as the bear in defeat,
Sired of a bulldog parent, steeled in the furnace heat.
Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen ones;
Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons;
Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut with my meat;
But the others—the misfits, the failures—I trample under my feet.
Dissolute, damned, and despairful, crippled and palsied and slain,
Ye would send me the spawn of your gutters—Go! take back your spawn again.

"Wild and wide are my borders, stern as death is my sway;
From my ruthless throne I have ruled alone for a million years and a day;
Hugging my mighty treasure, waiting for man to come:
Till he swept like a turbid torrent, and after him swept—the scum.
The pallid pimp of the dead-line, the enervate of the pen,
One by one I weeded them out, for all that I sought was—Men.
One by one I dismayed them, frightening them sore with my glooms;
One by one I betrayed them unto my manifold dooms.
Drowned them like rats in my rivers, starved them like curs on my plains,
Rotted the flesh that was left them, poisoned the blood in their veins;
Burst with my winter upon them, searing forever their sight,
Lashed them with fungus-white faces, whimpering wild in the night;
Staggering blind through the storm-whirl, stumbling mad through the snow,
Frozen stiff in the ice pack, brittle and bent like a bow;
Featureless, formless, forsaken, scented by wolves in their flight,

Left for the wind to make music through ribs that are glittering white;
Gnawing the black crust of failure, searching the pit of despair,
Crooking the toe in the trigger, trying to patter a prayer;
Going outside with an escort, raving with lips all afoam;
Writing a cheque for a million, drivelling feebly of home;
Lost like a louse in the burning ... or else in tented town
Seeking a drunkard's solace, sinking and sinking down;
Steeped in the slime at the bottom, dead to a decent world,
Lost 'mid the human flotsam, far on the frontier hurled;
In the camp at the bend of the river, with its dozen saloons aglare,
Its gambling dens a-riot, its gramophones all a-blare;
Crimped with the crimes of a city, sin-ridden and bridled with lies,
In the hush of my mountained vastness, in the flush of my midnight skies.
Plague-spots, yet tools of my purpose, so nathless I suffer them thrive,
Crushing my Weak in their clutches, that only my Strong may survive.

"But the others, the men of my mettle, the men who would 'stablish my fame,
Unto its ultimate issue, winning me honour, not shame;
Searching my uttermost valleys, fighting each step as they go,
Shooting the wrath of my rapids, scaling my ramparts of snow;
Ripping the guts of my mountains, looting the beds of my creeks,
Them will I take to my bosom, and speak as a mother speaks.
I am the land that listens, I am the land that broods;
Steeped in eternal beauty, crystalline waters and woods.
Long have I waited lonely, shunned as a thing accurst,
Monstrous, moody, pathetic, the last of the lands and the first;
Visioning camp-fires at twilight, sad with a longing forlorn,
Feeling my womb o'er-pregnant with the seed of cities unborn.
Wild and wide are my borders, stern as death is my sway,
And I wait for the men who will win me—and I will not be won in a day;
And I will not be won by weaklings, subtle, suave, and mild,
But by men with the hearts of vikings, and the simple faith of a child;
Desperate, strong, and resistless, unthrottled by fear or defeat,
Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut with my meat.

"Lofty I stand from each sister land, patient and wearily wise,
With the weight of a world of sadness in my quiet, passionless eyes;
Dreaming alone of a people, dreaming alone of a day,
When men shall not rape my riches, and curse me and go away;
Making a bawd of my bounty, fouling the hand that gave—
Till I rise in my wrath and I sweep on their path and I stamp them into a grave.
Dreaming of men who will bless me, of women esteeming me good,
Of children born in my borders, of radiant motherhood;

Of cities leaping to stature, of fame like a flag unfurled,
As I pour the tide of my riches in the eager lap of the world.”

This is the Law of the Yukon, that only the Strong shall thrive;
That surely the Weak shall perish, and only the Fit survive.
Dissolute, damned, and despairful, crippled and palsied and slain,
This is the Will of the Yukon,—Lo! how she makes it plain!

The Parson's Son

*This is the song of the parson's son, as he squats in his shack alone,
On the wild, weird nights when the Northern Lights shoot up from the frozen zone,
And it's sixty below, and couched in the snow the hungry huskies moan.*

"I'm one of the Arctic brotherhood, I'm an old-time pioneer.
I came with the first—O God! how I've cursed this Yukon—but still I'm here.
I've sweated athirst in its summer heat, I've frozen and starved in its cold;
I've followed my dreams by its thousand streams, I've toiled and moiled for its gold.

"Look at my eyes—been snow-blind twice; look where my foot's half gone;
And that gruesome scar on my left cheek where the frost-fiend bit to the bone.
Each one a brand of this devil's land, where I've played and I've lost the game,
A broken wreck with a craze for 'hooch,' and never a cent to my name.

"This mining is only a gamble, the worst is as good as the best;
I was in with the bunch and I might have come out right on top with the rest;
With Cormack, Ladue and Macdonald—O God! but it's hell to think
Of the thousands and thousands I've squandered on cards and women and drink.

"In the early days we were just a few, and we hunted and fished around,
Nor dreamt by our lonely camp-fires of the wealth that lay under the ground.
We traded in skins and whiskey, and I've often slept under the shade
Of that lone birch-tree on Bonanza, where the first big find was made.

"We were just like a great big family, and every man had his squaw,
And we lived such a wild, free, fearless life beyond the pale of the law;
Till sudden there came a whisper, and it maddened us every man,
And I got in on Bonanza before the big rush began.

"Oh, those Dawson days, and the sin and the blaze, and the town all open wide!
(If God made me in His likeness, sure He let the devil inside.)
But we all were mad, both the good and the bad, and as for the women, well—
No spot on the map in so short a space has hustled more souls to hell.

"Money was just like dirt there, easy to get and to spend.
I was all caked in on a dance-hall jade, but she shook me in the end.
It put me queer, and for near a year I never drew sober breath,
Till I found myself in the bughouse ward with a claim staked out on death.

"Twenty years in the Yukon, struggling along its creeks;
Roaming its giant valleys, scaling its god-like peaks;
Bathed in its fiery sunsets, fighting its fiendish cold,
Twenty years in the Yukon ... twenty years—and I'm old.

"Old and weak, but no matter, there's 'hooch' in the bottle still.
I'll hitch up the dogs to-morrow, and mush down the trail to Bill.
It's so long dark, and I'm lonesome—I'll just lay down on the bed,
To-morrow I'll go ... to-morrow ... I guess I'll play on the red.

"... Come, Kit, your pony is saddled. I'm waiting, dear, in the court ...
...Minnie, you devil, I'll kill you if you skip with that flossy sport ...
... How much does it go to the pan, Bill?... play up, School, and play the game ...
... Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name ..."

*This was the song of the parson's son, as he lay in his bunk alone, Ere the fire went out
and the cold crept in, and his blue lips ceased to moan, And the hunger-maddened
malamutes had torn him flesh from bone.*

The Spell of the Yukon

I wanted the gold, and I sought it;
I scrabbled and mucked like a slave.
Was it famine or scurvy—I fought it,
I hurled my youth into the grave.
I wanted the gold and I got it—
Came out with a fortune last fall,—
Yet somehow life's not what I thought it,
And somehow the gold isn't all.

