

Classic Poetry Series

Roderic Quinn

- poems -

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Mid-Forest Fear

SHE is standing at the gate,
Tall and sweet,
And although the hour be late
She will greet
Me, her lover,
Smiling over
Absent mind and tardy feet.

'Rest,' I'll say to her, 'and more rest,'
As she wraps her love around me,
And I'll tell her of the forest,
Of the strange, fear-haunted forest
Where the fleshless beings found me.

For I trod a rock-strewn rude way
Thinking only of my lover,
When the moonlight on the woodway,
Made a weird-way of the woodway,
And a place where demons hover.

For the leaves that had been sleeping
On the sodden soil-bed lying,
Look a motion and 'gan creeping,
Like a thousand small feet creeping,
And there rose a distant sighing.

Why the trees did droop their tresses,
Weeping leaves for something under,
And what bode in dim recesses,
Feline-lurked in dim recesses,
Paled my cheeks and heart to ponder.

Had I feet I would have hurried,
But the moonlit forest chained me,
Soul and body grasped and worried,
With frost-fingers gripped and worried,
Till, half-stayed, my hurt heart pained me....

'Rest,' I'll say, 'my Love, and more rest;
Things unseen have life and motion
And they haunt the moonlit forest—
Soul-affronting haunt the forest,
And men meet them on the ocean.'

She will look so grave and kind,
Saying 'Rest—
Rest is here for heart and mind
On this breast—
Put aside all
Fancies idle,
I will shield you—Love is best.'

Roderic Quinn

Stars in the Sea

I took a boat on a starry night
and went for a row on the water,
and she danced like a child on a wake of light
and bowed where the ripples caught her.

I vowed, as I rowed on the velvet blue
through the night and the starry splendour
to woo and sue a maiden I know
till she bent to my pleading tender.

My painted boat she was light and glad
and gladder my heart was wishing,
and I came in time to a little lad
who stood on the rocks a-fishing.

I said "Ahoy!" and he said "Ahoy!"
and I asked how the fish were biting;
And what are you trying to catch my boy,
Bream, silver and red - or Whiting?"

"Neither", he answered, "the seaweed mars
my line, and the sharp shells sunder;
I am trying my luck with those great big stars
down there in the round skies under".

"Goodbye!" from him and "Goodbye!" from me,
and never a laugh came after;
So many fishing for stars in the sea
that it's hardly a subject for laughter

Roderic Quinn

The Camp Within the West

O DID you see a troop go by
Way-weary and oppressed,
Dead kisses on the drooping lip
And a dead heart in the breast?

Yea, I have seen them one by one
Way-weary and oppressed,
And when I asked them, 'Whither speed?'
They answered, 'To the West!'

And were they pale as pale could be—
Death-pale with haunted eyes,
And did you see the hot white dust
Range round their feet and rise?

Oh, they were pale as pale could be,
And pale as an embered leaf;
The hot white dust had risen, but
They laid it with their grief.

Did no one say the way is long,
And crave a little rest?
Oh no, they said, 'The night is nigh,
Our camp is in the West!'

And did pain pierce their feet, as though
The way with thorns were set,
And were they visited by strange
Dark angels of regret?

Oh yea, and some were mute as death,
Though shot by many a dart,
With them the salt of inward tears
Went stinging through the heart.

And how are these wayfarers called,
And whither do they wend?
The Weary-Hearted—and their road
At sunset hath and end.

Shed tears for them...Nay, nay, no tears!
They yearn for endless rest;
Perhaps large stars will burn above
Their camp within the West.

Roderic Quinn

The Circling Hearths

MY Countrymen, though we are young as yet
With little history, nought to show
Of lives enleagued against a foreign foe,
Torn flags and triumph, glory or regret;
Still some things make our kinship sweet,
Some deeds inglorious but of royal worth,
As when with tireless arms and toiling feet
We felled the tree and tilled the earth.

'Tis no great way that we have travelled since
Our feet first shook the storied dust
Of England from them, when with love and trust
In one another, and large confidence
In God above, our ways were ta'en
'Neath alien skies—each keeping step in mind
And soul and purpose to one trumpet strain,
One urging music on the wind:

Yet tears of ours have wet the dust, have wooed
Some subtle green things from the ground—
Like violets—only violets never wound
Such tendrils round the heart: the solitude
Has seen young hearts with love entwine;
And many gentle friends gone down to death
Have mingled with the dust, and made divine
The very soil we tread beneath.

