

Classic Poetry Series

Alice Guerin Crist

- poems -

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Alice Guerin Crist (6 February, 1876 - 13 June, 1941)

Alice Guerin Crist, author and journalist, was born on 6 February 1876 at Clare Castle, Clare, Ireland, daughter of Patrick Guerin, chapel master, and his wife Winifred, née Roughan. Alice migrated with her family to Queensland at the age of 2. As her father was a teacher, she spent her childhood at small, south-eastern rural schools where he supervised her education and her work as a pupil-teacher. In 1896 she was appointed to Blackhall Range State School near Landsborough but after a transfer to West Haldon next year she was unfairly dismissed when an inspector found her en route to a wedding to retrieve truant students. She returned to her family at Douglas on the Darling Downs. On 4 October 1902 at St Patrick's Catholic Church, Toowoomba, she married a German immigrant farmer, Joseph Christ, who later changed the name to Crist. The couple moved to an isolated property at Rosenberg near Bundaberg in 1910 but returned to Toowoomba in 1913 when Jo began a fuel supply business there.

Alice pursued an active literary career despite significant periods when she had to concentrate on farm work and the care of her five children. A prolific writer of verse and short fiction, she published widely in the Australian secular and religious press including the *Bulletin* (Sydney), *Worker*, *Steele Rudd's Magazine*, *Home Budget*, *Toowoomba Chronicle*, *Catholic Advocate* and *Catholic Press*. Her devout Irish Catholicism was at first associated with democratic politics and in 1902 she joined the *Social Democratic Vanguard*. She also became friendly with another poet and schoolteacher (Dame) Mary Gilmore, who published her work in the woman's page of the *Australian Worker*. Crist wrote about her rural and domestic experiences, frequently celebrating the beauty of the bush and the virtues and struggles of Irish Australian pioneers. A marked Celtic influence is discernible in poems about the homesickness of immigrants and in the sprites and faeries of her nature verse and poems for children.

Crist was a long-term member and vice-president of the Toowoomba Ladies' Literary Society, which played an important role promoting the culture of the Darling Downs. In 1917 her youngest brother Felician was killed at Passchendaele, Belgium; for many years she contributed Anzac Day poems to the *Toowoomba Chronicle*. She published *When Rody Came to Ironbark and Other Verses* (Sydney, 1927) and *Eucharist Lilies and Other Verses* (Sydney, 1928).

From 1927 the *Brisbane Catholic Advocate* began to pay Crist for rural and religious poems, short stories and a serial celebrating the contribution of the Christian Brothers to Catholic education, which resulted in the novel, "Go It! Brothers!!" (Sydney, 1928). In 1930 she became 'Betty Bluegum', editor of the children's page, and used the versatility of this outlet to stimulate

Queensland's Catholic children. Crist's page, like her verse, was an inventive mix of Catholic Irish-Australian nationalism, domestic virtue and appreciation of nature, and she encouraged young correspondents.

In 1935 she was awarded King George V's jubilee medal and in 1937 King George VI's coronation medal. Crist died of tuberculosis on 13 June 1941 in hospital at Toowoomba and was buried in Toowoomba cemetery. Her husband, three daughters and two sons survived her. In September 1953 a wing of the Holy Spirit Hospital, Brisbane, was dedicated in her name.

"O'Shea"

O'Shea was a big railway ganger, clean-hearted, and clean-limbed and shy,
With a glint of grey hair at his temples, and smile in his Irish blue eye;
He'd but one speech for every occasion, as you told him the news of the day,
And I know I will shock pious people-but poor Tim meant no harm when he's say.
"Aw! g'long, go-to-hell, go-to-hell now! In a mildly expostulant way.

Oft the boys told, with winking and laughter, how O'Shea courted early in life
The dashing and voluble lady who'd make him an excellent wife;
And how slowly that courtship proceeded, till herself had to "settle the day".
For Tim, though he madly adored her, could find nothing better to say
Than 'Aw! G'long, go-to-hell go-to-hell now," in a tender and loverlike way.

The flying gang loved and served him, for O'Shea was a leader of men,
But we never knew Tim for a hero, till the train smash at Appletree, when
The seven forty-five lay in ruins in a setting of scrub, ferns and flowers,
With the summer sky smiling above it, and the air fresh and fragrant from
showers.
There was tragedy, death and confusion, there was horror and grief beyond words,
Pain blent with the incense of blossoms, and groans with the song of the birds.
The flying gang came to the rescue, ah O'Shea was magnificent then,
When there's danger and death and destruction-God send us the silent men!

His clothing in rents and in tatters, fire-blackened on forehead and cheek,
He fought with grim death like a hero, but never a word did he speak.
All were saved, but the wreckage was blazing, the flames rushing madly up, where
A great 'Prince-of-Wales' feather orchid blossom just out of reach of the glare.
Then a child's cry arose from beneath it, and we shrank back aghast as it came
But O'Shea, with a roar like a lion, leaped right in the heart of the flames.
And he saved her, we found her unscathed, as we rushed to the spot where they lay,
But we laid on the cinder scorched grasses what that furnace had left of O'Shea.

We were paying the last loving tribute to our hero, who lay there at rest,
His grizzled hair singed at the temples, his hands fold still on his breast,
The 'beads' round his sinewy fingers, that the never neglected to say,
Ah, we all know that God's Holy Mother had his soul in her keeping that day.
On his breast lay a big creamy orchid, unspoiled by the smoke and the flame
('Twas McCarthy, the city reporter, had carefully gathered the same).
His poor wife and girls clung together and stifled their heartbroken cries
While Simpson, the posy old Mayor, was lauding O'Shea to the skies;
'The noblest of heroes," he called him, while serene in his coffin Tim lay
With a smile on his smoke-blackened features and the quiet dry smile seemed to say:
"Aw! g'long, go-to-hell, go-to-hell now! In a mildly expostulant way.

Alice Guerin Crist

A Dream Of Heaven

They tell of harps and golden crowns, and singing,
But oh, I think, when ends the strife and pain,
That our dear Lord will lead the souls that love Him
Where are green grass and trees, and soft spring rain;

Where are no scorching suns, or skies drought-blazing,
But dear grey clouds with sunshine stealing through
In level rays, o'er distant wooded valleys,
And still green pools, with waterlilies blue.

And those who sought to save drought-ridden creatures,
And struggled bravely with the grim old earth,
The God of all true hearts will surely give them
Rest from their labours in a new world's birth:

When they shall feel the fresh wind in their faces,
Fragrant with clover scents and summer shower,
And they shall praise Him in green silent places,
Who, like St. Francis, loved each tree and flower;

Who see their God in all the changing seasons,
And never failed, or flinched, or Faith denied,
For evermore their loving Lord shall lead them
Where are green woods, and rolling pastures wide.

Alice Guerin Crist

A Letter From Palestine

A letter from "The East" it came today,
And all the house is lightened of its gloom:
A sun-browned desert wind through every room
Eddies, and bring strange scents of old bazaare;
Of orange-groves beneath the dreaming stars
O'er far Jerusalem. Through these ordered rooms
Where poppies glow and pale narcissi blooms
Nod in tall vases, sings the desert breeze
Telling of brown battalion overseas.

Khaki-clad soldiers, singing as they go
Along the road to Gaza, and we know
The very breath of freedom's in the air
With their gay boast, "Australia will be there"
Mateship and courage, loyalty and truth
The very essence of Australian youth!
We have no fears! serene in faith we pray
For those dear gallant lads so far away.

Alice Guerin Crist

A Song Of Delight

Oh! Have you stolen out, one summer morning
To pick white crocus 'neath the garden wall,
Or shaken softly the big scented roses
And watched the dew-drops fall?

