

Classic Poetry Series

Bliss William Carman

- poems -

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A Creature Catechism

I
Soul, what art thou in the tribes of the sea?

LORD, said a flying fish,
Below the foundations of storm
We feel the primal wish
Of the earth take form.

Through the dim green water-fire
We see the red sun loom,
And the quake of a new desire
Takes hold on us down in the gloom.

No more can the filmy drift
Nor draughty currents buoy
Our whim to its bent, nor lift
Our heart to the height of its joy.

When sheering down to the Line
Come polar tides from the North,
Thy silver folk of the brine
Must glimmer and forth.

Down in the crumbling mill
Grinding eternally,
We are the type of thy will
To the tribes of the sea.

II
Soul, what art thou in the tribes of the air

Lord, said a butterfly,
Out of a creeping thing,
For days in the dust put by,
The spread of a wing

Emerges with pulvil of gold
On a tissue of green and blue,
And there is thy purpose of old
Unspoiled and fashioned anew.

Ephemera, ravellings of sky
And shreds of the Northern light,
We age in a heart-beat and die
Under the eaves of night.

What if the small breath quail,
Or cease at a touch of the frost?
Not a tremor of joy shall fail,
Nor a pulse be lost.

This fluttering life, never still,
Survives to oblivion's despair.
We are the type of thy will
To the tribes of the air.

III

Soul, what art thou in the tribes of the field?

Lord, said a maple seed,
Though well we are wrapped and bound,
We are the first to give heed,
When thy bugles give sound.

We banner thy House of the Hills
With green and vermilion and gold,
When the floor of April thrills
With the myriad stir of the mould,

And her hosts for migration prepare.
We too have the veined twin-wings,
Vans for the journey of air.
With the urge of a thousand springs

Pent for a germ in our side,
We perish of joy, being dumb,
That our race may be and abide
For aeons to come.

When rivulet answers to rill
In snow-blue valleys unsealed,
We are the type of thy will
To the tribes of the field.

IV

Soul, what art thou in the tribes of the ground?

Lord, when the time is ripe,
Said a frog through the quiet rain,
We take up the silver pipe
For the pageant again.

When the melting wind of the South
Is over meadow and pond,
We draw the breath of thy mouth,
Reviving the ancient bond.

Then must we fife and declare
The unquenchable joy of earth,—
Testify hearts still dare,
Signalize beauty's worth.

Then must we rouse and blow

On the magic reed once more,
Till the glad earth-children know
Not a thing to deplore.

When rises the marshy trill
To the soft spring night's profound,
We are the type of thy will
To the tribes of the ground.

V

Soul, what art thou in the tribes of the earth?

Lord, said an artist born,
We leave the city behind
For the hills of open morn,
For fear of our kind.

Our brother they nailed to a tree
For sedition; they bully and curse
All those whom love makes free.
Yet the very winds disperse

Rapture of birds and brooks,
Colours of sea and cloud,—
Beauty not learned of books,
Truth that is never loud.

We model our joy into clay,
Or help it with line and hue,
Or hark for its breath in stray
Wild chords and new.

For to-morrow can only fulfil
Dreams which to-day have birth;
We are the type of thy will
To the tribes of the earth.

Bliss William Carman

A Sea Child

The lover of child Marjory
Had one white hour of life brim full;
Now the old nurse, the rocking sea,
Hath him to lull.
The daughter of child Marjory
Hath in her veins, to beat and run,
The glad indomitable sea,
The strong white sun.

Bliss William Carman

A Song before Sailing

Wind of the dead men's feet,
Blow down the empty street
Of this old city by the sea
With news for me!
Blow me beyond the grime
And pestilence of time!
I am too sick at heart to war
With failure any more.
Thy chill is in my bones;
The moonlight on the stones
Is pale, and palpable, and cold;
I am as one grown old.

I call from room to room
Through the deserted gloom;
The echoes are all words I know,
Lost in some long ago.

I prowl from door to door,
And find no comrade more.
The wolfish fear that children feel
Is snuffing at my heel.

I hear the hollow sound
Of a great ship coming round,
The thunder of tackle and the tread
Of sailors overhead.

That stormy-blown hulloo
Has orders for me, too.
I see thee, hand at mouth, and hark,
My captain of the dark.

O wind of the great East,
By whom we are released
From this strange dusty port to sail
Beyond our fellows' hail,

Under the stars that keep
The entry of the deep,
Thy somber voice brings up the sea's
Forgotten melodies;

And I have no more need
Of bread, or wine, or creed,
Bound for the colonies of time
Beyond the farthest prime.

Wind of the dead men's feet,
Blow through the empty street;
The last adventurer am I,
Then, world, goodbye!

Bliss William Carman

Behind the Arras

I like the old house tolerably well,
Where I must dwell
Like a familiar gnome;
And yet I never shall feel quite at home.
I love to roam.
Day after day I loiter and explore
From door to door;
So many treasures lure
The curious mind. What histories obscure
They must immure!

I hardly know which room I care for best;
This fronting west,
With the strange hills in view,
Where the great sun goes,—where I may go too,
When my lease is through,—

Or this one for the morning and the east,
Where a man may feast
His eyes on looming sails,
And be the first to catch their foreign hails
Or spy their bales

Then the pale summer twilights towards the pole!
It thrills my soul
With wonder and delight,
When gold-green shadows walk the world at night,
So still, so bright.