No! There's the land. (Have you seen it?)
It's the cussedest land that I know,
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it,
To the deep, deathlike valleys below.
Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe: but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth—and I'm one.

You come to get rich (damned good reason),
You feel like an exile at first;
You hate it like hell for a season,
And then you are worse than the worst.
It grips you like some kinds of sinning;
It twists you from foe to a friend;
It seems it's been since the beginning;
It seems it will be to the end.

I've stood in some mighty-mouthed hollow
That's plumb-full of hush to the brim;
I've watched the big, husky sun wallow
In crimson and gold, and grow dim,
Till the moon set the pearly peaks gleaming,
And the stars tumbled out, neck and crop;
And I've thought that I surely was dreaming,
With the peace o' the world piled on top.

The summer—no sweeter was ever;
The sunshiny woods all athrill;
The grayling aleap in the river,
The bighorn asleep on the hill.
The strong life that never knows harness;
The wilds where the caribou call;

The freshness, the freedom, the farness—
O God! how I'm stuck on it all.

The winter! the brightness that blinds you,
The white land locked tight as a drum,
The cold fear that follows and finds you,
The silence that bludgeons you dumb.
The snows that are older than history,
The woods where the weird shadows slant;
The stillness, the moonlight, the mystery,
I've bade 'em good-bye—but I can't.

There's a land where the mountains are nameless,
And the rivers all run God knows where;
There are lives that are erring and aimless,
And deaths that just hang by a hair;
There are hardships that nobody reckons;
There are valleys unpeopled and still;
There's a land—oh, it beckons and beckons,
And I want to go back—and I will.

They're making my money diminish;
I'm sick of the taste of champagne.
Thank God! when I'm skinned to a finish
I'll pike to the Yukon again.
I'll fight—and you bet it's no sham-fight;
It's hell!—but I've been there before;
And it's better than this by a damsite—
So me for the Yukon once more.

There's gold, and it's haunting and haunting;
It's luring me on as of old;
Yet it isn't the gold that I'm wanting,
So much as just finding the gold.
It's the great, big, broad land 'way up yonder,
It's the forests where silence has lease;
It's the beauty that thrills me with wonder,
It's the stillness that fills me with peace.

The Call of the Wild

Have you gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing else to gaze on,
Set pieces and drop-curtain scenes galore,
Big mountains heaved to heaven, which the blinding sunsets blazon,
Black canyons where the rapids rip and roar?
Have you swept the visioned valley with the green stream streaking through it,
Searched the Vastness for a something you have lost?
Have you strung your soul to silence? Then for God's sake go and do it;
Hear the challenge, learn the lesson, pay the cost.

Have you wandered in the wilderness, the sage-brush desolation,
The bunch-grass levels where the cattle graze?
Have you whistled bits of rag-time at the end of all creation,
And learned to know the desert's little ways?
Have you camped upon the foothills, have you galloped o'er the ranges,
Have you roamed the arid sun-lands through and through?
Have you chummed up with the mesa? Do you know its moods and changes?
Then listen to the wild—it's calling you.

Have you known the Great White Silence, not a snow-gemmed twig a-quiver?
(Eternal truths that shame our soothing lies.)
Have you broken trail on snowshoes? mushed your huskies up the river,
Dared the unknown, led the way, and clutched the prize?
Have you marked the map's void spaces, mingled with the mongrel races,
Felt the savage strength of brute in every thew?
And though grim as hell the worst is, can you round it off with curses?
Then hearken to the wild—it's wanting you.

Have you suffered, starved, and triumphed grovelled, down, yet grasped at glory,
Grown bigger in the bigness of the whole?
"Done things" just for the doing, letting babblers tell the story,
Seeing through the nice veneer the naked soul?
Have you seen God in His splendours, heard the text that nature renders?
(You'll never hear it in the family pew.)
The simple things, the true things, the silent men who do things—
Then listen to the wild—it's calling you.

They have cradled you in custom, they have primed you with their preaching,
They have soaked you in convention through and through;
They have put you in a showcase; you're a credit to their teaching—
But can't you hear the wild?—it's calling you.
Let us probe the silent places, let us seek what luck betide us;
Let us journey to a lonely land I know.

There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star agleam to guide us,
And the wild is calling, calling ... let us go.

The Lone Trail

*Ye who know the Lone Trail fain would follow it,
Though it lead to glory or the darkness of the pit.
Ye who take the Lone Trail, bid your love good-bye;
The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow till you die.*

The trails of the world be countless, and most of the trails be tried;
You tread on the heels of the many, till you come where the ways divide;
And one lies safe in the sunlight, and the other is dreary and wan,
Yet you look aslant at the Lone Trail, and the Lone Trail lures you on.
And somehow you're sick of the highway, with its noise and its easy needs,
And you seek the risk of the by-way, and you reck not where it leads.
And sometimes it leads to the desert, and the tongue swells out of the mouth,
And you stagger blind to the mirage, to die in the mocking drouth.
And sometimes it leads to the mountain, to the light of the lone camp-fire,
And you gnaw your belt in the anguish of hunger-goaded desire.
And sometimes it leads to the Southland, to the swamp where the orchid glows,
And you rave to your grave with the fever, and they rob the corpse for its clothes.
And sometimes it leads to the Northland, and the scurvy softens your bones,
And your flesh dints in like putty, and you spit out your teeth like stones.
And sometimes it leads to a coral reef in the wash of a weedy sea,
And you sit and stare at the empty glare where the gulls wait greedily.
And sometimes it leads to an Arctic trail, and the snows where your torn feet freeze,
And you whittle away the useless clay, and crawl on your hands and knees.
Often it leads to the dead-pit; always it leads to pain;
By the bones of your brothers ye know it, but oh, to follow you're fain.
By your bones they will follow behind you, till the ways of the world are made plain.

*Bid good-bye to sweetheart, bid good-bye to friend;
The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow to the end.
Tarry not, and fear not, chosen of the true;
Lover of the Lone Trail, the Lone Trail waits for you.*

The Heart of the Sourdough

There where the mighty mountains bare their fangs unto the moon;
There where the sullen sun-dogs glare in the snow-bright, bitter noon,
And the glacier-gutted streams sweep down at the clarion call of June:

There where the livid tundras keep their tryst with the tranquil snows;
There where the Silences are spawned, and the light of hell-fire flows
Into the bowl of the midnight sky, violet, amber, and rose:

There where the rapids churn and roar, and the ice-floes bellowing run;
Where the tortured, twisted rivers of blood rush to the setting sun—
I've packed my kit and I'm going, boys, ere another day is done.

I knew it would call, or soon or late, as it calls the whirring wings;
It's the olden lure, it's the golden lure, it's the lure of the timeless things;
And to-night, O God of the trails untrod, how it whines in my heart-strings!

I'm sick to death of your well-groomed gods, your make-believe and your show;
I long for a whiff of bacon and beans, a snug shake-down in the snow,
A trail to break, and a life at stake, and another bout with the foe;

With the raw-ribbed Wild that abhors all life, the wild that would crush and rend;
I have clinched and closed with the naked North, I have learned to defy and defend;
Shoulder to shoulder we've fought it out—yet the Wild must win in the end.

I have flouted the Wild. I have followed its lure, fearless, familiar, alone;
By all that the battle means and makes I claim that land for mine own;
Yet the Wild must win, and a day will come when I shall be overthrown.

