Classic Poetry Series

William Wilfred Campbell

- poems -

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William Wilfred Campbell (1858 - 1918)

Born in Kitchener (then Berlin), Ontario, Campbell grew up in Wiarton, attended high school in Owen Sound, and studied at University College in 1881-82 (where he wrote for the student newspaper The Varsity) and Wycliffe College in 1882-83, Toronto, and then at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He married Mary Dibble of Woodstock, Ontario, in 1884, and worked as rector of the congregations of West Claremont, New Hampshire, and of St. Stephen, New Brunswick, until giving up the ministry in 1892. His first two volumes of verse were Sunshine and Snowflakes (1888) and Lake Lyrics (1889). A failure of religious faith forced him to abandon the ministry in 1892; the preceding year he had accepted a position in the office of the Secretary of State in Ottawa, and from 1909 on in the Dominion Archives there. He contributed to the "Mermaid Inn" literary columns in the Toronto Globe in the early 1890s, and he was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1892. He published volumes of verse and verse drama regularly and late in life took a keen interest in Canada's involvement in World War I, his son Basil serving as a major in the second Canadian Pioneer Battalion in September 1914. Wilfred Campbell died in Ottawa and is buried in Beechwood Cemetery

Works:

Snowflakes and Sunbeams (poems; 1888)

Lake Lyrics and Other Poems (poems; 1889)

The Dread Voyage and Other Poems (poems; 1893 or 1898)

Mordred and Hildebrand (poetical drama; 1895)

Beyond the Hills of Dreams (poems; 1899)

The Poems of Wilfred Campbell (poems; 1905)

Ian of the Orcades, or the Armourer of Grinigoe (novel; 1906)

Canada (nonfiction; 1907)

Poetic Tragedies (poetical drama; 1908)

A Beautiful Rebel (novel; 1909)

The Beauty, History, Romance, and Mystery of the Canadian Lake Region (nonfiction; 1910) [enlarged and revised reprint in 1914]

Sagas of Vaster Britain (poems; 1914)

The Poetical Works of Wilfred Campbell (poems; 1923)

At the Mermaid Inn, Conducted by A. Lampman, W.W. Campbell, Duncan C. Scott (nonfiction; 1958)

An October Evening

The woods are haggard and lonely,
The skies are hooded for snow,
The moon is cold in Heaven,
And the grasses are sere below.

The bearded swamps are breathing
A mist from meres afar,
And grimly the Great Bear circles
Under the pale Pole Star.

There is never a voice in Heaven,
Nor ever a sound on earth,
Where the spectres of winter are rising
Over the night's wan girth.

There is slumber and death in the silence,
There is hate in the winds so keen;
And the flash of the north's great sword-blade
Circles its cruel sheen.

The world grows agèd and wintry,
Love's face peakèd and white;
And death is kind to the tired ones
Who sleep in the north to-night.

William Wilfred Campbell

Bereavement of the Fields

Soft fall the February snows, and soft
Falls on my heart the snow of wintry pain;
For never more, by wood or field or croft,
Will he we knew walk with his loved again;
No more, with eyes adream and soul aloft,
In those high moods where love and beauty reign,
Greet his familiar fields, his skies without a stain.

Soft fall the February snows, and deep,
Like downy pinions from the moulting breast
Of all the mothering sky, round his hushed sleep,
Flutter a million loves upon his rest,
Where once his well-loved flowers were fain to peep,
With adder-tongue and waxen petals prest,
In young spring evenings reddening down the west.

Soft fall the February snows, and hushed
Seems life's loud action, all its strife removed,
Afar, remote, where grief itself seems crushed,
And even hope and sorrow are reproved;
For he whose cheek erstwhile with hope was flushed,
And by the gentle haunts of being moved,
Hath gone the way of all he dreamed and loved.

Soft fall the February snows, and lost,
This tender spirit gone with scarce a tear,
Ere, loosened from the dungeons of the frost,
Wakens with yearnings new the enfranchised year,
Late winter-wizened, gloomed, and tempest-tost;
And Hesper's gentle, delicate veils appear,
When dream anew the days of hope and fear.

And Mother Nature, she whose heart is fain,
Yea, she who grieves not, neither faints nor fails,
Building the seasons, she will bring again
March with rudening madness of wild gales,
April and her wraiths of tender rain,
And all he loved,—this soul whom memory veils,
Beyond the burden of our strife and pain.

Not his to wake the strident note of song,
Nor pierce the deep recesses of the heart,
Those tragic wells, remote, of might and wrong;
But rather, with those gentler souls apart,
He dreamed like his own summer days along,
Filled with the beauty born of his own heart,
Sufficient in the sweetness of his song.