There at the window many a time of year,
Strange faces peer,
Solemn though not unkind,
Their wits in search of something left behind
Time out of mind;

As if they once had lived here, and stole back
To the window crack
For a peep which seems to say,
"Good fortune, brother, in your house of clay!"
And then, "Good day!"

I hear their footsteps on the gravel walk,
Their scraps of talk,
And hurrying after, reach
Only the crazy sea-drone of the beach
In endless speech.

And often when the autumn noons are still,
By swale and hill
I see their gipsy signs,
Trespassing somewhere on my border lines;
With what designs?

I forth afoot; but when I reach the place,
Hardly a trace,
Save the soft purple haze
Of smouldering camp-fires, any hint betrays
Who went these ways.

Or tatters of pale aster blue, descried
By the roadside,
Reveal whither they fled;
Or the swamp maples, here and there a shred
Of Indian red.

But most of all, the marvellous tapestry
Engrosses me,
Where such strange things are rife,
Fancies of beasts and flowers, and love and strife,
Woven to the life;

Degraded shapes and splendid seraph forms,
And teeming swarms
Of creatures gauzy dim
That cloud the dusk, and painted fish that swim,
At the weaver's whim;

And wonderful birds that wheel and hang in the air;
And beings with hair,
And moving eyes in the face,
And white bone teeth and hideous grins, who race
From place to place;

They build great temples to their John-a-nod,
And fume and plod
To deck themselves with gold,
And paint themselves like chattels to be sold,
Then turn to mould.

Sometimes they seem almost as real as I;
I hear them sigh;
I see them bow with grief,
Or dance for joy like any aspen leaf;
But that is brief.

They have mad wars and phantom marriages;
Nor seem to guess
There are dimensions still,
Beyond thought's reach, though not beyond love's will,
For soul to fill.

And some I call my friends, and make believe
Their spirits grieve,
Brood, and rejoice with mine;

I talk to them in phrases quaint and fine
Over the wine;

I tell them all my secrets; touch their hands;
One understands
Perhaps. How hard he tries
To speak! And yet those glorious mild eyes,
His best replies!

I even have my cronies, one or two,
My cherished few.
But ah, they do not stay!
For the sun fades them and they pass away,
As I grow gray.

Yet while they last how actual they seem!
Their faces beam;
I give them all their names,
Bertram and Gilbert, Louis, Frank and James,
Each with his aims;

One thinks he is a poet, and writes verse
His friends rehearse;
Another is full of law;
A third sees pictures which his hand can draw
Without a flaw.

Strangest of all, they never rest. Day long
They shift and throng,
Moved by invisible will,
Like a great breath which puffs across my sill,
And then is still;

It shakes my lovely manikins on the wall;
Squall after squall,
Gust upon crowding gust,
It sweeps them willy nilly like blown dust
With glory or lust.

It is the world-ghost, the time-spirit, come
None knows wherefrom,
The viewless draughty tide
And wash of being. I hear it yaw and glide,
And then subside,

Along these ghostly corridors and halls

Like faint footfalls;
The hangings stir in the air;
And when I start and challenge, "Who goes there?"
It answers, "Where?"

The wail and sob and moan of the sea's dirge,
Its plangor and surge;
The awful biting sough
Of drifted snows along some arctic bluff,
That veer and luff,

And have the vacant boding human cry,
As they go by;—
Is it a banished soul
Dredging the dark like a distracted mole
Under a knoll?

Like some invisible henchman old and gray,
Day after day
I hear it come and go,
With stealthy swift unmeaning to and fro,
Muttering low,

Ceaseless and daft and terrible and blind,
Like a lost mind.
I often chill with fear
When I bethink me, What if it should peer
At my shoulder here!

Perchance he drives the merry-go-round whose track
Is the zodiac;
His name is No-man's-friend;
And his gabbling parrot-talk has neither trend,
Beginning, nor end.

A prince of madness too, I'd cry, "A rat!"
And lunge thereat,—
Let out at one swift thrust
The cunning arch-delusion of the dust
I so mistrust,

But that I fear I should disclose a face
Wearing the trace
Of my own human guise,
Piteous, unharmed, loving, sad, and wise

With the speaking eyes.

I would the house were rid of his grim pranks,
Moaning from banks
Of pine trees in the moon,
Startling the silence like a demoniac loon
At dead of noon.

Or whispering his fool-talk to the leaves
About my eaves.
And yet how can I know
'T is not a happy Ariel masking so
In mocking woe?

Then with a little broken laugh I say,
Snatching away
The curtain where he grinned
(My feverish sight thought) like a sin unsinned,
"Only the wind!"

Yet often too he steals so softly by.
With half a sigh,
I deem he must be mild,
Fair as a woman, gentle as a child,
And forest wild.

Passing the door where an old wind-harp swings,
With its five strings,
Contrived long years ago
By my first predecessor bent to show
His handcraft so,

He lay his fingers on the aeolian wire,
As a core of fire
Is laid upon the blast
To kindle and glow and fill the purple vast
Of dark at last.

Weird wise, and low, piercing and keen and glad,
Or dim and sad
As a forgotten strain
Born when the broken legions of the rain
Swept through the plain—

He plays, like some dread veiled mysteriarch,
Lighting the dark,
Bidding the spring grow warm,
The gendering merge and loosing of spirit in form,
Peace out of storm.