Then when as wolf-dogs fight we've fought, the lean wolf-land and I;
Fought and bled till the snows are red under the reeling sky;
Even as lean wolf-dog goes down will I go down and die.

The Three Voices

The waves have a story to tell me,
As I lie on the lonely beach;
Chanting aloft in the pine-tops,
The wind has a lesson to teach;
But the stars sing an anthem of glory
I cannot put into speech.

The waves tell of ocean spaces,
Of hearts that are wild and brave,
Of populous city places,
Of desolate shores they lave;
Of men who sally in quest of gold
To sink in an ocean grave.

The wind is a mighty roamer;
He bids me keep me free,
Clean from the taint of the gold-lust,
Hardy and pure as he;
Cling with my love to nature
As a child to the mother-knee.

But the stars throng out in their glory,
And they sing of the God in man;
They sing of the mighty Master,
Of the loom His fingers span;
Where a star or a soul is a part of the whole,
And weft in the wondrous plan.

Here by the camp-fire's flicker,
Deep in my blanket curled,
I long for the peace of the pine-gloom
When the scroll of the Lord is unfurled,
And the wind and the wave are silent,
And world is singing to world.

The Pines

We sleep in the sleep of ages, the bleak,
barbarian pines;
The grey moss drapes us like sages, and closer
we lock our lines,
And deeper we clutch through the gelid gloom
where never a sunbeam shines.

On the flanks of the storm-gored ridges are our
black battalions massed;
We surge in a host to the sullen coast, and we
sing in the ocean blast;
From empire of sea to empire of snow we grip
our empire fast.

To the niggard lands were we driven; 'twixt
desert and foe are we penned.
To us was the Northland given, ours to stronghold
and defend;
Ours till the world be riven in the crash of the
utter end.

Ours from the bleak beginning, through the æons
of death-like sleep;
Ours from the shock when the naked rock was
hurled from the hissing deep;
Ours through the twilight ages of weary
glacier-creep.

Wind of the East, wind of the West, wandering
to and fro,
Chant your songs in our topmost boughs, that
the sons of men may know
The peerless pine was the first to come, and the
pine will be last to go!

We pillar the halls of perfumed gloom; we plume
where the eagles soar;
The North-wind swoops from the brooding Pole,
and our ancients crash and roar;
But where one falls from the crumbling walls
shoots up a hardy score.

We spring from the gloom of the canyon's womb;

in the valley's lap we lie;
From the white foam-fringe where the breakers
cringe to the peaks that tusk the sky
We climb, and we peer in the crag-locked mere
that gleams like a golden eye,—
Gain to the verge of the hog-back ridge where the
vision ranges free:
Pines and pines and the shadow of pines as far as
the eye can see;
A steadfast legion of stalwart knights in
dominant empery.
Sun, moon and stars, give answer; shall we not
staunchly stand
Even as now, forever, wards of the wilder strand,
Sentinels of the stillness, lords of the last lone land!

The Harpy

*There was a woman, and she was wise; woefully wise was she;
She was old, so old, yet her years all told were but a score and three;
And she knew by heart, from finish to start, the Book of Iniquity.*

There is no hope for such as I, on earth nor yet in Heaven;
Unloved I live, unloved I die, unpitied, unforgiven;
A loathed jade I ply my trade, unhallowed and unshriven.

I paint my cheeks, for they are white, and cheeks of chalk men hate;
Mine eyes with wine I make to shine, that men may seek and sate;
With overhead a lamp of red I sit me down and wait.

Until they come, the nightly scum, with drunken eyes aflame;
Your sweethearts, sons, ye scornful ones—'tis I who know their shame;
The gods ye see are brutes to me—and so I play my game.

For life is not the thing we thought, and not the thing we plan;
And woman in a bitter world must do the best she can;
Must yield the stroke, and bear the yoke, and serve the will of man;

Must serve his need and ever feed the flame of his desire;
Though be she loved for love alone, or be she loved for hire;
For every man since life began is tainted with the mire.

And though you know he love you so, and set you on love's throne,
Yet let your eyes but mock his sighs, and let your heart be stone,
Lest you be left (as I was left) attainted and alone.

From love's close kiss to hell's abyss is one sheer flight, I trow;
And wedding-ring and bridal bell are will-o'-wisps of woe;
And 'tis not wise to love too well, and this all women know.

Wherefore, the wolf-pack having gorged upon the lamb, their prey,
With siren smile and serpent guile I make the wolf-pack pay;
With velvet paws and flensing claws, a tigress roused to slay.

One who in youth sought truest truth, and found a devil's lies;
A symbol of the sin of man, a human sacrifice:
Yet shall I blame on man the shame? Could it be otherwise?

Was I not born to walk in scorn where others walk in pride?
The Maker marred, and evil-starred I drift upon His tide;
And He alone shall judge His own, so I His judgment bide.

Fate has written a tragedy; its name is "The Human Heart."

*The theatre is the House of Life, Woman the mummer's part:
The Devil enters the prompter's box and the play is ready to start.*

The Lure of Little Voices

There's a cry from out the Loneliness—Oh, listen, Honey, listen!

Do you hear it, do you fear it, you're a-holding of me so?

You're a-sobbing in your sleep, dear, and your lashes, how they glisten—

Do you hear the Little Voices all a-begging me to go?

All a-begging me to leave you. Day and night they're pleading, praying,

On the North-wind, on the West-wind, from the peak and from the plain;

Night and day they never leave me—do you know what they are saying?

"He was ours before you got him, and we want him once again."

Yes, they're wanting me, they're haunting me, the awful lonely places;

They're whining and they're whimpering as if each had a soul;

They're calling from the wilderness, the vast and god-like spaces,

The stark and sullen solitudes that sentinel the Pole.

They miss my little camp-fires, ever brightly, bravely gleaming

In the womb of desolation where was never man before;

As comradeless I sought them, lion-hearted, loving, dreaming;

And they hailed me as a comrade, and they loved me evermore.

And now they're all a-crying, and it's no use me denying:

The spell of them is on me and I'm helpless as a child;

My heart is aching, aching, but I hear them sleeping, waking;

It's the Lure of Little Voices, it's the mandate of the Wild.

I'm afraid to tell you, Honey, I can take no bitter leaving;

But softly in the sleep-time from your love I'll steal away.

Oh, it's cruel, dearie, cruel, and it's God knows how I'm grieving;

But His Loneliness is calling and He knows I must obey.