Or slipt beneath the rail fence, grey with lichen,
And found the little brown path to the creek
In the deep hush of morn when all was silent
And soft airs fanned your cheek?

And caught he subtle scent of earth and mosses,
Of tender water-violets blue and white,
Or heard a little brown bird thrill with rapture,
Deep-hidden out of sight.

Or have you tracked a 'coachman's whip' at noon-day
Through spicy scrub with tropic orchids gay,
Following its mocking 'whish-h' with eager footsteps
Until it dies away?

Oh have you caught the breath of glowing summer,
Rich with ripe passion-fruit and blackberry wine? –
Gone berry-hunting by the river reaches,
Where dancing waters shine?

Or have you seem the deep scrub-aisles by moonlight,
Where scented jasmine gleamed amid the shade,
Where moonrays lit great banks of white rock-lilies –
And listened unafraid.

To the soft stir of unseen life about you?
Give thanks to God, then, for your heart is right,
The treasure-house of Nature yours forever-
Her realms of pure delight.

Alice Guerin Crist

A Young Rebel

The sun is setting behind the range,
his golden rays pour down
On a little figure, childish, strange,
Bending over a volume worn,
Whose green-clad cover, dusty and torn,
Bears a 'harp without a crown'.

The young eyes turn to the distant west,
Where the sunset colours glow,
And thoughts are thrilling the childish breast
Of gallant, valorous deeds long done,
Of glorious battles, fought and won
In the days of long ago.

His fancy peoples the lonely glen
With the ghosts of the vanished past,
Till he hears the tramp of armed men,
And O'Niall's plumed horsemen ridge
While the 'Red Hand' flutters in all its pride
Above them on the blast.

And just where the road winds into the creek
Where the jasmine stars the shade,
With the soft wind kissing her blushful cheek,
Beautiful grey-eyed Dierdrie stands
Stretching to Naisi her snowy hands--
Half -welcoming, half- dismayed.

The purple hues of the gully change
With the deepening shades of night,
And, far in a nook of the distant range
Is Michael Dwyer, of the Wicklow glen,
Holding his desperate stand again,
'Gainst the redcoat soldier's might.

The west wind rises across the creek,
And with it the crash of steel
Carries a flush to the listener's cheek—
'Tis only the crash of branches dry,
But in it he hears the battle-cry,
And the patriot's words of zeal.

And martyred shades come thronging around,
To the roll-call of Liberty;
Louder their eager voices sound,
Till towering tree-tops and glowing sky,
Are echoing back the defiant cry----
'Michael answer for me!'

The moon is rising above the creek,
The shining stars look down
On a little dreamer, whose pillowed cheek

Rests, in a volume worn,
Whose green-clad cover, dusty and torn,
Bears ' Harp without a Crown'.

Alice Guerin Crist

Adventure

We found one evening, in the scrub,
a road the timber-getters made,
a winding, dim, mysterious track,
and we raced down it, half afraid.

The wild-hop vines grew high aloft,
a winter's chill was in the air,
and trailing sarsaparilla swung
it's purple glory everywhere.

Then, curled within a hollow stump
down in a gully dim and deep,
we held our breaths with awe to find
four dingo puppies fast asleep!

We stroked them, trembling, for we knew
that somewhere in the forest dim,
there lurked amid the gathering shades
the gaunt old mother, fierce and grim.

The dry leaves rustled, back we sped
to where the homelight beckoned warm,
to supper-time and Mother's smile;
and nestling near her safe from harm.

We, thrilling, gazed into the night
where twinkling stars rose high and dim,
above the darksome scrub, where lurked
the dingo mother fierce and grim!

Alice Guerin Crist

Afterglow

A magic wrought of dying dreams
A wizard light that creeps and glows;
Painting grey hills and sluggish streams
In tints of gold and rose

Staining with fire the cherry-snow
Lighting our hearts with sudden flame
As if the love of long ago
Back from its ashes came

Rose-flushed and radiant everything
And joy and hope are born anew;
Even the darting swallow's wing
Has caught its glowing hue

Ah! swift it dies from hill and plain...
Be wise dear heart and let me go;
Not love that lit our hearts again -
Only it's afterglow!

Alice Guerin Crist

Bid McCrae

The church was wrapped in darkness save for the alter-light,
And save where near the marble rail six tapers glimmered bright
O'er waxen heavy-scented flowers and coffin plated deep,
Where the good wife, Mary Halloran lay in her last long sleep.

Her life, calm, pure and prosperous, had scarcely known a care;
Four sons, three daughters, she had reared – all sturdy, strong and fair,
All like their parents, kindly, plain and practical-save one
That rare soul, marked for graces high, the young priest - Father John.

His beautiful young face was lit by spirit-light within
A new St. Michael armed against the powers of wrath and sin-
And now he knelt and prayed alone, amid the church's gloom,
And heard his mother's well loved voice come from beyond the tomb:

"Oh help me dearest son of mine to-night my soul has known
Our neighbours' life is twined with ours; we cannot live alone;
My sins, our dear Lord has forgiven, their guilt is purged away,
But yet I cannot enter Heaven, because of Bid McCrae."

Young Father John thought hard and long, till memory came again,
Of the poor, shiftless outcast, Bid, who dwelt in Padgett's Lane,
A stone's throw from his Mother's yard, the by-word of the street,
Good women turned away in scorn at passing of her feet.

The gentle sisters often strove, with fond solicitude,
To bring to paths of light and peace bid's wild and reckless brood;
And so, at Constance Halloran's side, on first communion day,
Knelt little bright eyes Delia, the child of Bid McCrae.

Both pure souls, wrapt in loving awe, before the children's King,
But ah, the coming, crowding years that swift temptations bring!
While Constance, safe and sheltered bloomed to happy girlhood bright.
Poor erring Delia's wayward path knew sin's un-holy blight.

"Blind in my selfish virtue wrapped I passed her all my days,
And god, He judgeth not as we – His ways are not our ways-"
Again his Mothers' voice he heard, and read its message plain,
And Father John arose and sought the depths of Padgett's Lane.

There by the dying sinner's bed, he fought the powers of Hell-
Fought for the storm –tossed mother's soul, the erring child as well
For kneeling by her mothers' bed, the lamplight on her hair,
Poor broken-hearted Delia knelt in sorrow and despair.

And strange deep thoughts had Father John-how full of charity!
How rich in golden gleams of good a sinner's heart can be!
And ere the dawnlight flushed the sky, both had been reconciled-
Shriven and at rest the happy dead, and saved the wayward child.

Next night there came to father John a vision glad and bright:
He saw his gentle mother stand at Heaven's portal bright,

And as the young priest raised his heart in humble fervent praise
To God, who judgeth not as we - whose ways are not our ways-
The storm-tossed outcast, bid McCrae, all shriven from her sin,
Stood at this saintly woman's side, and smiled, and led her in.

Alice Guerin Crist

Brother Wind

"I thank my god for brother wind,"
So prayed St. Francis long ago
In words of simple, joyous praise,
That fill my heart with sudden glow
As-braced by winter's icy draught-
With singing soul, and strengthened mind,
I humbly join the good Saint's prayer
Thank my God for "Brother Wind."

For Brother Wind, who, whispering soft
Brings subtlest perfume on his wings,
The violet scent of childhood days,
The lost delight in simple things;
For Brother wind, who whistling keen
O'er open plain and storm-scarred hill,
Cleanses from mind, and heart, and brain,
All thoughts of wrong, and ancient ill.

Who wafts from scarce-stirred lily beds
Incense of early purity,
Or wakes to life our laggard souls
With stinging fragrance of the sea.