For music is the sacrament of love;
He broods above
The virgin silence, till
She yields for rapture shuddering, yearning still
To his sweet will.

I hear him sing, "Your harp is like a mesh,
Woven of flesh
And spread within the shoal
Of life, where runs the tide-race of the soul
In my control.

"Though my wild way may ruin what it bends,
It makes amends
To the frail downy clocks,
Telling their seed a secret that unlocks
The granite rocks.

"The womb of silence to the crave of sound
Is heaven unfound,
Till I, to soothe and slake
Being's most utter and imperious ache,
Bid rhythm awake.

"If with such agonies of bliss, my kin,
I enter in
Your prison house of sense,
With what a joyous freed intelligence
I shall go hence."

I need no more to guess the weaver's name,
Nor ask his aim,
Who hung each hall and room
With swarthy-tinged vermilion upon gloom;
I know that loom.

Give me a little space and time enough,
From ravelings rough
I could revive, reweave,

A fabric of beauty art might well believe
Were past retrieve.

O men and women in that rich design,
Sleep-soft, sun-fine,
Dew-tenuous and free,
A tone of the infinite wind-themes of the sea,
Borne in to me,

Reveals how you were woven to the might
Of shadow and light.
You are the dream of One
Who loves to haunt and yet appears to shun
My door in the sun;

As the white roving sea tern fleck and skim
The morning's rim;
Or the dark thrushes clear
Their flutes of music leisurely and sheer,
Then hush to hear.

I know him when the last red brands of day
Smoulder away,
And when the vernal showers
Bring back the heart to all my valley flowers
In the soft hours.

O hand of mine and brain of mine, be yours,
While time endures,
To acquiesce and learn!
For what we best may dare and drudge and yearn,
Let soul discern.

So, fellows, we shall reach the gusty gate,
Early or late,
And part without remorse,
A cadence dying down unto its source
In music's course;

You to the perfect rhythms of flowers and birds,
Colors and words,
The heart-beats of the earth,
To be remoulded always of one worth
From birth to birth;

I to the broken rhythm of thought and man,
The sweep and span
Of memory and hope
About the orbit where they still must grope
For wider scope,

To be through thousand springs restored, renewed,
With love imbrued,
With increments of will
Made strong, perceiving unattainment still
From each new skill.

Always the flawless beauty, always the chord
Of the Overword,
Dominant, pleading, sure,
No truth too small to save and make endure.
No good too poor!

And since no mortal can at last disdain
That sweet refrain,
But lets go strife and care,
Borne like a strain of bird notes on the air,
The wind knows where;

Some quiet April evening soft and strange,
When comes the change
No spirit can deplore,
I shall be one with all I was before,
In death once more.

Bliss William Carman

By the Aurelian Wall

In Memory of John Keats

By the Aurelian Wall,
Where the long shadows of the centuries fall
From Caius Cestius' tomb,
A weary mortal seeking rest found room
For quiet burial,
Leaving among his friends
A book of lyrics.
Such untold amends
A traveller might make
In a strange country, bidden to partake
Before he farther wends;

Who slyly should bestow
The foreign reed-flute they had seen him blow
And finger cunningly,
On one of the dark children standing by,
Then lift his cloak and go.

The years pass. And the child
Thoughtful beyond his fellows, grave and mild,
Treasures the rough-made toy,
Until one day he blows it for clear joy,
And wakes the music wild.

His fondness makes it seem
A thing first fashioned in delirious dream,
Some god had cut and tried,
And filled with yearning passion, and cast aside
On some far woodland stream,--

After long years to be
Found by the stranger and brought over sea,
A marvel and delight
To ease the noon and pierce the dark blue night,
For children such as he.

He learns the silver strain
Wherewith the ghostly houses of gray rain
And lonely valleys ring,
When the untroubled whitethroats make the spring
A world without a stain;

Then on his river reed,
With strange and unsuspected notes that plead
Of their own wild accord
For utterances no bird's throat could afford,
Lifts it to human need.

His comrades leave their play,
When calling and compelling far away
By river-slope and hill,

He pipes their wayward footsteps where he will,
All the long lovely day.

Even his elders come.
"Surely the child is elvish," murmur some,
And shake the knowing head;
"Give us the good old simple things instead,
Our fathers used to hum."

Others at open door
Smile when they hear what they have hearkened for
These many summers now,
Believing they should live to learn somehow
Things never known before.

But he can only tell
How the flute's whisper lures him with a spell,
Yet always just eludes
The lost perfection over which he broods;
And how he loves it well.
Till all the country-side,
Familiar with his piping far and wide,
Has taken for its own
That weird enchantment down the evening blown,--
Its glory and its pride.

And so his splendid name,
Who left the book of lyrics and small fame
Among his fellows then,
Spreads through the world like autumn--who knows when?--
Till all the hillsides flame.

Grand Pré and Margaree
Hear it upbrought from the unresting sea;
And the small Gaspereau,
Whose yellow leaves repeat it, seems to know
A new felicity.

Even the shadows tall,
Walking at sundown through the plain, recall
A mound the grasses keep,
Where once a mortal came and found long sleep
By the Aurelian Wall.