Outside this prison-house of all our tears,
Enfranchised from our sorrow and our wrong,
Beyond the failure of our days and years,
Beyond the burden of our saddest song,

He moves with those whose music filled his ears,
And claimed his gentle spirit from the throng,—
Wordsworth, Arnold, Keats, high masters of his song.

Like some rare Pan of those old Grecian days,
Here in our hours of deeper stress reborn,
Unfortunate thrown upon life's evil ways,
His inward ear heard ever that satyr horn
From Nature's lips reverberate night and morn,
And fled from men and all their troubled maze,
Standing apart, with sad, incurious gaze.

And now, untimely cut, like some sweet flower
Plucked in the early summer of its prime,
Before it reached the fulness of its dower,
He withers in the morning of our time;
Leaving behind him, like a summer shower,
A fragrance of earth's beauty, and the chime
Of gentle and imperishable rhyme.

Songs in our ears of winds and flowers and buds
And gentle loves and tender memories
Of Nature's sweetest aspects, her pure moods,
Wrought from the inward truth of intimate eyes
And delicate ears of him who harks and broods,
And, nightly pondering, daily grows more wise,
And dreams and sees in mighty solitudes.

Soft fall the February snows, and soft
He sleeps in peace upon the breast of her
He loved the truest; where, by wood and croft,
The wintry silence folds in fleecy blur
About his silence, while in glooms aloft
The mighty forest fathers, without stir,
Guard well the rest of him, their rare sweet worshipper.

William Wilfred Campbell

Canadian Folksong

The doors are shut, the windows fast;
Outside the gust is driving past,
Outside the shivering ivy clings,
While on the hob the kettle sings.
    Margery, Margery, make the tea,
    Singeth the kettle merrily.

The streams are hushed up where they flowed,
The ponds are frozen along the road,
The cattle are housed in shed and byre,
While singeth the kettle on the fire.
    Margery, Margery, make the tea,
      Singeth the kettle merrily.

The fisherman on the bay in his boat
Shivers and buttons up his coat;
The traveler stops at the tavern door,
And the kettle answers the chimney’s roar.
    Margery, Margery, make the tea,
    Singeth the kettle merrily.

The firelight dances upon the wall,
Footsteps are heard in the outer hall;
A kiss and a welcome that fill the room,
And the kettle sings in the glimmer and gloom.
    Margery, Margery, make the tea,
    Singeth the kettle merrily.

William Wilfred Campbell

England

ENGLAND, England, England,
Girdled by ocean and skies,
And the power of a world, and the heart of a race,
And a hope that never dies.

England, England, England,
Wherever a true heart beats,
Wherever the rivers of commerce flow,
Wherever the bugles of conquest blow,
Wherever the glories of liberty grow,
'Tis the name that the world repeats.

And ye, who dwell in the shadow
Of the century-sculptured piles,
Where sleep our century-honoured dead,
Whilst the great world thunders overhead,
And far out, miles on miles,
Beyond the smoke of the mighty town,
The blue Thames dimples and smiles;
Not yours alone the glory of old,
Of the splendid thousand years,
Of Britain's might and Britain's right
And the brunt of British spears.
Not yours alone, for the great world round,
Ready to dare and do,
Scot and Celt and Norman and Dane,
With the Northman's sinew and heart and brain,
And the Northman's courage for blessing or bane,
Are England's heroes too.

North and south and east and west,
Wherever their triumphs be,
Their glory goes home to the ocean-girt isle,
Where the heather blooms and the roses smile,
With the green isle under her lee.
And if ever the smoke of an alien gun
Should threaten her iron repose,
Shoulder to shoulder against the world,
Face to face with her foes,

Scot, and Celt and Saxon are one
Where the glory of England goes.

And we of the newer and vaster West,
Where the great war-banners are furled,
And commerce hurries her teeming hosts,
And the cannon are silent along our coasts,
Saxon and Gaul, Canadians claim
A part in the glory and pride and aim
Of the Empire that girdles the world.

England, England, England,

Wherever the daring heart
By Arctic floe or torrid strand
Thy heroes play their part;
For as long as conquest holds the earth,
Or commerce sweeps the sea,
By orient jungle or western plain
Will the Saxon spirit be:
And whatever the people that dwell beneath,
Or whatever the alien tongue,
Over the freedom and peace of the world
Is the flag of England flung,
Till the last great freedom is found,
And the last great truth be taught,
Till the last great deed be done,
And the last great battle is fought;
Till the last great fighter is slain in the last great fight,
And the war-wolf is dead in his den–
England, breeder of hope and valour and might,
Iron mother of men.