Echoes of Heaven, far-off and faint
For weary heart and tired mind,
Sweet long-lost memories, old and quaint-
These are the gifts of Brother Wind.

Ah! Dear St. Francis, let me kneel
Before thy shrine with joyous mind
Joining my humble, grateful prayer,
Thanking our God for Brother Wind.

Alice Guerin Crist

Christmas Welcome

Under the wintry skies,
Sundered from home and kin,
With patience and love in her eyes,
Mary is journeying.
The angels keep watch and ward,
And Joseph is there to guard,
But - "there is no room at the inn."

No room in the inns of Life,
No place for Christ the King,
Through the Heavens with joy are rife,
Where worshipping angels sing,
In palace, and street and mart,
In the worlds great pagan heart
There is no welcoming.

But in far cathedrals dim,
Where Christmas lilies bloom
'Mid incense and holy hymn,
And tapers lighting the gloom,
Where the Christmas crib is laid,
And children come, unafraid
His own are finding Him room.

Here the humble ones of the earth,
The poor, and the sorely tried
Are waiting the dear Lord's birth,
And their arms are open wide,
And Mary will find them grace
Who makes for Her child a place
In their hearts, this Christmas-tide.

Alice Guerin Crist

Croquet

In a garden where the may made the straggling fences gay
And the roses cream and scarlet shed their petals on the breeze
Your maiden aunts and I, and you, demure and shy,
Played a sober game of croquet underneath the spreading trees.

Just beyond the garden wall we could hear the merry call
Of the tennis players yonder, flitting gaily in the sun,
But we recked not of their glee, for all too content were we,
And we weren't flushed and heated when our quiet game was done.

What a picture sweet you made! As you rested in the shade,
Listening to my eager chatter with a glance of grave surprise;
Was it nectar, love, or tea that your white hands poured for me
In the dainty Wedgewood tea-cups that were bluer than your eyes?

Love I know not; this I know, that we parted years ago –
That our paths lie far asunder in the giddy whirl of life,
And the tender vows we made, underneath the spreading shade,
Are a memory half forgotten 'mid the city's toil and strife.

But when wearied by its din, by its ceaseless strife and sin,
My thoughts will wander backwards at the close of some long day,
Once again I see you stand with your mallet in your hand,
'Twixt a nodding scarlet rose-bush and a hedge of snowy may.

And the scent of mignonette comes to haunt and thrill me yet
While your blue eyes light the distance with a half reproachful smile;
Love, it is the world sad way, just to worship for a day-
And I doubt if you remember, after all this weary while.

Alice Guerin Crist

Enniskillen

Oh my heart beat high with joy elate,
When Danny rode in the Hunters' Plate
On Enniskillen, the raking grey-
A mighty jumper, with power to stay!
Velvet muzzled, with eye of fire,
Clean-legged, slant -shouldered, and tough as wire,
Oh, the joy that can fill a colleen's breast,
When her man and horse are dong their best!
The summer skies were without a cloud
O'er the heads of the frantic, cheering crowd,
As he led the field right into the straight,
And his eyes met mine, at the five-barred gate.
Then they thundered by, like a roaring flood,
And oh, good luck to the Irish blood!
The Irish blood that in horse or man
Has never 'caved in' since the world began.
He took the last leap, like a bird in the air,
Clearing the hurdle, straight and fair,
And Enniskillen won!

We'd been married for one long blissful year
Of hope and struggle, of joy and fear;
Our hearts were young, and our hopes were high,
And the star of love shone bright in our sky.
And I felt like a queen as I hushed to rest
The little bright head that lay on my breast;
But the air was stifling close and strange
With a scent of smoke from the burning range,
And I prayed for Danny, riding away
On a cattle hunt, on the gallant grey—
The smoke came down like a cloud of night,
And ranges and trees were blotted from sight,
When Enniskillen came galloping home,
His grey coat mottled and flecked with foam,
And Danny's face was rigid and white,
"Come Sweetheart, we ride for our lives to-night;
Wrap this cloak around you, hold Baby fast,
And pray, till the danger be overpassed,
For the wind has arisen with whirling force,
And our lives depend on the dear, grey horse.

And on God's good mercy." – A streak of light,
Enniskillen went racing into the night
The dim stars peered from a reeling sky,
And wild bush creatures came rushing by;
As crash on crash the timber fell,
And the burning wind was a blast of hell.
But Danny held me with steady arm,
And the Babe, between us, slept safe from harm.

We were nearly through, and the battle won,
When Danny drew rein with "Ah God! – We're done!"

For before us the flames met roaring wide,
Though safety lay on the other side,
One moment, a tremble, the grey horse stood,
Then oh, thank God for the Irish blood,
The Irish blood that in horse and man
Has never `caved in' since the world began!
With a snort of defiance to smoke and flame,
Through the raging furnace the grey horse came,
Though laboured sobs shook his trembling side,
And falling cinders scorched his hide,
And Enniskillen won!

The grass is waving on hill and plain,
And peace and plenty are here again;
Our little home rebuilt once more,
And the lean struggling year are o'er.
There's a paddock green on the river flat,
Where a dear grey horse roams strong and fat,
Though on his back the scars still show,
Deep scars where never a hair can grow.
But still he holds his head with pride,
And treads the earth with a kingly stride,
Proud of his Irish blood!

Alice Guerin Crist

Fairies

They don't believe in fairies,
Those old folk wide and staid,
They've never caught the glitter
Of their wings in forest shade.

For them the bush is just a place
Of timber, cows and corn,
They've never been up our creek
On a cool November morn.

From mossy banks all dotted
With violets breaking through,
Beneath the frondled maidenhair
Their shy eyes peep at you.

They sleep 'neath tasselled tea-trees,
The drowsy summer day,
Where the tiny crimson love-birds
Around them dart and play.

The dew-drenched nights of Summer,
When gum-trees are aflower,
In foamy waves of sweetness
Bring round the fairies' hour.

This is the time of frolic,
When they go floating high,
On wispy shreds of river mist,
Across the shining sky.

What! Don't believe in fairies!
When they're round you everywhere!
See them- who needs to see them?
You simply know they're there.

Alice Guerin Crist

Grass

The world is all one smother of grass,
Waves of it rolling deep and green,
Clothing the paddocks' gentle slope,
Laughing the brown tree-trunks between.
And some are praising the brilliant flowers,
The beauty of foliage as they pass,
But I am drinking its glory in
And thanking the Lord for grass, for grass!

The air is a-murmur with rippling sound
From jubilant creeks long fed with rain,
Singing of drought and travail past
And a bounteous earth drowsy again-
An earth that is telling its thankfulness
With passionate rapture too deep for words
In acres and acres of waving grass,
Haven of promise to starving herds.

There's a tangle of bloom in its moist green shade,
Mottled yam-flowers and gentians blue,
Small white stars that are honey sweet,
And nodding bluebells all drenched with dew.
And oh! The breath of its incense rare
As the summer breezes over it pass,
My heart is thrilling with voiceless prayer
And thanking the Giver of things for grass.

Alice Guerin Crist

Himself

Last night, when I was listenin'
Alone, to wind and rain,
He took the chair beside me,
Himself - come home again.

His kind blue eyes were smilin'
Beneath his thatch of grey,
He laid his hand on my hand,
The ould sweetheartin' way.

I pressed my cheek upon it,
Remembering bitterly
The times he faced his daily toil
Without one smile from me.

And yet, his meals were always good,
His clothes well kept and clean,
The neighbours, sure, will tell you,
The splendid wife I've been.

But in Life's stress and struggle,
We somehow, grew apart,
You know these Irish mothers,
'Tis "the childer" has their heart.