The Song of the Wage-Slave

When the long, long day is over, and the Big Boss gives me my pay,
I hope that it won't be hell-fire, as some of the parsons say.
And I hope that it won't be heaven, with some of the parsons I've met—
All I want is just quiet, just to rest and forget.
Look at my face, toil-furrowed; look at my calloused hands;
Master, I've done Thy bidding, wrought in Thy many lands—
Wrought for the little masters, big-bellied they be, and rich;
I've done their desire for a daily hire, and I die like a dog in a ditch.
I have used the strength Thou hast given, Thou knowest I did not shirk;
Threescore years of labour—Thine be the long day's work.
And now, Big Master, I'm broken and bent and twisted and scarred,
But I've held my job, and Thou knowest, and Thou wilt not judge me hard.
Thou knowest my sins are many, and often I've played the fool—
Whiskey and cards and women, they made me the devil's tool.
I was just like a child with money: I flung it away with a curse,
Feasting a fawning parasite, or glutting a harlot's purse,
Then back to the woods repentant, back to the mill or the mine,
I, the worker of workers, everything in my line.
Everything hard but headwork (I'd no more brains than a kid),
A brute with brute strength to labour, doing as I was bid;
Living in camps with men-folk, a lonely and loveless life;
Never knew kiss of sweetheart, never caress of wife.
A brute with brute strength to labour, and they were so far above—
Yet I'd gladly have gone to the gallows for one little look of Love.
I with the strength of two men, savage and shy and wild—
Yet how I'd ha' treasured a woman, and the sweet, warm kiss of a child.
Well, 'tis Thy world, and Thou knowest. I blaspheme and my ways be rude;
But I've lived my life as I found it, and I've done my best to be good;
I, the primitive toiler, half naked, and grimed to the eyes,
Sweating it deep in their ditches, swining it stark in their styes,
Hulling down forests before me, spanning tumultuous streams;
Down in the ditch building o'er me palaces fairer than dreams;
Boring the rock to the ore-bed, driving the road through the fen,
Resolute, dumb, uncomplaining, a man in a world of men.
Master, I've filled my contract, wrought in Thy many lands;
Not by my sins wilt Thou judge me, but by the work of my hands.
Master, I've done Thy bidding, and the light is low in the west,
And the long, long shift is over ... Master, I've earned it—Rest.

Grin

If you're up against a bruiser and you're getting knocked about—

Grin.

If you're feeling pretty groggy, and you're licked beyond a doubt—

Grin.

Don't let him see you're funkng, let him know with every clout,
Though your face is battered to a pulp, your blooming heart is stout;
Just stand upon your pins until the beggar knocks you out—

And grin.

This life's a bally battle, and the same advice holds true,

Of grin.

If you're up against it badly, then it's only one on you,

So grin.

If the future's black as thunder, don't let people see you're blue;
Just cultivate a cast-iron smile of joy the whole day through;
If they call you "Little Sunshine," wish that *they'd* no troubles, too—

You may—grin.

Rise up in the morning with the will that, smooth or rough,

You'll grin.

Sink to sleep at midnight, and although you're feeling tough,

Yet grin.

There's nothing gained by whining, and you're not that kind of stuff;
You're a fighter from away back, and you *won't* take a rebuff;
Your trouble is that you don't know when you have had enough—

Don't give in.

If Fate should down you, just get up and take another cuff;
You may bank on it that there is no philosophy like bluff

And grin.

The Shooting of Dan McGrew

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon;
The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a jag-time tune;
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew,
And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the lady that's known as Lou.

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and into the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty and loaded for bear.
He looked like a man with a foot in the grave, and scarcely the strength of a louse,
Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar, and he called for drinks for the house.
There was none could place the stranger's face, though we searched ourselves for a clue;
But we drank his health, and the last to drink was Dangerous Dan McGrew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes, and hold them hard like a spell;
And such was he, and he looked to me like a man who had lived in hell;
With a face most hair, and the dreary stare of a dog whose day is done,
As he watered the green stuff in his glass, and the drops fell one by one.
Then I got to figgering who he was, and wondering what he'd do,
And I turned my head—and there watching him was the lady that's known as Lou.

His eyes went rubbering round the room, and he seemed in a kind of daze,
Till at last that old piano fell in the way of his wandering gaze.
The rag-time kid was having a drink; there was no one else on the stool,
So the stranger stumbles across the room, and flops down there like a fool.
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
Then he clutched the keys with his talon hands—my God! but that man could play!

Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear,
And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence you most could hear;
With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped there in the cold,
A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold;
While high overhead, green, yellow, and red, the North Lights swept in bars—
Then you've a haunch what the music meant ... hunger and night and the stars.

And hunger not of the belly kind, that's banished with bacon and beans;
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home and all that it means;
For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls and a roof above;
But oh! so cramful of cosy joy, and crowned with a woman's love;
A woman dearer than all the world, and true as Heaven is true—
(God! how ghastly she looks through her rouge,—the lady that's known as Lou.)

Then on a sudden the music changed, so soft that you scarce could hear;

But you felt that your life had been looted clean of all that it once held dear;
That some one had stolen the woman you loved; that her love was a devil's lie;
That your guts were gone, and the best for you was to crawl away and die.
'Twas the crowning cry of a heart's despair, and it thrilled you through and through—

"I guess I'll make it a spread misere," said Dangerous Dan McGrew.

The music almost died away ... then it burst like a pent-up flood;
And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay," and my eyes were blind with blood.
The thought came back of an ancient wrong, and it stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill ... then the music stopped with a crash,

And the stranger turned, and his eyes they burned in a most peculiar way;
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
Then his lips went in in a kind of grin, and he spoke, and his voice was calm;
And, "Boys," says he, "you don't know me, and none of you care a damn;
But I want to state, and my words are straight, and I'll bet my poke they're true,
That one of you is a hound of hell ... and that one is Dan McGrew."

Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out, and two guns blazed in the dark;
And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two men lay stiff and stark;
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was Dangerous Dan McGrew,
While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the breast of the lady that's known
as Lou.

These are the simple facts of the case, and I guess I ought to know;
They say that the stranger was crazed with "hooch," and I'm not denying it's so.
I'm not so wise as the lawyer guys, but strictly between us two—
The woman that kissed him and—pinched his poke—was the lady that's known
as Lou.

The Cremation of Sam McGee

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who moil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebargé
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee,
Where the cotton blooms and blows.
Why he left his home in the South to roam
‘Round the Pole, God only knows.
He was always cold, but the land of gold
Seemed to hold him like a spell;
Though he’d often say in his homely way
That “he’d sooner live in hell.”

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way
Over the Dawson trail.
Talk of your cold!—through the parka’s fold
It stabbed like a driven nail.
If our eyes we’d close, then the lashes froze
Till sometimes we couldn’t see;
It wasn’t much fun, but the only one
To whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight
In our robes beneath the snow,
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o’erhead
Were dancing heel and toe,
He turned to me, and “Cap,” says he,
“I’ll cash in this trip, I guess;
And if I do, I’m asking that you
Won’t refuse my last request.”

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn’t say no;
Then he says with a sort of moan:
“It’s the cursed cold, and it’s got right hold
Till I’m chilled clean through to the bone.
Yet ‘tain’t being dead—it’s my awful dread
Of the icy grave that pains;

So I want you to swear that, foul or fair,
You'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed,
So I swore I would not fail;
And we started on at the streak of dawn,
But God! he looked ghastly pale.
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day
Of his home in Tennessee;
And before nightfall a corpse was all
That was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death,
And I hurried, horror-driven,
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid,
Because of a promise given;
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say:
"You may tax your brawn and brains,
But you promised true, and it's up to you
To cremate those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid,
And the trail has its own stern code.
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb,
In my heart how I cursed that load.
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight,
While the huskies, round in a ring,
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows—
O God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay
Seemed to heavy and heavier grow;
And on I went, though the dogs were spent
And the grub was getting low;
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad,
But I swore I would not give in;
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing,
And it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge,
And a derelict there lay;
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice
It was called the "Alice May."
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit,

And I looked at my frozen chum;
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry,
"Is my crematorium."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor,
And I lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around,
And I heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—
Such a blaze you seldom see;
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal,
And I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like
To hear him sizzle so;
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled,
And the wind began to blow.
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled
Down my cheeks, and I don't know why;
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak
Went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow
I wrestled with grisly fear;
But the stars came out and they danced about
Ere again I ventured near;
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said:
"I'll just take a peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked."
... Then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm,
In the heart of the furnace roar;
And he wore a smile you could see a mile,
And he said: "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear
You'll let in the cold and storm—
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee,
It's the first time I've been warm."