Yea, England, England, England,
Till honour and valour are dead,
Till the world's great cannons rust,
Till the world's great hopes are dust,
Till faith and freedom be fled,
Till wisdom and justice have passed
To sleep with those who sleep in the many-chambered vast,
Till glory and knowledge are charnelled dust in dust,
To all that is best in the world's unrest,

In heart and mind you are wed.
While out from the Indian jungle
To the far Canadian snows,
Over the East and over the West,
Over the worst and over the best,
The flag of the world to its winds unfurled,
The blood-red ensign blows.

William Wilfred Campbell

Foundations

We are what nature made us; soon or late,
Life's art that fadeth passeth slow away,
With iron eatings of our sordid day,
Leaving behind those influences, innate,
Immutable, divine. As round some great,
Rude, craggy isle, the loud surf's ravening fray
Shatters all life in spume of thundered spray,
Leaving huge cliffs, scarred, grim, in naked state.

So life and all its idols hath its hour,
Its fleet, ephemeral dream, its passing show,
Its pomp of fevered hopes that come and go:
Then stripped of vanity and folly's power,
Like some wide water bared to moon and star,
We know ourselves in truth for what we are.

William Wilfred Campbell

How one Winter Came in the Lake Region

For weeks and weeks the autumn world stood still,
Clothed in the shadow of a smoky haze;
The fields were dead, the wind had lost its will,
And all the lands were hushed by wood and hill,
In those grey, withered days.

Behind a mist the blear sun rose and set,
At night the moon would nestle in a cloud;
The fisherman, a ghost, did cast his net;
The lake its shores forgot to chafe and fret,
And hushed its caverns loud.

Far in the smoky woods the birds were mute,
Save that from blackened tree a jay would scream,
Or far in swamps the lizard's lonesome lute
Would pipe in thirst, or by some gnarlèd root
The tree-toad trilled his dream.

From day to day still hushed the season's mood,
The streams stayed in their runnels shrunk and dry;
Suns rose aghast by wave and shore and wood,
And all the world, with ominous silence, stood
In weird expectancy:

When one strange night the sun like blood went down,
Flooding the heavens in a ruddy hue;
Red grew the lake, the sere fields parched and brown,
Red grew the marshes where the creeks stole down,
But never a wind-breath blew.

That night I felt the winter in my veins,
A joyous tremor of the icy glow;
And woke to hear the north's wild vibrant strains,
While far and wide, by withered woods and plains,
Fast fell the driving snow.

William Wilfred Campbell

In My Study,

Out over my study,
  All ashen and ruddy,
Sinks the December sun;
  And high up over
  The chimney’s soot cove,
The winter night wind has begun.

  Here in the red embers
  I dream old Decembers,
Until the low moan of the blast,
  Like a voice out of Ghost-land,

   Or memory’s lost-land,
Seems to conjure up wraiths of the past.

  Then into the room
  Through the firelight and gloom,
Some one steals,—let the night-wind grow bleak,

  And ever so coldly,—
  Two white arms enfold me,
And a sweet face is close to my cheek

William Wilfred Campbell

Indian Summer

Along the line of smoky hills
The crimson forest stands,
And all the day the blue-jay calls
Throughout the autumn lands.

Now by the brook the maple leans
With all his glory spread,
And all the sumachs on the hills
Have turned their green to red.

Now by great marshes wrapt in mist,
Or past some river's mouth,
Throughout the long, still autumn day
Wild birds are flying south.

William Wilfred Campbell

Langemarck At Ypres

This is the ballad of Langemarck,
A story of glory and might;
Of the vast Hun horde, and Canada's part
In the great grim fight.

It was April fair on the Flanders Fields,
But the dreadest April then
That ever the years, in their fateful flight,
Had brought to this world of men.

North and east, a monster wall,
The mighty Hun ranks lay,
With fort on fort, and iron-ringed trench,
Menacing, grim and gray.

And south and west, like a serpent of fire,
Serried the British lines,
And in between, the dying and dead,
And the stench of blood, and the trampled mud,
On the fair, sweet Belgian vines.

And far to the eastward, harnessed and taut,
Like a scimitar, shining and keen,
Gleaming out of that ominous gloom,
Old France's hosts were seen.

When out of the grim Hun lines one night,
There rolled a sinister smoke;—
A strange, weird cloud, like a pale, green shroud,
And death lurked in its cloak.