Thus we have learned to love our country, learned
To treasure every inch from foam
To foam; to tittle her with name of Home;
To light in her regard a flame that burned
No land in vain, that calls the eyes
Of men to glory heights and old renown;
That wild winds cannot quench, nor thunder-skies
Make dim, nor many waters drown.

Six hearths are circled round our shores, and round
The six hearths group a common race,
Though leagues divide, the one light on their face;
The same old songs and stories rise; the sound
Of kindred voices and the dear
Old English tongue make music; and men move
From hearth to hearth with little fear
Of aught save open arms and love.

To keep these hearth-fires red, to keep the door
Of each house wide—that is our part:
Surely 'tis noble! Surely heart to heart,
God's love upon us and one goal before,
Is something worth; something to win
Our hearts to effort; something it were good
To garner soon; and something 'twould be sin

To cast aside in wanton mood.

My Countrymen, hats off! with heart and will
Thank God that you are free, and then
Arise and don your nationhood like men,
And manlike face the world for good or ill.
Peace be to you, and in the tide
Of years great plenty till Time's course be run:
Six Ploughmen in the same field side by side,
But, if need be, six Swords as one.

Roderic Quinn

The Hidden Tide

WITHIN the world a second world
That circles ceaselessly:
Stars in the sky and sister stars—
Turn in your eyes and see!

Tides of the sea that rise and fall,
Aheave from Pole to Pole—
And kindred swayings, veiled but felt,
That noise along the soul.

Yon moon, noon-rich, high-throned, remote,
And pale with pride extreme,
Draws up the sea, but what white moon
Exalts the tide of Dream?

The Fisher-Folk who cast their nets
In Vision's golden tide
Oft bring to light misshapen shells,
And nothing worth beside.

And so their worn hands droop adown,
Their singing throats are dumb;
The Inner-Deep withholds its pearls
Till turn of tide be come.

But patience! wait—the good tide turns,
The waters inward set;
And lo, behold! aleap, alive
With glowing fish the net!

O Toilers of the Hidden Seas!
Ye have strange gain and loss,
Dragging the Deeps of Soul for pearls,
And oftentimes netting dross.

Flushed to the lips with golden light,
And dark with sable gloom;
Thrilled by a thousand melodies,
And silent like a tomb.

Fierce are the winds across your realm,
As though some Demon veiled
Had loosed the gales of Spirit-land
To ravage ways unsailed.

But still sweet hours befall at times,
Rich-lit and full of ease;
The afterglow is like the light
Of sunset on tired seas.

And worse, perhaps, may be the lot
Of those whose fate is sleep;

The sodden souls without a tide,
Dense as a rotten deep.

Pain paves the way for keener joy,
And wondrous thoughts uproll
When the large moon of Peace looks down
On high tide in the soul.

Roderic Quinn

The House of the Commonwealth

We sent a word across the seas that said,
"The house is finished and the doors are wide,
Come, enter in.
A stately house it is, with tables spread,
Where men in liberty and love abide
With hearts akin.

"Behold, how high our hands have lifted it!
The soil it stands upon is pure and sweet
As are our skies.
Our title deeds in holy sweat are writ,
Not red accusing blood -- and 'neath our feet
No foeman lies."

And England, Mother England, leans her face
Upon her hand and feels her blood burn young
At what she sees:
The image here of that fair strength and grace
That made her feared and loved and sought and sung
Through centuries.

What chorus shall we lift, what song of joy,
What boom of seaward cannon, roll of drums?
The majesty of nationhood demands
A burst of royal sounds, as when a victor comes
From peril of a thousand foes;
An empire's honour saved from death
Brought home again; an added rose
Of victory upon its wreath.
In this wise men have greeted kings,
In name or fame,
But such acclaim
Were vain and emptiest of things
If love were silent, drawn apart,
And mute the People's mighty heart.

The love that ivy-like an ancient land doth cherish,
It grows not in a day, nor in a year doth perish.
But, little leaf by leaf,
It creeps along the walls and wreathes the ramparts hoary.
The sun that gives it strength -- it is a nation's glory;
The dew, a people's grief.