And he grew grim, and close-lipped,
And harder, day by day,
Poor man - too tired for laughter,
Too worried to be gay.

But - how his care enclosed us,
For all he was so grim,
The very rafters of our home
Were cut and laid by him.

And I, that might have cheered him,
The bitter words I said,
Oh! God, that we remember,
Only when they are dead.

But now - my arms were round him,
The room seemed full of flowers,
And Youth came back and sunshine,
That glorious time was ours.

The firelight flamed and flickered,
The embers fell apart,
I woke to empty silence,
With sorrow at my heart.

The wild winds brought the morning,
The dawn was red and chill,

And Himself was lyin' sleepin'
In the graveyard on the hill!

Alice Guerin Crist

Homesick

I've lit the Christmas candle,
As we used to long ago
When it shone through cabin windows
On Holly-hedge and snow.
In this fine new house they've built me
That is furnished rich and fair-
But I'm hearing now the breakers rolling round the cliffs of Moher,
And my heart is aching, aching for a breath of Irish air.

The wren boys on St. Stephen's Day.
Went singin' up and down
With their poor dead wren and thorn bush,
I heard them through the town.
But to-night down lighted city streets,
I hear the distant band,
And when'er they play 'our own' hymns or tune of dear old Ireland,
The poor old foolish heart of me is in another land.

'Twas a lonely hillside chapel,
Where we tramped to midnight Mass,
With the flaring lights we carried
Throwing shadows on the grass.
But to-night my boy will drive me
In his grand new limousine,
And he'll wrap my furs around me, proudly caring for his Mother,
And I'll ride to the Cathedral just as grand as any queen.

Ah! No, I'm not repinin',
And I love this wide new land,
And I'm proud to see the childer
Growin' prosperous and grand,
But roots strike deep in Irish soil,
Old memories are sweet,
And to-night my heart is yearnin' for the cabin I was born in,
And I smell the reek of turf-smoke driftin' up the city streets.

Alice Guerin Crist

In Winter

Golden and white in the garden walk,
Chrysanthemums gather their bravest show,
'Mid withered blossom and wilted stalk
Where never a rosebud dares to blow.

For winter is coming icy and stern
And the grasses rank in the paddocks hold
No plummy rushes or waving fern,
No buttercup treasures of fairy gold.

And on the bough of the peach-tree bare
'Neath the curtained window open thrown,
All in the chill and frosty air
A little brown bird is singing alone.

Sing on little bird, for the sky grows red
And the night wind is rising cold and chill,
And Death is coming with footsteps dread
To the farmhouse under the lonely hill.

Over the mountain and down by the creek,
Stirring the rushes with icy breath,
Waileth the wind in the tree-tops bleak-
Rustling of wings of the angel of Death.

Sing on little bird from thy throbbing throat
She smiles to hear on her bed of pain;
When thou triest in summer they fuller note
No more will she listen and smile again.

Sing of the land where the roses bloom
In the glorious summer that lasts for aye;
Tell to the soul so near the tomb
What our trembling lips cannot bear to say.

How can we tell her of brighter skies
When faith seems failing and hope is fled?
God pity us all when the chill earth lies
Over the face of our darling dead!

Alice Guerin Crist

Milestones

Gay balloons and coloured streamers,
Gliding figures, footsteps light,
Flannelled youths and short-frocked maidens
Jazzing gaily through the night.
Music quaint and queer and catchy,
Lilting cadence of the band,
'Tis a scene of harmless frolic.
Youth and pleasure hand in hand.
Laughter, frank and merry hearted,
Careless banter – burst of song-
"While the red, red robin
Goes bob-bob-bobbin'
Goes bob-bob-bobbin' along!"

Small Miss Anne is sitting, dreaming
In the vine-clad window-seat
Listening to the lilting music,
To the trip of dancing feet,
But her vision sees a ballroom
Where the swaying lanterns glow
Over maidens in flowing muslins,
Courteous gallants bowing low.
Hear the cooing flutes and violins,
'Tis a waltz song sweet and old-
"Glide along, oh river,
Where the willows quiver,
Glide along for ever
O'er thy sands of gold."

Ah, the cruel, gleaming river
That can sweep young lives away,
Gone, long gone the youthful lover,
Closed the boyish eyes of grey.
But the old heart-wound is throbbing
As she dreams, with cheeks aglow,
Of a dew-drenched, fragrant garden
Where the river breezes blow
Over beds of phlox and pansy,
Waxen jasmine, while and cold-
"There amid the gloaming
Lover true are roaming
Hand in hand in Love's dreamland,
Where fond hearts ne'er grow old."

Soft and clear the rippling music
Steals into a chamber nigh
Where the dear Old Irish grandma
Waits her summons from on High,
Ready for the great adventure
Is her gently child-like soul,
For the grand old Faith upholds her,
And her life's long simple scroll

Is a screech of shining whiteness;
But just now her old eyes glow
As, like dancing, flickering turf-fires,
Long-lost memories come and go-
'When the boys began to gather
In the glen of a summer night,
And the Kerry pipers tuning
Made us long with a wild delight."

Like the horns of elf-land blowing,
Rings the distant pipers' tune,
Laughter gay of lads and colleens
Underneath the harvest moon.
To the "wind that shook the barley"
Tripped their glancing footsteps fleet,
Ah! Did you dance light, dear Grandma
On the hearts beneath your feet?
On the daisy spangled greensward
'Neath the hawthorn hedge abloom-
"Ah! The days of Kerry dancing
Oh! The lilt of the pipers' tune.

Alice Guerin Crist

Murtagh The Cobbler

The harvest moon was shinin'
As Murtagh came from the fair,
And Oh! The scent of the new-mown hay
And the gorsebloom in the air.

The night wind lifted his shock of hair
With whisperings weird and low,
And sang in his lonely, aching heart
Till he could not choose but go.

Aside from the dusky highway
Down a haunted old boreen
To where a strange light flickered
In under the hollies green--

All night he spent in that fairy dell,
Till the red dawn stained the sky;
And he sold his soul to the fairy folk
For the gift of the seeing eye.

Now he dwells in the mountain cabin,
Silent and unafraid,
The cabin his Father left him,
With the tools of his cobbler's trade.

He has no hope of Heaven,
He has no fear of Hell,
But he shrinks with a passing shiver
At the sound of the chapel bell.

Th stern young priest came storming,
Ah! 'tis bitter and cross was he,
But Murtagh gazed with clouded eyes
At the far-off shining sea.

And the wise old priest came pleading
With his understanding eyes;
Ah! Non can know the heart of a man
Like a priest grown old and wise.

But the bitter word and the kind word
Went by on the whispering wind,
For Murtagh's eyes were seeing
Things hid from all human kind.

Below at the village fireside
By the flickering turf-fires flame,
Prays a little blue-eyes girsha
Sickly and frail and lame.

Till the smoky air around her
Is vibrant with angels' wings,

For the heart of the child is near to God
And akin to holy things.

She prays and prays for Murtagh,
Who has been her friend for so long,
Who fashioned her crutch of mountain ash
And cheered her with smile and song.

And I know that the Lord of Mercy
Will hark to her cry of pain;
And turn his steps from the erring path
And give Murtagh his soul again.

Alice Guerin Crist

November in Ireland

November days in Ireland
The skies are dull and grey,
But Oh! The clear strong flame of love,
That burns by night and day.
As swift and bright the whispered prayers fly to the Heavens O'erhead,
From faithful hearts in Ireland, remembering their dead.