On a fiend-like wind it curled along
Over the brave French ranks,
Like a monster tree its vapours spread,
In hideous, burning banks
Of poisonous fumes that scorched the night
With their sulphurous demon danks.

And men went mad with horror, and fled
From that terrible, strangling death,
That seemed to sear both body and soul
With its baleful, flaming breath.

Till even the little dark men of the south,
Who feared neither God nor man,
Those fierce, wild fighters of Afric's steppes,
Broke their battalions and ran:—

Ran as they never had run before,
Gasping, and fainting for breath;
For they knew 't was no human foe that slew;
And that hideous smoke meant death.

Then red in the reek of that evil cloud,
The Hun swept over the plain;
And the murderer's dirk did its monster work,
'Mid the scythe-like shrapnel rain;

Till it seemed that at last the brute Hun hordes
Had broken that wall of steel;
And that soon, through this breach in the freeman's dyke,
His trampling hosts would wheel;—

And sweep to the south in ravaging might,
And Europe's peoples again
Be trodden under the tyrant's heel,
Like herds, in the Prussian pen.

But in that line on the British right,
There massed a corps amain,
Of men who hailed from a far west land
Of mountain and forest and plain;

Men new to war and its dreadest deeds,
But noble and staunch and true;
Men of the open, East and West,
Brew of old Britain's brew.

These were the men out there that night,
When Hell loomed close ahead;
Who saw that pitiful, hideous rout,
And breathed those gases dread;
While some went under and some went mad;
But never a man there fled.

For the word was "Canada," theirs to fight,
And keep on fighting still;—
Britain said, fight, and fight they would,
Though the Devil himself in sulphurous mood
Came over that hideous hill.

Yea, stubborn, they stood, that hero band,
Where no soul hoped to live;
For five, 'gainst eighty thousand men,
Were hopeless odds to give.

Yea, fought they on! 'T was Friday eve,
When that demon gas drove down;
'T was Saturday eve that saw them still
Grimly holding their own;

Sunday, Monday, saw them yet,
A steadily lessening band,
With "no surrender" in their hearts,

But the dream of a far-off land,

Where mother and sister and love would weep
For the hushed heart lying still;—
But never a thought but to do their part,
And work the Empire's will.

Ringed round, hemmed in, and back to back,
They fought there under the dark,
And won for Empire, God and Right,
At grim, red Langemarck.

Wonderful battles have shaken this world,
Since the Dawn-God overthrew Dis;
Wonderful struggles of right against wrong,
Sung in the rhymes of the world's great song,
But never a greater than this.

Bannockburn, Inkerman, Balaclava,
Marathon's godlike stand;
But never a more heroic deed,
And never a greater warrior breed,
In any war-man's land.

This is the ballad of Langemarck,
A story of glory and might;
Of the vast Hun horde, and Canada's part
In the great, grim fight

William Wilfred Campbell

Night

Home of the pure in heart and tranquil mind,
Temple of love's white silence, holy Night;
Greater than splendid thought or iron might,
Thy lofty peace unswept by any wind
Of human sorrow, leaves all care behind.
Uplifted to the zenith of thy height,
My world-worn spirit drinks thy calm delight,
And, chrysalis-like, lets slip its earthly rind.
The blinded feuds, base passions, and fierce guilt,
Vain pride and falseness that enslaved the day,
Here dwindle and fade with all that mocks and mars;
Where wisdom, awed, walks hushed with lips that pray.
'Neath this high minster, dim, invisible, built,
Vast, walled with deeps of space and roofed with stars.

William Wilfred Campbell

Not Unto Endless Dark

Not unto endless dark do we go down,
Though all the wisdom of wide earth said yea,
Yet my fond heart would throb eternal nay.
Night, prophet of morning, wears her starry crown,
And jewels with hope her murkiest shades that frown.
Death's doubt is kernelled in each prayer we pray.
Eternity but night in some vast day
Of God's far-off red flame of love's renown.
Not unto endless dark. We may not know
The distant deeps to which our hopings go,
The tidal shores where ebbs our fleeting breath:
But over ill and dread and doubt's fell dart,
Sweet hope, eternal, holds the human heart,
And love laughs down the desolate dusks of death.

William Wilfred Campbell

On Christmas Eve

In byre and barn the mows are brim with sheaves,
  Where stealeth in with phosphorescent tread
The glimmering moon, and, ’neath his wattled eaves,
The kennelled hound unto the darkness grieves
  His chilly straw, and from his gloom-lit shed,
  The wakeful cock proclaims the midnight dread.