Bliss William Carman

Earth Voices

I

I heard the spring wind whisper
Above the brushwood fire,
"The world is made forever
Of transport and desire.
"I am the breath of being,
The primal urge of things;
I am the whirl of star dust,
I am the lift of wings.
"I am the splendid impulse
That comes before the thought,
The joy and exaltation
Wherein the life is caught.

"Across the sleeping furrows
I call the buried seed,
And blade and bud and blossom
Awaken at my need.

"Within the dying ashes
I blow the sacred spark,
And make the hearts of lovers
To leap against the dark."II

I heard the spring light whisper
Above the dancing stream,
"The world is made forever
In likeness of a dream.

"I am the law of planets,
I am the guide of man;
The evening and the morning
Are fashioned to my plan.

"I tint the dawn with crimson,
I tinge the sea with blue;
My track is in the desert,
My trail is in the dew.

"I paint the hills with color,
And in my magic dome
I light the star of evening
To steer the traveller home.

"Within the house of being,
I feed the lamp of truth
With tales of ancient wisdom
And prophecies of youth."III

I heard the spring rain murmur
Above the roadside flower,
"The world is made forever

In melody and power.

"I keep the rhythmic measure
That marks the steps of time,
And all my toil is fashioned
To symmetry and rhyme.

"I plow the untilled upland,
I ripe the seeding grass,
And fill the leafy forest
With music as I pass.

"I hew the raw, rough granite
To loveliness of line,
And when my work is finished,
Behold, it is divine!

"I am the master-builder
In whom the ages trust.
I lift the lost perfection
To blossom from the dust."IV

Then Earth to them made answer,
As with a slow refrain
Born of the blended voices
Of wind and sun and rain,

"This is the law of being
That links the threefold chain:
The life we give to beauty
Returns to us again."

Bliss William Carman

I Loved Thee, Atthis, in the Long Ago

(Sappho XXIII)

I loved thee, Atthis, in the long ago,
When the great oleanders were in flower
In the broad herded meadows full of sun.
And we would often at the fall of dusk
Wander together by the silver stream,
When the soft grass-heads were all wet with dew
And purple-misted in the fading light.
And joy I knew and sorrow at thy voice,
And the superb magnificence of love,—
The loneliness that saddens solitude,
And the sweet speech that makes it durable,—
The bitter longing and the keen desire,
The sweet companionship through quiet days
In the slow ample beauty of the world,
And the unutterable glad release
Within the temple of the holy night.
O Atthis, how I loved thee long ago
In that fair perished summer by the sea!

Bliss William Carman

If Death be Good

(Sappho LXXIV)

If death be good,
Why do the gods not die?
If life be ill,
Why do the gods still live?
If love be naught,
Why do the gods still love?
If love be all,
What should men do but love?

Bliss William Carman

Lord of my Heart's Elation

Lord of my heart's elation,
Spirit of things unseen,
Be thou my aspiration
Consuming and serene!
Bear up, bear out, bear onward
This mortal soul alone,
To selfhood or oblivion,
Incredibly thine own,—
As the foamheads are loosened
And blown along the sea,
Or sink and merge forever
In that which bids them be.

I, too, must climb in wonder,
Uplift at thy command,—
Be one with my frail fellows
Beneath the wind's strong hand,

A fleet and shadowy column
Of dust or mountain rain,
To walk the earth a moment
And be dissolved again.

Be thou my exaltation
Or fortitude of mien,
Lord of the world's elation,
Thou breath of things unseen!

Bliss William Carman

Low Tide on Grand Pré

The sun goes down, and over all
These barren reaches by the tide
Such unelusive glories fall,
I almost dream they yet will bide
Until the coming of the tide.
And yet I know that not for us,
By any ecstasy of dream,
He lingers to keep luminous
A little while the grievous stream,
Which frets, uncomforted of dream--

A grievous stream, that to and fro
Athrough the fields of Acadie
Goes wandering, as if to know
Why one beloved face should be
So long from home and Acadie.

Was it a year or lives ago
We took the grasses in our hands,
And caught the summer flying low
Over the waving meadow lands,
And held it there between our hands?

The while the river at our feet--
A drowsy inland meadow stream--
At set of sun the after-heat
Made running gold, and in the gleam
We freed our birch upon the stream.

There down along the elms at dusk
We lifted dripping blade to drift,
Through twilight scented fine like musk,
Where night and gloom awhile uplift,
Nor sunder soul and soul adrift.

And that we took into our hands
Spirit of life or subtler thing--
Breathed on us there, and loosed the bands
Of death, and taught us, whispering,
The secret of some wonder-thing.

Then all your face grew light, and seemed
To hold the shadow of the sun;
The evening faltered, and I deemed
That time was ripe, and years had done
Their wheeling underneath the sun.

So all desire and all regret,
And fear and memory, were naught;
One to remember or forget
The keen delight our hands had caught;
Morrow and yesterday were naught.

The night has fallen, and the tide . . .
Now and again comes drifting home,
Across these aching barrens wide,
A sigh like driven wind or foam:
In grief the flood is bursting home.

Bliss William Carman

On Love

TO the assembled folk
At great St. Kavin's spoke
Young Brother Amiel on Christmas Eve;
I give you joy, my friends,
That as the round year ends,
We meet once more for gladness by God's leave.

On other festal days
For penitence or praise
Or prayer we meet, or fullness of thanksgiving;
To-night we calendar
The rising of that star
Which lit the old world with new joy of living.