No primroses or cowslips now,
But cold November rain,
No hawthorns in the hedges,
Till Spring comes round again,
But roses bloom in chapels lone and cabins far apart
Dear rosaries of remembrance said to Mary's loving heart.

"For all the Holy Souls we pray,
God give them peace and light
For the brave boys that died for us,
We pray both day and night.
We can feel their presence near us-we can hear their voices call,
For the dead folk in Ireland are the 'lifest' of us all"

November days in Ireland
Are just one round of prayer,
Of loving help, and sacrifice,
For those who claim our care.
And Oh! Look up with hope to Heaven: the starry, shining dome,
Is vibrant with the beating wings of glad souls going home.

Alice Guerin Crist

O'Grady's Little Girl

Her hair was dark and curly, floatin' to the saddle bow,
Her laugh was frank and girlish, and her voice was sweet and low;
When I was one-and-twenty, sure my heart was in a whirl,
Ridin' neath the blossomed gum-trees with O'Grady's little girl.

And ah! The dear grey eyes of her all truth and purity
What a beacon-light to goodness, such a colleen's eyes can be!
The blazed a track to Heaven for me an' it struck me like a blow
When O'Grady left the township, just twenty years ago.

In those years I've grown and prospered-sure the township's half me own-
But my heart's been empty-aching-since she left me all alone.
Now we've got a "Back-to-She-Oak' week, celebratin' royally,
And Nora's coming home again, to join the revelry.

I'll know her by here wild-rose face, her floatin' curling hair,
By the neat black skirt and frilly blouse she always loved to wear,
I've never looked at wimmin since, but at the township ball
I'll tell her all my faithful love-my hopes, and dreams and all.

Oh! the band is playing gaily, but alone I sit apart,
Watching all the merry dancers, with a sore and aching heart;
Gaily old friends greet each other, but my head is in a whirl,
As I watcher her twirling past me-Dan O'Grady's little girl.

She's grown stout-she's got a shingle-and her skirt's just on her knee
Sure the girl that I remember's not the girl she used to be,
And the merry lilting music ringing out into the night,
Seems to mock my dying fancies and my dream of lost delight.

Now the band is playing softly-'tis the waltz we used to know,
And I'll have to ask her for it, for the sake of long ago,
But ah! The dear grey eyes of her, uplifted now to me,
And the unchanged heart beneath them, full of truth and purity.

'Tis a woman's heart that matters, fashions come and fashions go,
And what signifies a shingle, for a shingle sure can grow,
All my lonely years are over, I'm as happy as an earl,
Looking forward to the future with O'Grady's little girl.

Alice Guerin Crist

Old Tin Liz

We have scrubbed, and scoured and polished, till she's looking just like new,
And her good old engines singing, and our hearts are singing too,
While the magpies pipe a chorus, and the air's like a sparkling fizz.
And we're going to the races in the Old Tin Liz.

T'was the first car in the district, how we swelled our chests with pride,
As we asked our poorer neighbours to step up and take a ride,
Now they pass us by, disdainful, in the newest make there is,
Wondering why we cling so faithfully to Old Tin Liz.

When we'd got her, new and shining, Oh the picnics that we had,
Mother shredding all her troubles, Father larking like a lad,
While we youngsters sang in chorus, as our bubbling spirits riz,
Sitting decked with ferns and wattles in the Old Tin Liz.

But when Janey got a snake bite, ah! the terror of that day,
Nothing in the house to cure her, and the doctor miles away,
'Twas then Lizzie showed her mettle. Oh she had a heart of gold
Roaring up those flinty ridges liked a blessed two-year-old.

And the doctor cured our Janey, but the good old car helped too.
She has shared our joys and sorrows, and she's always pulled us through
Carting water in the drought time, pulling cattle from the bogs
Snorting gaily through the paddocks, over stones and stumps and logs.

The the precious hours on sunday-coming home from early Mass,
While the air's all hushed and holy, and the dew's still on the grass,
Sitting reverent and silent, what a blessed time it is:
We are near to Heaven then, in the Old Tin Liz.

Alice Guerin Crist

Resurrection

All rank on rank the tall white lillies stood,
The graceful palms against the rose-flushed sky
Showed gemmed with dew-drops, and red poppies glowed
Through the rank grass near by.

All hushed the air was - rapt and clear and still
The earth, late racked with pain
Felt it's insensate form with rapture thrill
And hope was born again

But in that garden there was silence deep,
All nature waited - till a ringing cry
'Rabboni! Master!' cleft the dewey air,
And swift the listening sky

Flashed into splendour, and the sun leaped up
And all creation thrilled with joy new-born
Hailing Our risen Lord with ecstasy
On that first Easter morn.

Alice Guerin Crist

Sixty Years Ago

I

The double-blossomed peach-trees with rosy bloom were gay
When grandpa rode beneath them upon his courting way,
From the white gate to the homestead they stretched in stately row,
And showered his path with petals, just sixty years ago.
His riding suit was spick and span, his jingling bridle rein,
Was polished to the limit, his top-boots shone again;
A mass of youthful vanity, from curly head to toe,
Was my darling gay young grandpa – just sixty years ago.

Upon the broad veranda, demure my grandma sat,
And hid her girlish blushes beneath her garden hat,
Her dainty flowing muslins enfolded her like snow;
Ah! Very sweet my grandma was, just sixty years ago.
With sweeping bow and fluttering heart he told his hopes and fears,
And grandma gently said him 'Yea', mid blushes, smiles and tears.
When the double-blossomed peach-trees with fruit were bending low,
Good Father Flynn united them – just sixty years ago.

II

There's a sound of mirthful revel in the dear old home to-night,
Where the merry young folk frolic 'neath the incandescent light,
Jazzing on the broad veranda, listening to the radio,
Knowing wonders quite undreamt of in the days of long ago.
On the vine-enclosed veranda, sits my grandpa in his chair,
And the flower-scented night winds stirs the white locks of his hair;
Grandma sits and smiles beside him, happy in the young folks glee,
Such a dainty dear old lady, ever young at heart is she.

And the harvest of their labours in the moonlight stretches wide
All the land they've won and toiled for as they struggled side by side,
In their brave old eyes no shadow from the griefs of gone-by years,
For their hearts beat high within them – dauntless breed of pioneers.
Hand in hand they sit together, while the angels smile above,
On their long unbroken record of faith, sacrifice and love;
From the double-blossomed peach trees come the petals falling slow,
Bringing sweet and fadeless memories of Sixty Years ago.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Banshee

As we came down the old boreen,
Rose and I – Rose and I,
At vesper time on Sunday e'en,
We heard a banshee cry!
Beyond the churchyard dim and dark,
'Neath whispering elms, and yew-trees stark,
Where our star shone-a corpse-like spark-
Against the wintry sky.

We heard and shuddered sick with dread,
Rose and I- Rose and I,
As the shrill keening rang o'erhead
Where cloud-wrack floated high.
Our two young hearts long, sorely tried,
By poverty and love denied
Still waiting for some favouring tide,
And now! Death come so nigh.

'Which of us two is called away
You or I-You or I?"
I heard my patient poor love say,
With bitter plaintive sigh.
'Neither, dear girl," I bravely said,
'To Mary Mother bow your head,
And cry for help to Her instead,
Nor heed the Banshee's cry'.

We raised our hearts in fervent prayer,
Rose and I-Rose and I,
Nor knew our troubles ended there,
Our happiness came nigh.
For 'twas the grim old farmer, he-
My only kin, rich, miserly,
Who, dying left his wealth to me-
For whom the banshee cried.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Courtship Of Young John

Fields of lucerne and waving wheat,
White-washed sheds, and cottage neat,
Nesting orchards and mulberry trees,
Scented flowers round hives of bees,
With the cool green creek behind it all,
Where the bell-bird chimed at evenfall
Far from the city's stir and noise-
This was the home of the 'Reilly boys."