With mullioned windows, ’mid its skeleton trees,
  Beneath the moon the ancient manor stands,
Old gables rattle in the midnight breeze,
Old elms make answer to the moaning seas

  Beyond the moorlands, on the wintry sands,
  While drives the gust along the leafless lands.

William Wilfred Campbell

Out of Pompeii

She lay, face downward, on her beaded arm,
In this her new, sweet dream of human bliss,
Her heart within her fearful, fluttering, warm,
Her lips yet pained with love's first timorous kiss.
She did not note the darkening afternoon,
She did not mark the lowering of the sky
O'er that great city. Earth had given its boon
Unto her lips, love touched her and passed by.

In one dread moment all the sky grew dark,
The hideous rain, the panic, the red rout,
Where love lost love, and all the world might mark
The city overwhelmed, blotted out
Without one cry, so quick oblivion came,
And life passed to the black where all forget;
But she,—we know not of her house or name,—
In love's sweet musings doth lie dreaming yet.

The dread hell passed, the ruined world grew still,
And the great city passed to nothingness:
The ages went and mankind worked its will.
Then men stood still amid the centuries' press,
And in the ash-hid ruins opened bare,
As she lay down in her shamed loveliness,
Sculptured and frozen, late they found her there,
Image of love 'mid all that hideousness.

Her head, face downward, on her bended arm,
Her single robe that showed her shapely form,
Her wondrous fate love keeps divinely warm
Over the centuries, past the slaying storm,
The heart can read in writings time hath left,
That linger still through death's oblivion;
And in this waste of life and light bereft,
She brings again a beauty that had gone.

And if there be a day when all shall wake,
As dreams the hoping, doubting human heart,
The dim forgetfulness of death will break
For her as one who sleeps with lips apart;
And did God call her suddenly, I know
She'd wake as morning wakened by the thrush,
Feel that red kiss across the centuries glow,
And make all heaven rosier by her blush.

William Wilfred Campbell

Pan the Fallen

He wandered into the market
With pipes and goatish hoof;
He wandered in a grotesque shape,
And no one stood aloof.
For the children crowded round him,
The wives and greybeards, too,
To crack their jokes and have their mirth,
And see what Pan would do.

The Pan he was they knew him,
Part man, but mostly beast,
Who drank, and lied, and snatched what bones
Men threw him from their feast;
Who seemed in sin so merry,
So careless in his woe,
That men despised, scarce pitied him,
And still would have it so.

He swelled his pipes and thrilled them,
And drew the silent tear;
He made the gravest clack with mirth
By his sardonic leer.
He blew his pipes full sweetly
At their amused demands,
And caught the scornful, earth-flung pence
That fell from careless hands.

He saw the mob's derision,
And took it kindly, too,
And when an epithet was flung,
A coarser back he threw;
But under all the masking
Of a brute, unseemly part,
I looked, and saw a wounded soul,
And a god-like, breaking heart.

And back of the elfin music,
The burlesque, clownish play,
I knew a wail that the weird pipes made,
A look that was far away,—
A gaze into some far heaven
Whence a soul had fallen down;
But the mob only saw the grotesque beast
And the antics of the clown.

For scant-flung pence he paid them
With mirth and elfin play,
Till, tired for a time of his antics queer,
They passed and went their way;
Then there in the empty market
He ate his scanty crust,
And, tired face turned to heaven, down

He laid him in the dust.

And over his wild, strange features
A softer light there fell,
And on his worn, earth-driven heart
A peace ineffable.
And the moon rose over the market,
But Pan the beast was dead;
While Pan the god lay silent there,
With his strange, distorted head.

And the people, when they found him,
Stood still with awesome fear.
No more they saw the beast's rude hoof,
The furtive, clownish leer;
But the lightest in that audience
Went silent from the place,
For they knew the look of a god released
That shone from his dead face.

William Wilfred Campbell

Snow

Down out of heaven,
Frost-kissed
And wind driven,
Flake upon flake,
Over forest and lake,
Cometh the snow.

Folding the forest,
Folding the farms,
In a mantle of white;
And the river's great arms,
Kissed by the chill night
From clamor to rest,
Lie all white and shrouded
Upon the world's breast.

Falling so slowly
Down from above,
So white, hushed, and holy,
Folding the city
Like the great pity
Of God in His love; 20
Sent down out of heaven
On its sorrow and crime,
Blotting them, folding them
Under its rime.

Fluttering, rustling,
Soft as a breath,
The whisper of leaves,
The low pinions of death,
Or the voice of the dawning,
When day has its birth,
Is the music of silence
It makes to the earth.