Ah, we disparage still
The Tidings of Good Will,
Discrediting Love's gospel now as then!
And with the verbal creed
That God is love indeed,
Who dares make Love his god before all men?

Shall we not, therefore, friends,
Resolve to make amends
To that glad inspiration of the heart;
To grudge not, to cast out
Selfishness, malice, doubt,
Anger and fear; and for the better part,

To love so much, so well,
The spirit cannot tell
The range and sweep of her own boundary!
There is no period
Between the soul and God;
Love is the tide, God the eternal sea....

To-day we walk by love;
To strive is not enough,
Save against greed and ignorance and might.
We apprehend peace comes
Not with the roll of drums,
But in the still processions of the night.

And we perceive, not awe
But love is the great law
That binds the world together safe and whole.
The splendid planets run
Their courses in the sun;
Love is the gravitation of the soul.

In the profound unknown,
Illumined, fair, and lone,
Each star is set to shimmer in its place.

In the profound divine
Each soul is set to shine,
And its unique appointed orbit trace.

There is no near nor far,
Where glorious Algebar
Swings round his mighty circuit through the night,
Yet where without a sound
The winged seed comes to ground,
And the red leaf seems hardly to alight.

One force, one lore, one need
For satellite and seed,
In the serene benignity for all.
Letting her time-glass run
With star-dust, sun by sun,
In Nature's thought there is no great nor small.

There is no far nor near
Within the spirit's sphere.
The summer sunset's scarlet-yellow wings
Are tinged with the same dye
That paints the tulip's ply.
And what is colour but the soul of things?

(The earth was without form;
God moulded it with storm,
Ice, flood, and tempest, gleaming tint and hue;
Lest it should come to ill
For lack of spirit still,
He gave it colour,—let the love shine through.)...

Of old, men said, 'Sin not;
By every line and jot
Ye shall abide; man's heart is false and vile.'
Christ said, 'By love alone
In man's heart is God known;
Obey the word no falsehood can defile.'...

And since that day we prove
Only how great is love,
Nor to this hour its greatness half believe.
For to what other power
Will life give equal dower,
Or chaos grant one moment of reprieve!

Look down the ages' line,
Where slowly the divine
Evinces energy, puts forth control;
See mighty love alone
Transmuting stock and stone,
Infusing being, helping sense and soul.

And what is energy,
In-working, which bids be
The starry pageant and the life of earth?
What is the genesis
Of every joy and bliss,
Each action dared, each beauty brought to birth?

What hangs the sun on high?
What swells the growing rye?
What bids the loons cry on the Northern lake?
What stirs in swamp and swale,
When April winds prevail,
And all the dwellers of the ground awake?...

What lurks in the deep gaze
Of the old wolf? Amaze,
Hope, recognition, gladness, anger, fear.
But deeper than all these
Love muses, yearns, and sees,
And is the self that does not change nor veer.

Not love of self alone,
Struggle for lair and bone,
But self-denying love of mate and young,
Love that is kind and wise,
Knows trust and sacrifice,
And croons the old dark universal tongue....

And who has understood
Our brothers of the wood,
Save he who puts off guile and every guise
Of violence,—made truce
With panther, bear, and moose,
As beings like ourselves whom love makes wise?

For they, too, do love's will,
Our lesser clansmen still;
The House of Many Mansions holds us all;
Courageous, glad and hale,
They go forth on the trail,
Hearing the message, hearkening to the call....

Open the door to-night
Within your heart, and light
The lantern of love there to shine afar.
On a tumultuous sea
Some straining craft, maybe,
With bearings lost, shall sight love's silver star.

Bliss William Carman

On the Plaza

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Bliss William Carman

Rivers of Canada

O all the little rivers that run to Hudson's Bay,
They call me and call me to follow them away.
Missinaibi, Abitibi, Little Current--where they run
Dancing and sparkling I see them in the sun.
I hear the brawling rapid, the thunder of the fall,
And when I think upon them I cannot stay at all.
At the far end of the carry, where the wilderness begins,
Set me down with my canoe-load--and forgiveness of my sins.
O all the mighty rivers beneath the Polar Star,
They call me and call me to follow them afar.

Peace and Athabasca and Coppermine and Slave,
And Yukon and Mackenzie--the highroads of the brave.

Saskatchewan, Assiniboine, the Bow and the Qu'Appelle,
And many a prairie river whose name is like a spell.

They rumor through the twilight at the edge of the unknown,
"There's a message waiting for you, and a kingdom all your own.

"The wilderness shall feed you, her gleam shall be your guide.
Come out from desolations, our path of hope is wide."

O all the headlong rivers that hurry to the West,
They call me and lure me with the joy of their unrest.

Columbia and Fraser and Bear and Kootenay,
I love their fearless reaches where winds untarnished play--

The rush of glacial water across the pebbly bar
To polished pools of azure where the hidden boulders are.

Just there, with heaven smiling, any morning I would be,
Where all the silver rivers go racing to the sea.

O well remembered rivers that sing of long ago,
Ajourneying through summer or dreaming under snow.

Among their meadow islands through placid days they glide,
And where the peaceful orchards are diked against the tide.

Tobique and Madawaska and shining Gaspereaux,
St. Croix and Nashwaak and St. John whose haunts I used to know.