The love that ivy-like around a home-land lingers,
With soft embrace of breast and green, caressive fingers,
We are too young to know.
Not ours the glory-dome, the monuments and arches
At thought of which takes arms the blood, and proudly marches
Exultant o'er the foe.

Green lands undesolated
For no avengement cry;

No feud of race unsated
Leaps out again to triumph,
Leaps out again to triumph, or to die!

Attendant here to-day in heart and mind
Must be all lovers of mankind,
Attendant, too, the souls sublime --
The Prophet-souls of every clime,
Who, living, in a tyrant's time,
Yet thought and wrought and sought to break
The chains about mankind and make
A man where men had made a slave:
Who all intent to lift and save
Beheld the flag of Freedom wave
And scorned the prison or the grave;
For whom the darkness failed to mar
The vision of a world afar,
The shining of the Morning Star.
Attendant here, then, they must be,
And gathering close with eyes elate
Behold the vision of a State
Where men are equal, just, and free:
A State that hath no stain upon her,
No taint to hurt her maiden honour;
A Home where love and kindness centre;
A People's House where all may enter.
And, being entered, meet no dearth
Of welcome round a common hearth;
A People's House not built of stone,
Nor wrought by hand and brain alone,
But formed and founded on the heart;
A People's House, A People's Home,
En-ised in foam and far apart;
A People's House, where all may roam
The many rooms and be at ease;
A People's House, with tower and dome;
And over all a People's Flag --
A Flag upon the breeze.

Roderic Quinn

The Lotus-Flower

All the heights of the high shores gleam
Red and gold at the sunset hour:
There comes the spell of a magic dream,
And the Harbour seems a lotus-flower;

A blue flower tinted at dawn with gold,
A broad flower blazing with light at noon,
A flower forever with charms to hold
His heart, who sees it by sun or moon.

Its beauty burns like a ceaseless fire,
And tower looks over the top of tower;
For all mute things it would seem, aspire
To catch a glimpse of the lotus-flower.

Men meet its beauty with furrowed face,
And straight the furrows are smoothed away;
They buy and sell in the market-place,
And languor leadens their blood all day.

At night they look on the flower, and lo!
The City passes with all its cares:
They dream no more in its azure glow,
Of gold and silver and stocks and shares.

The Lotus dreams 'neath the dreaming skies,
Its beauty touching with spell divine
The grey old town, till the old town lies
Like one half-drunk with a magic wine.

Star-loved, it breathes at the midnight hour
A sense of peace from its velvet mouth.
Though flowers be fair -- is there any flower
Like this blue flower of the radiant South?

Sun-loved and lit by the moon it yields
A challenge-glory or glow serene,
And men bethink them of jewelled shields,
A turquoise lighting a ground of green.

Fond lovers pacing beside it see
Not death and darkness, but life and light,
And dream no dream of the witchery
The Lotus sheds on the silent night.

Pale watchers weary of watching stars
That fall, and fall, and forever fall,
Tear-worn and troubled with many scars,
They seek the Lotus and end life's thrall.

The spirit spelled by the Lotus swoons,
Its beauty summons the artist mood;

And thus, perchance, in a thousand moons
Its spell shall work in our waiting blood.

Then souls shall shine with an old-time grace,
And sense be wrapped in a golden trance,
And art be crowned in the market-place
With Love and Beauty and fair Romance.

Roderic Quinn

The Song of the Cicadas

Yesterday there came to me
from a green and graceful tree
as I loitered listlessly
nothing doing, nothing caring,
light and warmth and fragrance sharing
with the butterfly and the bee,
while the sapling-tops a-glisten
danced and trembled, wild and willing
such a sudden sylvan shrilling
that I could not choose but listen
Green Cicadas, Black Cicadas,
happy in the gracious weather,
Floury-baker, Double-Drummer,
all as one and all together,
how they voiced the golden summer.

Stealing back there came to me
as I loitered listlessly
'neath the green and graceful tree,
nothing doing, nothing caring,
boyhood moments spent in sharing
with the butterfly and the bee
youth and freedom, warmth and glamour
while Cicadas round me shrilling,
set the sleepy noontide thrilling
with their keen insistent clamour.

Green Cicadas, Black cicadas,
happy in the gracious weather
Floury-bakers, double-drummers
all as one and all together---
how they voice the bygone summers!

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