Thus down out of heaven,
Frost-kissed
And wind driven,
Flake upon flake,
Over forest and lake,
Cometh the snow.

William Wilfred Campbell

Spring

There dwells a spirit in the budding year-
As motherhood doth beautify the face-
That even lends these barren glebes a grace,
And fills grey hours with beauty that were drear
And bleak when the loud, storming March was here:
A glamour that the thrilled heart dimly traces
In swelling boughs and soft, wet, windy spaces,
And sunlands where the chattering birds make cheer.
I thread the uplands where the wind's footfalls
Stir leaves in gusty hollows, autumn's urns.
Seaward the river's shining breast expands,
High in the windy pines a lone crow calls,
And far below some patient ploughman turns
His great black furrow over steaming lands.

William Wilfred Campbell

Spring In Canada

SEASON of life's renewal, love's rebirth,
And all hope's young espousals; in your dream,
I feel once more the ancient stirrings of Earth.

Now in your moods benign of sun and wind,
The worn and aged, winter-wrinkled Earth,
Forgetting sorrow, sleep and iced snows,
Turns joyful to the glad sun bland and kind,
And in his kiss forgets her ancient woes.

Men scorn thy name in song in these late days
When life is sordid, crude, material, grim,
And love a laughter unto brutish minds,
Song a weariness or an idle whim,
The scoff of herds of this world's soulless hinds,
Deaf to the melody of your brooks and winds,
Blind to the beauty of your splendid dream.

Because earth's hounds and jackals bay the moon,
Must then poor Philomel forbear to sing,
Or that life's barn fowl croak in dismal tune,
Love's lark in heaven fail to lift her wing.

And even I, who feel thine ancient dreams,
Do hail thee, wondrous Spring,
Love's rare magician of this waking world,
Who turnest to melody all Earth's harshest themes,
And buildest beauty out of each bleak thing
In being, where thy roseate dreams are furled.

In thee, old age once more renews his youth,
And turns him kindling to his memoried past,
Reviving golden moments now no more,
By blossoming wood and wide sun-winnowed shore;
While youth by some supreme, divine intent,
Some spirit beneath all moods that breathe and move,
Builds o'er all earth a luminous, tremulous tent
In which to dream and love.

All elements and spirits stir and wake
From haunts of dream and death.
Loosened the waters from their iced chains
Go roaring by loud ways from fen and lake,
While all the world is filled with voice of rains,
And tender droppings toward the unborn flowers,
And rosy shoots in sunward blossoming bowers.

Loosened, the snows of Winter, cerements
From off the corpse of Autumn, waste and flee;
Loosened the gyves of slumber, plain and stream,
And all the spirits of life who build and dream
Enfranchised, glad and free.

Far out around the world by woods and meres,
Rises, like morn from night, a magic haze,
Filled with dim pearly hints of unborn days,
Of April's smiles and tears.

Far in the misty woodlands, myriad buds,
Shut leaves and petals, peeping one by one,
As in a night, leafy infinitudes,
By some kind inward magic of the sun,
Where yestereve the sad-voiced lonesome wind
Wailed a wild melody of mad Winter's mind,
Now clothed with tremulous glories of the Spring.

Or in low meadow lands some chattering brook
But last eve silent, or in slumbrous tune
Whispering hushed melodies to the wan-faced moon,
Like life slow ebbing; now with all life's dowers,
Goes loudly shouting down the joyous hours.

Wan weeds and clovers, tiny spires of green,
Rising from myriad meadows and far fields,
Drinking within the warm rains sweet and clear;
Put on the infinite glory of the year.

After long months of waiting, months of woe,
Months of withered age and sleep and death,
Months of bleak cerements of iced snow,
After dim shrunken days and long-drawn nights
Of pallid storm and haunted northern lights,
Wakens the song, the bud, the brook, the thrill,
The glory of being and the petalled breath,—
The newer wakening of a magic will,
Of life re-stirring to its infinite deeps,
By wave and shore and hooded mere and hill;—
And I, too, blind and dumb, and filled with fear,
Life-gyved and frozen, like a prisoned thing,
Feel all this glory of the waking year,
And my heart fluttering like a young bird's wing,
Doth tune itself in joyful guise to sing
The splendour and hope of all the splendid year,
The magic dream of Spring !

William Wilfred Campbell

Stella Flammarum: An Ode to Halley's Comet

Strange wanderer out of the deeps,
Whence, journeying, come you?
From what far, unsunned sleeps
Did fate foredoom you,
Returning for ever again
Through the surgings of man,
A flaming, awesome portent of dread
Down the centuries' span?