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who moil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;*

*The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.*

My Madonna

I haled me a woman from the street,

Shameless, but, oh, so fair!

I bade her sit in the model's seat,

And I painted her sitting there.

I hid all trace of her heart unclean;

I painted a babe at her breast;

I painted her as she might have been

If the Worst had been the Best.

She laughed at my picture, and went away.

Then came, with a knowing nod,

A connoisseur, and I heard him say:

”’Tis Mary, the Mother of God.”

So I painted a halo round her hair,

And I sold her, and took my fee,

And she hangs in the church of Saint Hilaire,

Where you and all may see.

Unforgotten

I know a garden where the lilies gleam,
And one who lingers in the sunshine there;
She is than white-stoled lily far more fair,
And oh, her eyes are heaven-lit with dream.

I know a garret, cold and dark and drear,
And one who toils and toils with tireless pen,
Until his brave, sad eyes grow weary—then
He seeks the stars, pale, silent as a seer.

And ah, it's strange, for desolate and dim
Between these two there rolls an ocean wide;
Yet he is in the garden by her side,
And she is in the garret there with him.

The Reckoning

It's fine to have a blow-out in a fancy restaurant,
With terrapin and canvas-back and all the wine you want;
To enjoy the flowers and music, watch the pretty women pass,
Smoke a choice cigar, and sip the wealthy water in your glass;
It's bully in a high-toned joint to eat and drink your fill,
But it's quite another matter when you

Pay the bill.

It's great to go out every night on fun or pleasure bent,
To wear your glad rags always, and to never save a cent;
To drift along regardless, have a good time every trip;
To hit the high spots sometimes, and to let your chances slip;
To know you're acting foolish, yet to go on fooling still,
Till Nature calls a show-down, and you

Pay the bill.

Time has got a little bill—get wise while yet you may,
For the debit side's increasing in a most alarming way;
The things you had no right to do, the things you should have done,
They're all put down: it's up to you to pay for every one.
So eat, drink, and be merry, have a good time if you will,
But God help you when the time comes, and you

Foot the bill.

Quatrains

One said: Thy life is thine to make or mar,
To flicker feebly, or to soar, a star;
It lies with thee—the choice is thine, is thine,
To hit the ties or drive thy auto-car.

I answer Her: The choice is mine—ah, no!
We all were made or marred long, long ago.
The parts are written: hear the super wail:
"Who is stage-managing this cosmic show?"

Blind fools of fate, and slaves of circumstance,
Life is a fiddler, and we all must dance.
From gloom where mocks that will-o'-wisp, Freewill,
I heard a voice cry: "Say, give us a chance."

Chance! Oh, there is no chance. The scene is set.
Up with the curtain! Man, the marionette,
Resumes his part. The gods will work the wires.
They've got it all down fine, you bet, you bet!

It's all decreed: the mighty earthquake crash;
The countless constellations' wheel and flash;
The rise and fall of empires, war's red tide,
The composition of your dinner hash.

There's no haphazard in this world of ours:
Cause and effect are grim, relentless powers.
They rule the world. (A king was shot last night.
Last night I held the joker and both bowers.)

From out the mesh of fate our heads we thrust.
We can't do what we would, but what we must.
Heredity has got us in a cinch.
(Consoling thought, when you've been on a "bust.")

Hark to the song where spherical voices blend:
"There's no beginning, never will be end."
It makes us nutty; hang the astral chimes!
The table's spread; come, let us dine, my friend.

The Men that don't Fit in

There's a race of men that don't fit in,
A race that can't stay still;
So they break the hearts of kith and kin,
And they roam the world at will.
They range the field and they rove the flood,
And they climb the mountain's crest;
Theirs is the curse of the gipsy blood,
And they don't know how to rest.

If they just went straight they might go far;
They are strong and brave and true;
But they're always tired of the things that are,
And they want the strange and new.
They say: "Could I find my proper groove,
What a deep mark I would make!"
So they chop and change, and each fresh move
Is only a fresh mistake.

And each forgets, as he strips and runs,
With a brilliant, fitful pace,
It's the steady, quiet, plodding ones
Who win in the lifelong race.
And each forgets that his youth has fled,
Forgets that his prime is past,
Till he stands one day with a hope that's dead
In the glare of the truth at last.

He has failed, he has failed; he has missed his chance;
He has just done things by half.
Life's been a jolly good joke on him,
And now is the time to laugh.
Ha, ha! He is one of the Legion Lost;
He was never meant to win;
He's a rolling stone, and it's bred in the bone;
He's a man who won't fit in.

Music in the Bush

O'er the dark pines she sees the silver moon,
And in the west, all tremulous, a star;
And soothing sweet she hears the mellow tune
Of cow-bells jangled in the fields afar.

Quite listless, for her daily stent is done,
She stands, sad exile, at her rose-wreathed door,
And sends her love eternal with the sun
That goes to gild the land she'll see no more.

The grave, gaunt pines imprison her sad gaze,
All still the sky and darkling drearily;
She feels the chilly breath of dear, dead days
Come sifting through the alders eerily.

Oh, how the roses riot in their bloom!
The curtains stir as with an ancient pain;
Her old piano gleams from out the gloom,
And waits and waits her tender touch in vain.

But now her hands like moonlight brush the keys
With velvet grace, melodious delight;
And now a sad refrain from overseas
Goes sobbing on the bosom of the night.

And now she sings. (O singer in the gloom,
Voicing a sorrow we can ne'er express,
Here in the Farness where we few have room
Unshamed to show our love and tenderness,

Our hearts will echo, till they beat no more,
That song of sadness and of motherland;
And stretched in deathless love to England's shore,
Some day she'll hearken and she'll understand.)

A prima-donna in the shining past,
But now a mother growing old and grey,
She thinks of how she held a people fast
In thrall, and gleaned the triumphs of a day.

She sees a sea of faces like a dream;
She sees herself a queen of song once more;
She sees lips part in rapture, eyes agleam;
She sings as never once she sang before.

She sings a wild, sweet song that throbs with pain,
The added pain of life that transcends art,
A song of home, a deep, celestial strain,
The glorious swan-song of a dying heart.

A lame tramp comes along the railway track,
A grizzled dog whose day is nearly done:
He passes, pauses, then comes slowly back
And listens there—an audience of one.

She sings—her golden voice is passion-fraught
As when she charmed a thousand eager ears;
He listens trembling, and she knows it not,
And down his hollow cheeks roll bitter tears.

She ceases and is still, as if to pray;
There is no sound, the stars are all alight—
Only a wretch who stumbles on his way,
Only a vagrant sobbing in the night.