There were Matthew and Mark, both lean and grim,
Hard of feature, and strong of limb,
And Luke-poor-Luke had long lain still
In the graveyard under the windy hill,
But his twin remained, the youngest he,
A solemn 'youth' of forty-three,
By his elders bossed and put upon,
And always referred to as 'that young John'.

Their house was speckless, and white as now,
But the dear old neighbour who kept it so,
Old Mrs. Schultz, who lived near by,
In the midst of her labours, found time to die.
And the bachelor brothers were sore perplexed,
Mournfully wondering what they'd do next,
Till Father O'Connell spoke words of cheer,
'Now one should get married, at least, that's clear".

'There's Kitty Dempsey-her Aunt Miss Ann
Would like her to wed some decent man,
She's kindly, and comely, and sensible too,
No end to the clever things she can do—"
And Matthew and Mark spoke up like one,
"She'd just do exactly for 'that young John".
But their much-tired victim flung off the yoke,
And these 're the indignant words he spoke:

"I'll not be the one to marry, now see;
The hardest jobs are all left to me:
The toughest cows in the milkin' yard,
Anythin' at all that is heavy and hard;
You've left me stumpin' the apple-tree flat,
But, be all the powers, I won't do that!"
Here the reverend adviser's mirth had sway,
And the good priest hurriedly went his way.

'Twas a pensive, drowsy afternoon,
The gums aflower and the birds in tune,
But as 'that young John' rode up the track,
The wrath in his heart was bitter and black,
For the brothers' will had prevailed that day,
To send him forth on his courting way,
The maiden heart and hand to seek

Of Kitty Dempsey from over the creek,
And the wretch condemned to the gallow's tree
Must have carried a cheerfuller heart than he.

On Dempsey's verandah, the shrinking man
Met a welcome warm from little Miss Ann-
A brisk little lady not too old,
With a sweet lines face and a heart of gold,
And wistful eyes smiling bravely still
On a world that mostly had used her ill,
"Is it you that's in it? You're Welcome, John,
But you should have been here some hours a-gone.

For we've had a wedding this very day,
Our Kitty's married and gone away—"
Oh! the glad relief that filled his breast,
As he told the tale of his fruitless quest
With a lightened heart, for the shyest man
Could have felt at ease with little Miss Ann,
As she gravely listened sitting near by,
And her awkward guest forgot to be shy.

'Now to think of Kit missin' a chance so grand,
And that home of yours needs a woman's hand:
The mulberries now are ripenin' fine
For makin' pies, or mulberry wine.
I noticed them Sunday-passin' to Mass-
And the pansy beds are full of grass,
And the fowls want fattenin, for Christmas Day—"
Here a sudden thought took John's breath away;

For a little brown bird hid down in the creek,
With a merry eye and saucy beak,
Began to trill and ripple and sing,
Like the very essence of rapturous spring.
And Oh! the guile of that little brown bird,
'Twas the oldest song that the world has heard,
And a flame he never had reckoned upon
Across the heart of 'that young John'.

The little bird has been silent long,
And the magpies had piped their evensong,
But John had forgotten,
Mid dreams sublime
That he should have been home by milking time;
He sat in the twilight-a different man-
Still clasping the hand of small Miss Ann,
And wondering a little blissfully,
If so daring a chap could be really he.

But he little knew what a treasure he'd won.
What a wonderful life had just begun;

And how bright the sunshine that lay upon
The future pathway of 'that young John'.

Alice Guerin Crist

The First School Day

We are saddling Don and Laddie,
Mid laughter, and fun and noise
And maybe, a sigh in passing
For vanished holiday joys.

And Mother is cutting lunches,
There are only four as a rule,
But to-day another is added,
For Baby is going to school.

'You'll take her on Laddie between you,
And hold her tight at the creek.'
And Mother parts with her darling
With a kiss on her dimpled cheek.

"You needn't be fwightened." Says baby,
"I'll be as wight as tan be,
I'LL give Sister our names, and I'll tell her
That 'Mary Beronica's'- me."

Oh, the breath of the summer morning,
The gleam of dew on the grass,
The incense of white gum blossoms
That strew our path as we pass.

While Mickey and Pat go racing
Over flats where the grass is green-
But Eileen and I ride slowly
Guarding our treasure between.

She loves every mile of the journey,
And shouts with delight at the creek,
Where under the blossomed tea-trees
The ripples play hide and seek.

And full of delight is the township
With its red-roofed houses gay,
Though Baby would love to linger
At the toy-shover over the way.

But the nine o'clock bell is sounding
From the door of the Convent school
Where our darling finds, to her pleasure,
Another kingdom to rule.

With a brand new desk in the corner,
A pencil and slate of her own,
In the sunshine of Sister's welcome
She sits - a queen on her throne.

But drowsily hums the insects
Round the bougainvillea flower,

And drowsy and warm in the morning,
So long ere the luncheon hour,

Kind Sister has drawn the blind down
Making a shady nook,
Where 'Mary Beronica' slumbers
With her golden head on her book.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Latest Martyr (Mexico 1926)

The morn is sweet and radiant with blue sky over all,
There's a flame of Oleanders over the adobe wall,
And the birds are singing gaily – I must crush my sorrow down
Why should a woman weep whose son doth wear a martyr's crown?

'Tis many hundred years since Stephen knelt in the market place,
Facing the cruel heathen stones battering his boyish face,
St. Stephen, first of the martyred bans! And he, my little son,
My little black-eyed Juan, he is the latest one!

It is almost too much honour – ah! Madre de Dios, be kind,
I am only a human mother, sinful and weak and blind,
I could not say "They will be done," on that terror-haunted day,
When he faced their coward bullets, with a "Viva Cristo Rey."

I can see the fearless flashing eyes, I can hear the ringing cry
As he fell 'mid the blood-stained flowers, 'neath the cruel-smiling sky,
His young form riddled with bullets, and I ran and held him fast,
And he smiled "Adios, Madre" for comfort at the last.

The nights are long in the adobe hut as I kneel and think of my dead,
For "We must not pray for a Martyr," so Padre Felipe said,
He is throned near to Our Lord's Dear Heart-no need for me to pray-
So I sit and hold the crimson scarf he wore on a festa day.

And I ask Our Lady for patience, for strength to bear my crown,
To smile as a martyr's mother should, and tread my sorrow down.
I pray for our tortured country to hasten freedom's day
When we may hail Our Heavenly King with a "Viva Cristo Rey."

Alice Guerin Crist

The Old Days - And The New

'Mid wattle scents and sounds of Spring,
The old man, dreaming in his chair,
Is back where skylarks soar and sing
In sunshine, o'er the hills of Clare.
And since all Irishmen have been,
True lovers, since the world began,
A flush still tints his withered cheek
At thoughts of Bessie Quinlevan.

'Ah Danny, lad, she was the girl,
So fine and straight in all her ways,
The price of every dance and fair,
There's no such women nowadays!"
Young Danny, plaiting stockwhip thongs,
Smiles o'er his grandsire's lock of grey,
Rememb'ring with a lovers pride,
The wild-rise grace of Betty Shea.

The old man in his dreams pursues,
Through hurling fields the flying ball,
Where his swift stroke was keen and strong,
And his the fleetest foot of all.
While Danny whistling as he goes,
Thinks of the latest football fray,
Leading the victors down the field,
Beneath the smile of Betty Shea.