Riddle! from the dark unwrung
By all earth's sages;--
God's fiery torch from His hand outflung,
To flame through the ages:
Thou Satan of planets eterne,
'Mid angry path,
Chained, in circlings vast, to burn
Out ancient wrath.

By what dread hand first loosed
From fires eternal?
With majesties dire infused
Of force supernal,
Takest thy headlong way
O'er the highways of space?
O wonderful, blossoming flower of fear
On the sky's far face!

What secret of destiny's will
In thy wild burning?
What portent dire of humanity's ill
In thy returning?
Or art thou brand of love
In masking of bale?
And bringest thou ever some mystical surcease
For all who wail?

Perchance, O Visitor dread,
Thou hast thine appointed
Task, thou bolt of the vast outsped!
With God's anointed,
Performest some endless toil
In the universe wide,
Feeding or curing some infinite need
Where the vast worlds ride.

Once, only once, thy face
Will I view in this breathing;
Just for a space thy majesty trace
'Mid earth's mad seething;
Ere I go hence to my place,
As thou to thy deeps,
Thou flambent core of a universe dread,

Where all else sleeps.

But thou and man's spirit are one,
Thou poet! thou flaming
Soul of the dauntless sun,
Past all reclaiming!
One in that red unrest,
That yearning, that surge,
That mounting surf of the infinite dream,
O'er eternity's verge.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Avenging Angel

When the last faint red of the day is dead,
And the dim, far heaven is lit
With the silvern cars
Of the orient stars,
And the winged winds whimper and flit;

Then I rise through the dome of my aerodrome,
Like a giant eagle in flight;
And I take my place
In the vengeful race
With the sinister fleets of night.

As I rise and rise in the cloudy skies,
No sound in the silence is heard,
Save the lonesome whirr
Of my engine's purr,
Like the wings of a monster bird.

And naught is seen save the vault, serene,
Of the vasty realms of night,
That vanish, aloof,
To eternity's roof,
As I mount in my ominous flight.

And I float and pause in the fleecy gauze,
Like a bird in a nest of down;
While 'neath me in deeps
Of blackness, sleeps
The far, vast London town.

But I am not here, like a silvern sphere,
To glory the deeps of space,
But a sentinel, I,
In this tower of the sky,
Scanning the dim deep's face.

For, sudden, afar, like a luminous star,
Or a golden horn of the moon,
Or a yellow leaf
Of the forest's grief,
When the autumn winds are atune;

There is borne on my sight, down the spaces of night,
By the engines of evilment sped,
That wonderful, rare,
Vast ship of the air,
Beautiful, ominous, dread.

One instant she floats, most magic of boats,
Illusive, implacable, there;
Throned angel of ill,
On her crystal-built hill,

O'er a people's defenceless despair.

Then sudden, I rise, like a bolt through the skies,
To the very dim roofs of the world;
Till down in the grey,
I see my grim prey,
Like a pallid gold leaf, uncurled.

And I hover and swing, until swiftly I spring,
And drop like a falling star;
And again and again,
My death-dealing rain,
Hurl to the deeps afar.

Then I hover and listen, till I see the far glisten
Of a flame-flash blanching the night;
And I know that my hate,
That has lain in wait,
Has won in the grim air-fight.

Then I curve and slant, while my engines pant,
And the wings of my great bird tame;
While the sinister Hun,
In his ill, undone,
Goes out in a blinding flame.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Blind Caravan

I am a slave, both dumb and blind,
    Upon a journey dread;
The iron hills lie far behind,
    The seas of mist ahead.

Amid a mighty caravan
    I toil a sombre track,
The strangest road since time began,
    Where no foot turneth back.

Here rosy youth at morning's prime
    And weary man at noon
Are crooked shapes at eventime
    Beneath the haggard moon.

Faint elfin songs from out the past
    Of some lost sunset land
Haunt this grim pageant drifting, vast,
    Across the trackless sand.

And often for some nightward wind
    We stay a space and hark,
Then leave the sunset lands behind,
    And plunge into the dark.

Somewhere, somewhere, far on in front,
    There strides a lonely man
Who is all strength, who bears the brunt,
    The battle and the ban.

I know not of his face or form,
    His voice or battle-scars,
Or how he fronts the haunted storm
    Beneath the wintry stars;

I know not of his wisdom great
    That leads this sightless host
Beyond the barren hills of fate
    Unto some kindlier coast.

But often 'mid the eerie black
    Through this sad caravan
A strange, sweet thrill is whispered back,
    Borne on from man to man.

A strange, glad joy that fills the night
    Like some far marriage horn,
Till every heart is filled with light
    Of some belated morn.