The Rhyme of the Remittance Man

There's a four-pronged buck a-swinging in the shadow of my cabin,
And it roamed the velvet valley till to-day;
But I tracked it by the river, and I trailed it in the cover,
And I killed it on the mountain miles away.
Now I've had my lazy supper, and the level sun is gleaming
On the water where the silver salmon play;
And I light my little corn-cob, and I linger softly dreaming,
In the twilight, of a land that's far away.

Far away, so faint and far, is flaming London, fevered Paris,
That I fancy I have gained another star;
Far away the din and hurry, far away the sin and worry,
Far away—God knows they cannot be too far.
Gilded galley-slaves of Mammon—how my purse-proud brothers taunt me!
I might have been as well-to-do as they
Had I clutched like them my chances, learned their wisdom, crushed my fancies,
Starved my soul and gone to business every day.

Well, the cherry bends with blossom, and the vivid grass is springing,
And the star-like lily nestles in the green;
And the frogs their joys are singing, and my heart in tune is ringing,
And it doesn't matter what I might have been,
While above the scented pine-gloom, piling heights of golden glory,
The sun-god paints his canvas in the west;
I can couch me deep in clover, I can listen to the story
Of the lazy, lapping water—it is best.

While the trout leaps in the river, and the blue grouse thrills the cover,
And the frozen snow betrays the panther's track,
And the robin greets the dayspring with the rapture of a lover,
I am happy, and I'll nevermore go back.
For I know I'd just be longing for the little old log cabin,
With the morning-glory clinging to the door,
Till I loathed the city places, cursed the care on all the faces,
Turned my back on lazar London evermore.

So send me far from Lombard Street, and write me down a failure;
Put a little in my purse and leave me free.
Say: "He turned from Fortune's offering to follow up a pale lure,
He is one of us no longer—let him be."
I am one of you no longer: by the trails my feet have broken,
The dizzy peaks I've scaled, the camp-fire's glow,

By the lonely seas I've sailed in—yea, the final word is spoken,
I am signed and sealed to nature. Be it so.

The Low-Down White

This is the pay-day up at the mines, when the bearded brutes come down;
There's money to burn in the streets to-night, so I've sent my klooch to town,
With a haggard face and a ribband of red entwined in her hair of brown.

And I know at the dawn she'll come reeling home with the bottles, one, two, three;
One for herself to drown her shame, and two big bottles for me,
To make me forget the thing I am and the man I used to be.

To make me forget the brand of the dog, as I crouch in this hideous place;
To make me forget once I kindled the light of love in a lady's face,
Where even the squalid Siwash now holds me a black disgrace.

Oh, I have guarded my secret well! And who would dream as I speak
In a tribal tongue like a rogue unhung, 'mid the ranch-house filth and reek,
I could roll to bed with a Latin phrase, and rise with a verse of Greek?

Yet I was a senior prizeman once, and the pride of a college eight;
Called to the bar—my friends were true! but they could not keep me straight;
Then came the divorce, and I went abroad and "died" on the River Plate.

But I'm not dead yet; though with half a lung there isn't time to spare,
And I hope that the year will see me out, and, thank God, no one will care—
Save maybe the little slim Siwash girl with the rose of shame in her hair.

She will come with the dawn, and the dawn is near; I can see its evil glow,
Like a corpse-light seen through a frosty pane in a night of want and woe;
And yonder she comes, by the bleak bull-pines, swift staggering through the snow.

The Little Old Log Cabin

When a man gits on his uppers in a hard-pan sort of town,
An' he ain't got nothin' comin', an' he can't afford ter eat,
An' he's in a fix fer lodgin', an' he wanders up an' down,
An' you'd fancy he'd been boozin', he's so locoed 'bout the feet;
When he's feelin' sneakin' sorry, an' his belt is hangin' slack,
An' his face is peaked an' grey-like, an' his heart gits down an' whines,
Then he's apt ter git a-thinkin' an' a-wishin' he was back
In the little ol' log cabin in the shadder of the pines.

When he's on the blazin' desert, an' his canteen's sprung a leak,
An' he's all alone an' crazy, an' he's crawlin' like a snail,
An' his tongue's so black an' swollen that it hurts him fer to speak,
An' he gouges down fer water, an' the raven's on his trail;
When he's done with care and cursin', an' he feels more like to cry,
An' he sees ol' Death a-grinnin', an' he thinks upon his crimes,
Then he's like ter hev' a vision, as he settles down ter die,
Of the little ol' log cabin an' the roses an' the vines.

Oh, the little ol' log cabin, it's a solemn shinin' mark
When a feller gits ter sinnin', an' a-goin' ter the wall,
An' folks don't understand him, an' he's gropin' in the dark,
An' he's sick of bein' cursed at, an' he's longin' fer his call:
When the sun of life's a-sinkin' you can see it 'way above,
On the hill from out the shadder in a glory 'gin the sky,
An' your mother's voice is callin', an' her arms are stretched in love,
An' somehow you're glad you're goin', an' you ain't a-scared to die;
When you'll be like a kid again, an' nestle to her breast,
An' never leave its shelter, an' forget, an' love, an' rest.

The Younger Son

If you leave the gloom of London and you seek a glowing land,
Where all except the flag is strange and new,
There's a bronzed and stalwart fellow who will grip you by the hand,
And greet you with a welcome warm and true;
For he's your younger brother, the one you sent away,
Because there wasn't room for him at home;
And now he's quite contented, and he's glad he didn't stay,
And he's building Britain's greatness o'er the foam.

When the giant herd is moving at the rising of the sun,
And the prairie is lit with rose and gold;
And the camp is all a-bustle, and the busy day's begun,
He leaps into the saddle sure and bold.
Through the round of heat and hurry, through the racket and the rout,
He rattles at a pace that nothing mars;
And when the night-winds whisper, and camp-fires flicker out,
He is sleeping like a child beneath the stars.

When the wattle-blooms are drooping in the sombre she-oak glade,
And the breathless land is lying in a swoon,
He leaves his work a moment, leaning lightly on his spade,
And he hears the bell-bird chime the Austral noon.
The parakeets are silent in the gum-tree by the creek;
The ferny grove is sunshine-steeped and still;
But the dew will gem the myrtle in the twilight ere he seek
His little lonely cabin on the hill.

Around the purple, vine-clad slope the argent river dreams;
The roses almost hide the house from view;
A snow-peak of the Winterberg in crimson splendour gleams;
The shadow deepens down on the karroo.
He seeks the lily-scented dusk beneath the orange-tree:
His pipe in silence glows and fades and glows,
And then two little maids come out and climb upon his knee,
And one is like the lily, one the rose.

He sees his white sheep dapple o'er the green New Zealand plain,
And where Vancouver's shaggy ramparts frown,
When the sunlight threads the pine-gloom he is fighting might and main
To clinch the rivets of an Empire down.
You will find him toiling, toiling, in the south or in the west,
A child of nature, fearless, frank and free;

And the warmest heart that beats for you is beating in his breast,
And he sends you loyal greeting o'er the sea.

You've a brother in the Army, you've another in the Church;
One of you is a diplomatic swell;

You've had the pick of everything and left him in the lurch;
And yet I think he's doing very well.

I'm sure his life is happy, and he doesn't envy yours;

I know he loves the land his pluck has won;

And I fancy in the years unborn, while England's fame endures,
She will come to bless with pride—the Younger Son.