Sweet Bessie Quinleven is gone,
In Clare churchyard her body lies,
Her gentle soul has blossomed long
Amid the flowers of Paradise.
But through the sweetness of the Spring,
By winding paths with wattle gay,
Radiant with youth and happy love,
Young Danny rides with Betty Shea.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Ride Of Rody Burke

The heat haze veiled the distant hills, the white clouds floated high,
Drifting in slow content across the blue Australian sky;
And down in Clancy's paddock there were mirth and laughter gay,
Where the She-Oak Jockey Club were met upon St. Patrick's day.

There were carts and cars and buggies ranged beneath the spreading trees,
Where country folk for miles around were clustered thick as bees,
Watching the prancing horses pass with keen appraising eyes,
All out to win the Squatters' Cup, the hundred-guinea prize.

Jim Daintry on The Digger rose; hopes for his mount were high,
A gallant roan with swinging pace, game head and fiery eye,
And Jim's horse was the favourite, the betting there was keen,
But some were backing Rody Burke upon Dark Rosaleen.

A thing of velvet, fire and steel—a little dark brown mare,
With dainty legs and shoulders slant, lean head and high-bred air,
But knowing backers simply scoffed her chances of the race,
"She'll never see his heels when once The Digger sets the pace."

'Twas just before the starting time that Rody reached the course,
And little Nora Shanahan watched for the dark brown horse,
And sighed to mark the rider's face was white as if with pain,
Could Rody after all her prayers, be 'going wild' again?

How could she know that very morn as Rody cross the yard
The old white draught-horse lumbering by, had lashed out good and hard.
The broken ribs, the searing pain that caught his breath away—
Ah! Naught but Irish pluck and grit brought Rody there that day.

As he and Jim rose side by side, each cast a wistful eye
Where little Nora Shanahan looked on aloof and shy;
And each man thrilled at sight of her, the simple girlish grace,
The little kind brown hands of her, the apple-blossom face.

Rivals were they in sport and love, and yet good friends withal,
Whose true Australian mateship held no feeling mean or small,
And Nora, long her maiden heart had done an angels' work,
With tears and prayers to save the soul of reckless Rody Burke.

Jim Daintry, manly, straight and true, had spreading acres wide,
And any girl in she-Oak might be proud to be his bride,
But who shall read a woman's heart, or pierce its hidden screen,
Sweet Nora's hopes were on the track with Rod and Rosaleen.

They're off! A rush of flying hoofs, a blur of colours bright –
Tim Clancy's Skylark in the lead, The Digger well in sight,
Dark Rosaleen leads the bunch behind, nor falters in her stride,
While Rody bears with sobbing breath the torture in his side.

And nearer, nearer still she draws, light as the summer wind,
She's with The Digger neck and neck – the Skylark's left behind,

Jim Daintry had his whale-bone out, before they reached the creek.
But Rosaleen's dark shining coat showed neither spot nor streak.

And Rody whispered homely words, his tortured lips between,
"Hang to it now for Nora's sake – ah! Stick it, Rosaleen!"
And as a swallow skimming low, swift as a streak of flame,
She passed The Digger's mighty stride, as down the straight they came.

And flew between the winning posts a half a length before,
As "Rosaleen!" 'Dark Rosaleen!" rose in a mighty roar;
For thews and muscle, training e'en, are little more than dust,
When weighed against the spirit's fire, that wins because it must.

But Rody all unconscious lay, nor heard the cheering cry,
With Jim's strong arms around him clasped, all thought of self put by,
And Nora, trembling, joined the group that gazed upon the scene,
And raise her quivering girlish lips and kissed Dark Rosaleen.

A night of moonlight, dew-drenched flowers, and bending, whispering trees,
The music from the township ball came faintly on the breeze,
As Rody, bandaged here, gazed at Nora's eyes of blue,
Telling the old, old story o'er to one who found it new.

And far across the moonlit plain, The Digger's mighty stride,
Carried the aching heart of one who nursed his grief and pride.
Ah! the dear griefs of headstrong youth – half pleasure and half pain.
The gallant, hot, young broken hearts, so quick to heal again!

Alice Guerin Crist

The Silver Box

Old tales of valour fire our blood
But this, the bravest deed I know
Is written of our modern times,
No myth of long ago.

It was a convent grim and grey,
Whose vine-clad balconies looked down
On stately old Colonial homes
Of a fair Southern town.

And daughters of those grand old homes
Dwelt, humble Nuns, within its shade,
Serving their Lord with zealous hearts,
Joyous and unafraid.

From the dear Rectress, staid and old
To the small novice whose sweet eyes
Held the soft blue of Mary's cloak
Or flowers of Paradise.

Peaceful and holy ran their lives
Hallowed by sacrifice and prayer,
Until one summer day did come
A fateful message there.

A letter from a brave young Priest,
The Rectress' nephew, who, long while
Had toiled alone 'mid leper folk
In a West Indian Isle.

The horrors of that festering hell
He told Ah! There were women there
Deep sunk in suffering and in sin
Who needed women's care.

The good Nun read with blanching face,
And well her wisdom could divine
The cry for help he dared not ask
The breathed in every line.

She could not bid her daughters loved
Such awful sacrifice to make;
But should one feel impelled to give
Her life, for Jesus sake,

"I'll place." She said. "this silver box,
Before the chapel alter where
Such one may place her name therein
In quiet and secret there."

The convent was a silent place
For all that long, long summer day,

Though in the garden old, the bees
Hummed round nasturtiums gay.

But tasks were done and prayers were said
In thoughtful silence, faithfully
The merry little novice e'en,
Went slowly and solemnly.

A thing of fate, the little box
Lay bright upon the alter stair,
The silver lamp before Our Lord
Shone on it sparkling there.

Next morn they waited after Mass
To hear the chaplain grave proclaim
On opening the casket there
If it held any name.

And in the rear a little group
Off anxious fathers, mothers pale,
Who knew the story of the box
Waited to hear the tale.

Oh! Wondrous faith of Peter's fold
That can such fruitage bear-
The little box was very full
No name was missing there.

From the dear Rectress staid and old
To the small novice, who bright eyes
Mirrored the blue of Mary's cloak
Of flowers of Paradise.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Voyage

We planned a glorious voyage, my Captain bold and I,
To sail in bliss on summer seas while halcyon days went by;
And underneath a speckless sky in a little dancing breeze,
We decked our craft with roses, and launched it on the seas.

Yes - we would sail together, my Captain gay and I.
Past miles and miles of blossomed shore, with sheltering harbours nigh;
We would not tempt the trackless seas, nor roam the waters dark,
Les Love, the tricky pilot, should e'er desert our bark.

Alas! For all our planning, my Captain brave and I,
We drove before a whistling gale beneath a lowering sky;
For the fierce storms came up on us scarce half a league from home,
And flung our crimson roses in the bitter blinding foam.

Silent our lilting love songs, untouched our gay guitar,
As side by side we toil and strive where raging tempests are;
But though in ceaseless labour our earnest days are spent,
A voiceless song is in our souls - a song of glad content.

For Love, the tricky pilot, still at our helm he sings,
Our darkest night is luminous with torchlight from his wings;
Loudly he sings and sweetly above the whistling gale,
And with Love's music in our hearts, how could we turn or quail?

Content we sail together, my Captain true and I,
Unheeding of the raging waves, or of the threatening sky;
With His strong hand to guard us, and Love to guide the boat,
The happiest pair of mariners that God has set afloat.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Water-Witch

The little creek went winding down
'Twixt whispering reeds and small blue flowers,
Singing a pleasant summer song
Of holidays and playtime hours.

We reached it at the noonday hours,
Coming from the scrub-aisles dime and cool,
Laden with ferns and lilies white,
And rested by it's deepest pool.