And all the pleasant rivers that seek the Fundy foam,
They call me and call me to follow them home.

Bliss William Carman

The Eavesdropper

In a still room at hush of dawn,
My Love and I lay side by side
And heard the roaming forest wind
Stir in the paling autumn-tide.
I watched her earth-brown eyes grow glad
Because the round day was so fair;
While memories of reluctant night
Lurked in the blue dusk of her hair.
Outside, a yellow maple tree,
Shifting upon the silvery blue
With tiny multitudinous sound,
Rustled to let the sunlight through.

The livelong day the elvish leaves
Danced with their shadows on the floor;
And the lost children of the wind
Went straying homeward by our door.

And all the swarthy afternoon
We watched the great deliberate sun
Walk through the crimsoned hazy world,
Counting his hilltops one by one.

Then as the purple twilight came
And touched the vines along our eaves,
Another Shadow stood without
And gloomed the dancing of the leaves.

The silence fell on my Love's lips;
Her great brown eyes were veiled and sad
With pondering some maze of dream,
Through all the splendid year was glad.

Restless and vague as a gray wind
Her heart had grown, she knew not why.
But hurrying to the open door,
Against the verge of western sky

I saw retreating on the hills,
Looming and sinister and black,
The stealthy figure swift and huge
Of One who strode and looked not back.

Bliss William Carman

The Heart of Night

When all the stars are sown
Across the night-blue space,
With the immense unknown,
In silence face to face.
We stand in speechless awe
While Beauty marches by,
And wonder at the Law
Which wears such majesty.
How small a thing is man
In all that world-sown vast,
That he should hope or plan
Or dream his dream could last!

O doubter of the light,
Confused by fear and wrong,
Lean on the heart of night
And let love make thee strong!

The Good that is the True
Is clothed with Beauty still.
Lo, in their tent of blue,
The stars above the hill!

Bliss William Carman

The Old Gray Wall

Time out of mind I have stood
Fronting the frost and the sun,
That the dream of the world might endure,
And the goodly will be done.
Did the hand of the builder guess,
As he laid me stone by stone,
A heart in the granite lurked,
Patient and fond as his own?
Lovers have leaned on me
Under the summer moon,
And mowers laughed in my shade
In the harvest heat at noon.

Children roving the fields
With early flowers in spring,
Old men turning to look,
When they heard a blue-bird sing,

Have seen me a thousand times
Standing here in the sun,
Yet never a moment dreamed
Whose likeness they gazed upon.

Ah, when will ye understand,
Mortals who strive and plod,—
Who rests on this old gray wall
Lays a hand on the shoulder of God!

Bliss William Carman

The Ships of Saint John

Where are the ships I used to know,
That came to port on the Fundy tide
Half a century ago,
In beauty and stately pride?
In they would come past the beacon light,
With the sun on gleaming sail and spar,
Folding their wings like birds in flight
From countries strange and far.
Schooner and brig and barkentine,
I watched them slow as the sails were furled,
And wondered what cities they must have seen
On the other side of the world.

Frenchman and Britisher and Dane,
Yankee, Spaniard and Portugee,
And many a home ship back again
With her stories of the sea.

Calm and victorious, at rest
From the relentless, rough sea-play,
The wild duck on the river's breast
Was not more sure than they.

The creatures of a passing race,
The dark spruce forests made them strong,
The sea's lore gave them magic grace,
The great winds taught them song.

And God endowed them each with life--
His blessing on the craftsman's skill--
To meet the blind unreasoned strife
And dare the risk of ill.

Not mere insensate wood and paint
Obedient to the helm's command,
But often restive as a saint
Beneath the Heavenly hand.

All the beauty and mystery
Of life were there, adventure bold,
Youth, and the glamour of the sea
And all its sorrows old.

And many a time I saw them go
Out on the flood at morning brave,
As the little tugs had them in tow,
And the sunlight danced on the wave.

There all day long you could hear the sound
Of the caulking iron, the ship's bronze bell,
And the clank of the capstan going round
As the great tides rose and fell.

The sailors' songs, the Captain's shout,
The boatswain's whistle piping shrill,
And the roar as the anchor chain runs out,--
I often hear them still.

I can see them still, the sun on their gear,
The shining streak as the hulls careen,
And the flag at the peak unfurling,--clear
As a picture on a screen.

The fog still hangs on the long tide-rips,
The gulls go wavering to and fro,
But where are all the beautiful ships
I knew so long ago?

Bliss William Carman

The Ships of Yule

When I was just a little boy,
Before I went to school,
I had a fleet of forty sail
I called the Ships of Yule;
Of every rig, from rakish brig
And gallant barkentine,
To little Fundy fishing boats
With gunwales painted green.
They used to go on trading trips
Around the world for me,
For though I had to stay on shore
My heart was on the sea.

They stopped at every port to call
From Babylon to Rome,
To load with all the lovely things
We never had at home;

With elephants and ivory
Bought from the King of Tyre,
And shells and silks and sandal-wood
That sailor men admire;

With figs and dates from Samarcand,
And squatty ginger-jars,
And scented silver amulets
From Indian bazaars;

With sugar-cane from Port of Spain,
And monkeys from Ceylon,
And paper lanterns from Pekin
With painted dragons on;

With cocoanuts from Zanzibar,
And pines from Singapore;
And when they had unloaded these
They could go back for more.