The March of the Dead

The cruel war was over—oh, the triumph was so sweet!

We watched the troops returning, through our tears;
There was triumph, triumph, triumph down the scarlet glittering street,
And you scarce could hear the music for the cheers.
And you scarce could see the house-tops for the flags that flew between,
The bells were pealing madly to the sky;
And every one was shouting for the Soldiers of the Queen,
And the glory of an age was passing by.

And then there came a shadow, swift and sudden, dark and drear;
The bells were silent, not an echo stirred.

The flags were drooping sullenly, the men forgot to cheer;
We waited, and we never spoke a word.

The sky grew darker, darker, till from out the gloomy rack
There came a voice that checked the heart with dread:

”Tear down, tear down your bunting now, and hang up sable black;
They are coming—it’s the Army of the Dead.”

They were coming, they were coming, gaunt and ghastly, sad and slow;
They were coming, all the crimson wrecks of pride;
With faces seared, and cheeks red smeared, and haunting eyes of woe,
And clotted holes the khaki couldn’t hide.

Oh, the clammy brow of anguish! the livid, foam-flecked lips!

The reeling ranks of ruin swept along!
The limb that trailed, the hand that failed, the bloody finger-tips!
And oh, the dreary rhythm of their song!

”They left us on the veldt-side, but we felt we couldn’t stop,

On this, our England’s crowning festal day;
We’re the men of Magersfontein, we’re the men of Spion Kop,
Colenso,—we’re the men who had to pay.
We’re the men who paid the blood-price. Shall the grave be all our gain?
You owe us. Long and heavy is the score.
Then cheer us for our glory now, and cheer us for our pain,
And cheer us as ye never cheered before.”

The folks were white and stricken, and each tongue seemed weighed with lead;
Each heart was clutched in hollow hand of ice;
And every eye was staring at the horror of the dead,
The pity of the men who paid the price.

They were come, were come to mock us, in the first flush of our peace;
Through writhing lips their teeth were all agleam;

They were coming in their thousands—oh, would they never cease!

I closed my eyes, and then—it was a dream.

There was triumph, triumph, triumph down the scarlet gleaming street;

The town was mad, a man was like a boy.

A thousand flags were flaming where the sky and city meet;

A thousand bells were thundering the joy.

There was music, mirth and sunshine; but some eyes shone with regret:

And while we stun with cheers our homing braves,

O God, in Thy great mercy, let us nevermore forget

The graves they left behind, the bitter graves.

“FIGHTING MAC”

A LIFE TRAGEDY

A pistol-shot rings round and round the world:

In pitiful defeat a warrior lies.

A last defiance to dark Death is hurled,

A last wild challenge shocks the sunlit skies.

Alone he falls with wide, wan, woeful eyes:

Eyes that could smile at death—could not face shame.

Alone, alone he paced his narrow room,

In the bright sunshine of that Paris day;

Saw in his thought the awful hand of doom;

Saw in his dream his glory pass away;

Tried in his heart, his weary heart, to pray:

”O God! who made me, give me strength to face

The spectre of this bitter, black disgrace.”

The burn brawls darkly down the shaggy glen,

The bee-kissed heather blooms around the door;

He sees himself a barefoot boy again,

Bending o’er page of legendary lore.

He hears the pibroch, grips the red claymore,

Runs with the Fiery Cross a clansman true,

Sworn kinsman of Rob Roy and Roderick Dhu.

Eating his heart out with a wild desire,

One day, behind his counter trim and neat,

He hears a sound that sets his brain afire—

The Highlanders are marching down the street.

Oh, how the pipes shrill out, the mad drums beat!

”On to the gates of Hell, my Gordons gay!”

He flings his hated yardstick far away.

He sees the sullen pass, high-crowned with snow,

Where Afghans cower with eyes of gleaming hate.

He hurls himself against the hidden foe.

They try to rally—ah, too late, too late!

Again, defenceless, with fierce eyes that wait

For death, he stands, like baited bull at bay,

And flouts the Boers, that mad Majuba day.

He sees again the murderous Soudan,

Blood-slaked and rapine swept. He seems to stand
Upon the gory plain of Omdurman.

Then Magersfontein, and supreme command
Over his Highlanders. To shake his hand
A King is proud, and princes call him friend,
And glory crowns his life—and now the end.

The awful end. His eyes are dark with doom;
He hears the shrapnel shrieking overhead:
He sees the ravaged ranks, the flame-stabbed gloom.
Oh, to have fallen! the battle-field his bed,
With Wauchope and his glorious brother-dead.
Why was he saved for this, for this? And now
He raises the revolver to his brow.

* * * * *

In many a Highland home, framed with rude art,
You'll find his portrait, rough-hewn, stern and square:
It's graven in the Fuyam fellah's heart;
The Ghurka reads it at his evening prayer;
The raw lands know it, where the fierce suns glare;
The Dervish fears it. Honour to his name,
Who holds aloft the shield of England's fame.

Mourn for our hero, men of Northern race!
We do not know his sin; we only know
His sword was keen. He laughed death in the face,
And struck, for Empire's sake, a giant blow.
His arm was strong. Ah! well they learnt, the foe.
The echo of his deeds is ringing yet,
Will ring for aye. All else ... let us forget.

The Woman And The Angel

An angel was tired of heaven, as he lounged in
the golden street;
His halo was tilted sideways, and his harp lay
mute at his feet;
So the Master stooped in His pity, and gave him
a pass to go,
For the space of a moon, to the earth-world, to
mix with the men below.

He doffed his celestial garments, scarce waiting
to lay them straight;
He bade goodbye to Peter, who stood by the
golden gate;
The sexless singers of heaven chanted a fond
farewell,
And the imps looked up as they pattered on the
red-hot flags of hell.

Never was seen such an angel: eyes of a heavenly
blue,
Features that shamed Apollo, hair of a golden
hue;
The women simply adored him, his lips were like
Cupid's bow;
But he never ventured to use them—and so they
voted him slow.

Till at last there came One Woman, a marvel of
loveliness,
And she whispered to him: "Do you love me?"
And he answered that woman, "Yes."
And she said: "Put your arms around me, and
kiss me, and hold me—so—"
But fiercely he drew back, saying: "This thing
is wrong, and I know."

Then sweetly she mocked his scruples, and softly
she him beguiled:
"You, who are verily man among men, speak
with the tongue of a child.
We have outlived the old standards; we have
burst, like an over-tight thong,

The ancient, outworn, puritanic traditions of
Right and Wrong.”

Then the Master feared for His angel, and called
him again to His side,

For oh, the woman was wondrous, and oh, the
angel was tried.

And deep in his hell sang the Devil, and this was
the strain of his song:

”The ancient, outworn, puritanic traditions of
Right and Wrong.”

The Rhyme of the Restless Ones

We couldn't sit and study for the law;
The stagnation of a bank we couldn't stand;
For our riot blood was surging, and we didn't need much urging
To excitements and excesses that are banned.
So we took to wine and drink and other things,
And the devil in us struggled to be free;
Till our friends rose up in wrath, and they pointed out the path,
And they paid our debts and packed us o'er the sea.

Oh, they shook us off and shipped us o'er the foam,
To the larger lands that lure a man to roam;
And we took the chance they gave
Of a far and foreign grave,
And we bade goodbye for evermore to home.