And while we watched with drowsy eyes
The shimmering sunlight on the plain,
The water-witch within the stream
Arose and stood between us twain.

She looked on me with scornful eye
And mocking smile that held no mirth;
She knew my simple soul was kin
To the brown, kindly, homely earth.

But she kissed Maye upon the brow,
As though to steal her soul away;
She kissed here on her Irish eyes,
Her faery eyes, now green, now grey.

And now she walks alone our girl,
Aloof from all life's joys and pains;
The witch's kiss is on her brow,
The dancing water in her veins.

Ah! For the hearts that cherish her,
That sigh and pine with secret pain
For her cool lips and smiling eyes;
For Maye will never love again—

Shallow and cold as water's self!
And my warm heart that loves her well
Can only breathe a prayer to Heaven
To break the water witch's spell.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Way Of The Bush

A night of storm and wind and rain,
Tall trees bowing beneath the blast
That shakes and rattles the window-pane,
And a thunderous roar as the creek goes past.

Inside there a pictures and flowers and books,
And a slim girl-wife with shingled hair;
The lamplight glimmers on cosy nooks,
And Desmond Keene in his easy chair

Thanks God for home and the days toil o'er;
When on the verandah a tramp of feet,
A frenzied knock on the kitchen door
Wondering he goes a neighbour to greet.

"The missus is dyin' " poor Simpson says,
'Down in the 'orspital-sent for me,
I gathered the kids, and brought 'em 'ere,
I thought your missus might mind 'em - see!"

"Mind them, of course, and I'll go with you,
You'll need a mate on a night like this."
And soon the neighbours are 'battling through'
Young Desmond cheered by his wife's last kiss.

For this is the way of the bush my friends
Neighbourly service prompt at need
Freely given and freely sought,
For the bush recks nothing of caste or creed.

And the young wife's hands are steady and firm
Though here soft lips tremble in voiceless prayer
As she smooths the wet and tangled curls
Of the young ones left in her gentle care.

There's a solemn hush in the hospital ward
Where a grey-haired bushman bends in woe
Over the toil-worn face of one
Who has come to the journey we all must go.

But 'Mother' still has a smile for him,
And the kind grey eyes show a soul at rest,
While the poor thin hands that have toiled so long
Lie idly now on her quiet breast.

For this is the way of the bush my friends,
To struggle and strive year out year in,
And often to die and leave it all
When the lean years end and the good begin.

They brought her back to the home she loved,
And the neighbours came for miles around,

There were cars and buggies and horses ranged
Round the rough rail fence of the burying ground.

They smothered the children with gifts and tears
In the way of the bush that is dear to God,
And their homely kindness was pure and sweet
As the flowers they placed on the new-turned sod.

Courage and patience and sturdy toil
And kindness unstinted in others' needs—
How the God that made them must love them all!
For the 'way of the bush' is His way indeed.

Alice Guerin Crist

The Young Rebel

The sun is setting behind the range,
His golden rays pour down
On a little figure, childish and strange,
Bending over a volume worn,
Whose green-clad cover, dusty and torn,
Bears a 'harp without a crown."

The young eyes turn to the distant west,
Where the sunset colours glow,
And thoughts are thrilling the childish breast
Of a gallant, valorous deeds long done,
Of glorious battles fought and won
In the days of long ago.

His fancy peoples the lonely glen
With the ghosts of the vanished past,
Till he hears the tramp of armed men,
And O'Niall's plumed horsemen ride
While the 'Red Hand' flutters in all its pride
Above them on the blast.

And, just where the road winds into the creek
Where the jasmine stars the shade,
With the soft winds kissing her blushing cheek,
Beautiful grey-eyed Dierdre stands
Stretching to Naisi her snowy hands-
Half-welcoming, half-dismayed.

The purple hues of the gully change
With the deepening shades of night,
And, far in the nook of the distant range,
Is Michael Dwyer, of the Wicklow glen,
Holding his desperate stand again,
'Gainst the redcoat soldier's might.

The west wind rises across the creek,
And with it the crash of steel
Carries a flush to the listeners cheek-
'Tis only the crash of the branches dry,
But in it he hears the battle-cry,
And the patriots' words of zeal.

And martyred shades come thronging around,
To the roll-call of Liberty:
Louder their eager voices sound,
Till towering tree-tops and glowing sky
Are echoing back the defiant cry—
"Michael! Answer for me!"

The moon is rising beyond the creek,
The shining stars look down
On a little dreamer, whose pillowed cheek

Rest, in sleep on a volume worn,
Whose green-glad cover, dusty and town,
Bears a 'harp without a crown.'

Alice Guerin Crist

West Of Fanny O'Dea's

You'll not find the name in geography books,
It isn't marked on the map,
Nor mentioned in atlas or history,
Yet you've heard of the place mayhap.
The fairies lurk in the boreens there,
And the scent of the black-thorn haunts the air
Where Atlantic batters the coast of Clare
"West of Fanny O'Dea's"

Now the old folk tell, in their cheerful chat
By the kitchen fire's bright glow,
Of hurling matches, or dance or fair,
Of happenings of long ago.
How the heftiest fighters came from there,
Women and men who could do and dare,
From the very heart of the heart of Clare,
West of Fanny O'Dea's.

From "West o' Fanny's" the folk went forth,
To the uttermost parts of the earth;
And the forest fell 'neath their sturdy stroke,
The cabin rang with mirth.
They builded homes, and the faith was there
Living circles of love and prayer,
Far from the rocky coast of Clare,
West of Fanny O'Dea's.

As the old folk chat at the kitchen fire
Of doings of long ago,
The young ones smile, with a tender scorn,
At a well-worn phrase they know:
"Now many strange countries and climes there be,
And many queer names o'er land and sea,
But
where
in the name of geography
Is 'West of Fanny O'Dea's?'"

Alice Guerin Crist

When Rody Came To Ironbark

When Rody came to Ironbark, there spread a hectic glow
around the little township - a dozen years ago,
and the townsfolk were divided, twixt laughter and dismay
at the roysterin' ways of Rody - the madcap tricks he'd play.
When whisky-primed and mischief bent, he drove in wild career
the parson's sulky hitched behind O'Grady's brindled steer,
and he, and other reckless lads, with laughter, song and joke,
made life on earth a burden for all sober-minded folk.

When Rody came to Ironbark, 'twas fun to watch the girls,
Such sorting out of frills and frocks such pinning up of curls,
there were no 'bob's no 'shingles' then but ringlets floated down,
and the the curling tongs worked overtime, when Rody came to town.

And all the girls in Ironbark for Rody pined and sighed,
save little Nora Shanahan, all scorn and maiden pride,
(Now Rod was like a pine-tree, so straight and slim and tall,
but she was pink and dainty, as an apple-blossom small).

She captured Rody's wilful heart, but though he'd beg and pray,
not one soft word of hope or love would little Nora say;
but - how she prayed for Rody, she stormed high Heaven with tears
for all his sins and follies, his reckless wasted years.

In the little township chapel, when evening lights were faint,
she knelt long hours in silence - a little blue-eyed saint -
While Rody, all unknowing, went on his careless way;
but Heaven always answers when soul's like Nora's pray.

So Rody came to Ironbark proud, prosperous and neat -
a dozen hats are lifted as he drives along the street -
and Nora sits beside him, all calm and matronly;
there are four small folk behind them, and one on Nora's knee
(The boys are both like Rody - so straight and strong and tall-
but the girls are like a cluster of apple-blossoms small),
though the wild lads muse regretfully the good old days upon,
and all the township gossips say 'Another good man gone!'

Alice Guerin Crist