And even after I was big
And had to go to school,
My mind was often far away
Aboard the Ships of Yule.

Bliss William Carman

The Vagabonds

We are the vagabonds of time,
And rove the yellow autumn days,
When all the roads are gray with rime
And all the valleys blue with haze.
We came unlooked for as the wind
Trooping across the April hills,
When the brown waking earth had dreams
Of summer in the Wander Kills.
How far afield we joyed to fare,
With June in every blade and tree!
Now with the sea-wind in our hair
We turn our faces to the sea.

We go unheeded as the stream
That wanders by the hill-wood side,
Till the great marshes take his hand
And lead him to the roving tide.

The roving tide, the sleeping hills,
These are the borders of that zone
Where they may fare as fancy wills
Whom wisdom smiles and calls her own.

It is a country of the sun,
Full of forgotten yesterdays,
When Time takes Summer in his care,
And fills the distance of her gaze.

It stretches from the open sea
To the blue mountains and beyond;
The world is Vagabondia
To him who is a vagabond.

In the beginning God made man
Out of the wandering dust, men say;
And in the end his life shall be
A wandering wind and blown away.

We are the vagabonds of time,
Willing to let the world go by,
With joy supreme, with heart sublime,
And valor in the kindling eye.

We have forgotten where we slept,
And guess not where we sleep to-night,
Whether among the lonely hills
In the pale streamers' ghostly light

We shall lie down and hear the frost
Walk in the dead leaves restlessly,
Or somewhere on the iron coast
Learn the oblivion of the sea.

It matters not. And yet I dream
Of dreams fulfilled and rest somewhere
Before this restless heart is stilled
And all its fancies blown to air.

Had I my will! . . . The sun burns down
And something plucks my garment's hem:
The robins in their faded brown
Would lure me to the south with them.

'Tis time for vagabonds to make
The nearest inn. Far on I hear
The voices of the Northern hills
Gather the vagrants of the year.

Brave heart, my soul! Let longings be!
We have another day to wend.
For dark or waylay what care we
Who have the lords of time to friend?

And if we tarry or make haste,
The wayside sleep can hold no fear.
Shall fate unpoise, or whim perturb,
The calm-begirt in dawn austere?

There is a tavern, I have heard,
Not far, and frugal, kept by One
Who knows the children of the Word,
And welcomes each when day is done.

Some say the house is lonely set
In Northern night, and snowdrifts keep
The silent door; the hearth is cold,
And all my fellows gone to sleep....

Had I my will! I hear the sea
Thunder a welcome on the shore;
I know where lies the hostelry
And who should open me the door.

Bliss William Carman

The Winter Scene

I

The rutted roads are all like iron; skies
Are keen and brilliant; only the oak-leaves cling
In the bare woods, or the hardy bitter-sweet;
Drivers have put their sheepskin jackets on;
And all the ponds are sealed with sheeted ice
That rings with stroke of skate and hockey-stick,
Or in the twilight cracks with running whoop.
Bring in the logs of oak and hickory,
And make an ample blaze on the wide hearth.
Now is the time, with winter o'er the world,
For books and friends and yellow candle-light,
And timeless lingering by the settling fire.

While all the shuddering stars are keen with cold.

II

Out from the silent portal of the hours,
When frosts are come and all the hosts put on.
Their burnished gear to march across the night
And o'er a darkened earth in splendor shine,
Slowly above the world Orion wheels
His glittering square, while on the shadowy hill
And throbbing like a sea-light through the dusk,
Great Sirius rises in his flashing blue.
Lord of the winter night, august and pure,
Returning year on year untouched by time,
To hearten faith with thine unfaltering fire,
There are no hurts that beauty cannot ease,
No ills that love cannot at last repair,
In the victorious progress of the soul.

III

Russet and white and gray is the oak wood
In the great snow. Still from the North it comes,
Whispering, settling, sifting through the trees,
O'erloading branch and twig. The road is lost.
Clearing and meadow, stream and ice-bound pond
Are made once more a trackless wilderness
In the white hush where not a creature stirs;
And the pale sun is blotted from the sky.
In that strange twilight the lone traveller halts
To listen to the stealthy snowflakes fall.
And then far off toward the Stamford shore,
Where through the storm the coastwise liners go,
Faint and recurrent on the muffled air,
A foghorn booming through the Smother--hark!

IV

When the day changed and the mad wind died down,
The powdery drifts that all day long had blown
Across the meadows and the open fields,

Or whirled like diamond dust in the bright sun,
Settled to rest, and for a tranquil hour
The lengthening bluish shadows on the snow
Stole down the orchard slope, and a rose light
Flooded the earth with beauty and with peace.
Then in the west behind the cedars black
The sinking sun stained red the winter dusk
With sullen flare upon the snowy ridge,--
As in a masterpiece by Hokusai,
Where on a background gray, with flaming breath
A scarlet dragon dies in dusky gold.

Bliss William Carman

Veni Creator

I

LORD of the grass and hill,
Lord of the rain,
White Overlord of will,
Master of pain,

I who am dust and air
Blown through the halls of death,
Like a pale ghost of prayer,—
I am thy breath.

Lord of the blade and leaf,
Lord of the bloom,
Sheer Overlord of grief,
Master of doom,

Lonely as wind or snow,
Through the vague world and dim,
Vagrant and glad I go;
I am thy whim.