And some of us are climbing on the peak,
And some of us are camping on the plain;
By pine and palm you'll find us, with never claim to bind us,
By track and trail you'll meet us once again.

We are fated serfs to freedom—sky and sea;
We have failed where slummy cities overflow;
But the stranger ways of earth know our pride and know our worth,
And we go into the dark as fighters go.

Yes, we go into the night as brave men go,
Though our faces they be often streaked with woe;
Yet we're hard as cats to kill,
And our hearts are reckless still,
And we've danced with death a dozen times or so.

And you'll find us in Alaska after gold,
And you'll find us herding cattle in the South.
We like strong drink and fun; and when the race is run,
We often die with curses in our mouth.

We are wild as colts unbroke, but never mean;
Of our sins we've shoulders broad to bear the blame;
But we'll never stay in town, and we'll never settle down,
And we'll never have an object or an aim.

No, there's that in us that time can never tame;
And life will always seem a careless game;

And they'd better far forget—
Those who say they love us yet—
Forget, blot out with bitterness our name.

New Year's Eve

It's cruel cold on the water-front, silent and dark and drear;

Only the black tide weltering, only the hissing snow;

And I, alone, like a storm-tossed wreck, on this night of the glad New Year,

Shuffling along in the icy wind, ghastly and gaunt and slow.

They're playing a tune in McGuffy's saloon, and it's cheery and bright in there

(God! but I'm weak—since the bitter dawn, and never a bite of food);

I'll just go over and slip inside—I mustn't give way to despair—

Perhaps I can bum a little booze if the boys are feeling good.

They'll jeer at me, and they'll sneer at me, and they'll call me a whiskey soak;

("Have a drink? Well, thankee kindly, sir, I don't mind if I do.")

A drivelling, dirty gin-joint fiend, the butt of the bar-room joke;

Sunk and sodden and hopeless—"Another? Well, here's to you!"

McGuffy is showing a bunch of the boys how Bob Fitzsimmons hit;

The barman is talking of Tammany Hall, and why the ward boss got fired;

I'll just sneak into a corner, and they'll let me alone a bit;

The room is reeling round and round ... O God, but I'm tired, I'm tired....

Roses she wore on her breast that night. Oh, but their scent was sweet;

Alone we sat on the balcony, and the fan-palms arched above;

The witching strain of a waltz by Strauss came up to our cool retreat,

And I prisoned her little hand in mine, and I whispered my plea of love.

Then sudden the laughter died on her lips, and lowly she bent her head;

And oh, there came in the deep, dark eyes a look that was heaven to see

And the moments went, and I waited there, and never a word was said,

And she plucked from her bosom a rose of red, and shyly gave it to me.

Then the music swelled to a crash of joy, and the lights blazed up like day;

And I held her fast to my throbbing heart, and I kissed her bonny brow;

"She is mine, she is mine for evermore!" the violins seemed to say,

And the bells were ringing the New Year in—O God! I can hear them now.

Don't you remember that long, last waltz, with its sobbing, sad refrain?

Don't you remember that last goodbye, and the dear eyes dim with tears?

Don't you remember that golden dream, with never a hint of pain,

Of lives that would blend like an angel-song in the bliss of the coming year?

Oh, what have I lost! What have I lost! Ethel, forgive, forgive!

The red, red rose is faded now, and it's fifty years ago.

'Twere better to die a thousand deaths than live each day as I live!
I have sinned, I have sunk to the lowest depths—but oh, I have suffered so!

Hark! Oh hark! I can hear the bells!... Look! I can see her there,
Fair as a dream ...but it fades ... And now—I can hear the dreadful hum
Of the crowded court ... See! the Judge looks down ...
Not Guilty, my Lord, I swear ...
The bells, I can hear the bells again ...
Ethel, I come, I come!...

* * * * *

"Rouse up, old man, it's twelve o'clock. You can't sleep here, you know.
Say! ain't you got no sentiment? Lift up your muddled head;
Have a drink to the glad New Year, a drop before you go—
You darned old dirty hobo ... My God! Here, boys! He's DEAD!"

Comfort

Say! You've struck a heap of trouble—

Bust in business, lost your wife;

No one cares a cent about you,

You don't care a cent for life;

Hard luck has of hope bereft you,

Health is failing, wish you'd die—

Why, you've still the sunshine left you,

And the big, blue sky.

Sky so blue it makes you wonder

If it's heaven shining through;

Earth so smiling 'way out yonder,

Sun so bright it dazzles you;

Birds a-singing, flowers a-flinging

All their fragrance on the breeze;

Dancing shadows, green, still meadows—

Don't you mope, you've still got these.

These, and none can take them from you;

These, and none can weigh their worth.

What! you're tired and broke and beaten?—

Why, you're rich—you've got the earth!

Yes, if you're a tramp in tatters,

While the blue sky bends above,

You've got nearly all that matters,

You've got God, and God is love.

Premonition

'Twas a year ago and the moon was bright
 (Oh, I remember so well, so well),
I walked with my love in a sea of light,
 And the voice of my sweet was a silver bell.

 And sudden the moon grew strangely dull,
 And sudden my love had taken wing;
I looked on the face of a grinning skull,
 I strained to my heart a ghastly thing.

'Twas but fantasy, for my love lay still
 In my arms with her tender eyes aglow,
And she wondered why my lips were chill,
 Why I was silent and kissed her so.

 A year has gone and the moon is bright,
 A gibbous moon like a ghost of woe;
I sit by a new-made grave to-night,
 And my heart is broken—it's strange, you know.

The Tramps

Can you recall, dear comrade, when we tramped
God's land together,
And we sang the old, old Earth-song, for our
youth was very sweet;
When we drank and fought and lusted, as we
mocked at tie and tether,
Along the road to Anywhere, the wide world at
our feet.

Along the road to Anywhere, when each day had
its story;
When time was yet our vassal, and life's jest
was still unstale;
When peace unfathomed filled our hearts as,
bathed in amber glory,
Along the road to Anywhere we watched the
sunsets pale.

Alas! the road to Anywhere is pitfalled with
disaster;
There's hunger, want, and weariness, yet oh,
we loved it so!
As on we tramped exultantly, and no man was
our master,
And no man guessed what dreams were ours,
as swinging heel and toe,
We tramped the road to Anywhere, the magic
road to Anywhere,
The tragic road to Anywhere, such dear, dim
years ago.

L'Envoi

*You who have lived in the Land,
 You who have trusted the trail;
 You who are strong to withstand,
 You who are swift to assail;
 Songs have I sung to beguile,
 Vintage of desperate years
 Hard as a harlot's smile,
 Bitter as unshed tears.*

*Little of joy or mirth,
 Little of ease I sing;
 Sagas of men of earth,
 Humanly suffering,
 Such as you all have done;
 Savagely faring forth,
 Sons of the midnight sun,
 Argonauts of the North.*

*Far in the land God forgot
 Glimmers the lure of your trail;
 Still in your lust are you taught
 Even to win is to fail.
 Still must you follow and fight
 Under the vampire wing;
 There in the long, long night
 Hoping and vanquishing.*

*Husbandmen of the Wild,
 Reaping a barren gain;
 Scourged by desire, reconciled
 Unto disaster and pain;
 These my songs are for you,
 You who are seared with the brand:
 God knows I have tried to be true;
 Please God you will understand.*