Lord of the storm and lull,
Lord of the sea,
I am thy broken gull,
Blown far alee.

Lord of the harvest dew,
Lord of the dawn,
Star of the paling blue
Darkling and gone,

Lost on the mountain height
Where the first winds are stirred,
Out of the wells of night
I am thy word.

Lord of the haunted hush,
Where raptures throng,
I am thy hermit thrush,
Ending no song.

Lord of the frost and cold,
Lord of the North,
When the red sun grows old
And day goes forth,

I shall put off this girth,—
Go glad and free,
Earth to my mother earth,
Spirit to thee.

II

Lord of my heart's elation,
Spirit of things unseen,
Be thou my aspiration
Consuming and serene!

Bear up, bear out, bear onward
This mortal soul alone,
To selfhood or oblivion,
Incredibly thine own,—

As the foamheads are loosened
And blown along the sea,
Or sink and merge forever
In that which bids them be.

I, too, must climb in wonder,
Uplift at thy command,—
Be one with my frail fellows
Beneath the wind's strong hand,

A fleet and shadowy column
Of dust or mountain rain,
To walk the earth a moment
And be dissolved again.

Be thou my exaltation
Or fortitude of mien,
Lord of the world's elation
Thou breath of things unseen!

Bliss William Carman

White Nassau

There is fog upon the river, there is mirk upon the town;
You can hear the groping ferries as they hoot each other down;
From the Battery to Harlem there's seven miles of slush,
Through looming granite canyons of glitter, noise, and rush.
Are you sick of phones and tickers and crazing cable gongs,
Of the theatres, the hansoms, and the breathless Broadway throngs,
Of Flouret's and the Waldorf and the chilly, drizzly Park,
When there's hardly any morning and five o'clock is dark?
I know where there's a city, whose streets are white and clean,
And sea-blue morning loiters by walls where roses lean,
And quiet dwells; that's Nassau, beside her creaming key,
The queen of the Lucayas in the blue Bahaman sea.

She's ringed with surf and coral, she's crowned with sun and palm;
She has the old-world leisure, the regal tropic calm;
The trade winds fan her forehead; in everlasting June
She reigns from deep verandas above her blue lagoon.

She has had many suitors,--Spaniard and Buccaneer,--
Who roistered for her beauty and spilt their blood for her;
But none has dared molest her, since the Loyalist Deveaux
Went down from Carolina a hundred years ago.

Unmodern, undistracted, by grassy ramp and fort,
In decency and order she holds her modest court;
She seems to have forgotten rapine and greed and strife,
In that unaging gladness and dignity of life.

Through streets as smooth as asphalt and white as bleaching shell,
Where the slip-shod heel is happy and the naked foot goes well,
In their gaudy cotton kerchiefs, with swaying hips and free,
Go her black folk in the morning to the market of the sea.

Into her bright sea-gardens the flushing tide-gates lead,
Where fins of chrome and scarlet loll in the lifting weed;
With the long sea-draft behind them, through luring coral groves
The shiny water-people go by in painted droves.

Under her old pink gateways, where Time a moment turns,
Where hang the orange lanterns and the red hibiscus burns,
Live the harmless merry lizards, quicksilver in the sun,
Or still as any image with their shadow on a stone.

Through the lemon-trees at leisure a tiny olive bird
Moves all day long and utters his wise assuring word;
While up in their blue chantry murmur the solemn palms.
At their litanies of joyance, their ancient ceaseless psalms.

There in the endless sunlight, within the surf's low sound,
Peace tarries for a lifetime at doorways unrenowned;
And a velvet air goes breathing across the sea-girt land,
Till the sense begins to waken and the soul to understand.

There's a pier in the East River, where a black Ward Liner lies,
With her wheezy donkey-engines taking cargo and supplies;
She will clear the Hook to-morrow for the Indies of the West,
For the lovely white girl city in the Islands of the Blest.

She'll front the riding winter on the gray Atlantic seas,
And thunder through the surf-heads till her funnels crust and freeze;
She'll grapple the Southeaster, the Thing without a Mind,
Till she drops him, mad and monstrous, with the light ship far behind.

Then out into a morning all summer warmth and blue!
By the breathing of her pistons, by the purring of the screw,
By the springy dip and tremor as she rises, you can tell
Her heart is light and easy as she meets the lazy swell.

With the flying fish before her, and the white wake running aft,
Her smoke-wreath hanging idle, without breeze enough for draft,
She will travel fair and steady, and in the afternoon
Run down the floating palm-tops where lift the Isles of June.

With the low boom of breakers for her only signal gun,
She will anchor off the harbor when her thousand miles are done,
And there's my love, white Nassau, girt with her foaming key,
The queen of the Lucayas in the blue Bahaman sea!

Bliss William Carman

Why

FOR a name unknown,
Whose fame unblown
Sleeps in the hills
For ever and aye;

For her who hears
The stir of the years
Go by on the wind
By night and day;

And heeds no thing
Of the needs of spring,
Of autumn's wonder
Or winter's chill;

For one who sees
The great sun freeze,
As he wanders a-cold
From hill to hill;

And all her heart
Is a woven part
Of the flurry and drift
Of whirling snow;

For the sake of two
Sad eyes and true,
And the old, old love
So long ago.

Bliss William Carman