The way is long, and rough the road,
    And bitter the night, and dread,

And each poor slave is but a goad
    To lash the one ahead.

Evil the foes that lie in wait
    To slay us in the pass,
Bloody the slaughter at the gate,
    And bleak the wild morass;

And I am but a shriveled thing
    Beneath the midnight sky;
A wasted, wan remembering
    Of days long wandered by.

And yet I lift my sightless face
    Toward the eerie light,
And tread the lonely way we trace
    Across the haunted night.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Children Of The Foam

OUT forever and forever,
Where our tresses glint and shiver
On the icy moonlit air;
Come we from a land of gloaming,
Children lost, forever homing,
Never, never reaching there;
Ride we, ride we, ever faster,
Driven by our demon master,
The wild wind in his despair.
Ride we, ride we, ever home,
Wan, white children of the foam.

In the wild October dawning,
When the heaven's angry awning
Leans to lakeward, bleak and drear;
And along the black, wet ledges,
Under icy, caverned edges,
Breaks the lake in maddened fear;
And the woods in shore are moaning;
Then you hear our weird intoning,
Mad, late children of the year;
Ride we, ride we, ever home,
Lost, white children of the foam.

All grey day, the black sky under,
Where the beaches moan and thunder,
Where the breakers spume and comb,
You may hear our riding, riding,
You may hear our voices chiding,
Under glimmer, under gloam;
Like a far-off infant wailing,

You may hear our hailing, hailing,
For the voices of our home;
Ride we, ride we, ever home,
Haunted children of the foam.

And at midnight, when the glimmer
Of the moon grows dank and dimmer,
Then we lift our gleaming eyes;
Then you see our white arms tossing,
Our wan breasts the moon embossing,
Under gloom of lake and skies;
You may hear our mournful chanting,
And our voices haunting, haunting,
Through the night's mad melodies;
Riding, riding, ever home,
Wild, white children of the foam.

There, forever and forever,
Will no demon-hate dissever
Peace and sleep and rest and dream:

There is neither fear nor fret there
When the tired children get there,
Only dews and pallid beam
Fall in gentle peace and sadness
Over long surcease of madness,
From hushed skies that gleam and gleam,
In the longed-for, sought-for home
Of the children of the foam.

There the streets are hushed and restful,
And of dreams is every breast full,
With the sleep that tired eyes wear;
There the city hath long quiet
From the madness and the riot,
From the failing hearts of care;
Balm of peacefulness ingliding,
Dream we through our riding, riding,
As we homeward, homeward fare;
Riding, riding, ever home,
Wild, white children of the foam.

Under pallid moonlight beaming,
Under stars of midnight gleaming,
And the ebon arch of night;
Round the rosy edge of morning,
You may hear our distant horning,
You may mark our phantom flight;
Riding, riding, ever faster,
Driven by our demon master,
Under darkness, under light;
Ride we, ride we, ever home,
Wild, white children of the foam.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Dread Voyage

Trim the sails the weird stars under—
Past the iron hail and thunder,
Past the mystery and the wonder,
    Sails our fated bark;
Past the myriad voices hailing,
Past the moaning and the wailing,
The far voices failing, failing,
    Drive we to the dark.

Past the headlands grim and sombre,
Past the shores of mist and slumber,
Leagues on leagues no man may number,
    Soundings none can mark;
While the olden voices calling,
One by one behind are falling;
Into silence dread, appalling,
    Drift we to the dark.

Far behind, the sad eyes yearning,
Hands that wring for our returning,
Lamps of love yet vainly burning:
    Past the headlands stark!
Through the wintry snows and sleeting,
On our pallid faces beating,
Through the phantom twilight fleeting,
    Drive we to the dark.

Without knowledge, without warning,
Drive we to no lands of morning;
Far ahead no signals horning
    Hail our nightward bark.
Hopeless, helpless, weird, outdriven,
Fateless, friendless, dread, unshriven,
For some race-doom unforgiven,
    Drive we to the dark.

Not one craven or unseemly;
In the flare-light gleaming dimly,
Each ghost-face is watching grimly:
    Past the headlands stark!
Hearts wherein no hope may waken,
Like the clouds of night wind-shaken,
Chartless, anchorless, forsaken,
    Drift we to the dark.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Dreamers

THEY lingered on the middle heights
Betwixt the brown earth and the heaven;
They whispered, 'We are not the night's,
But pallid children of the even.'

They muttered, 'We are not the day's,
For the old struggle and endeavour,
The rugged and unquiet ways
Are dead and driven past for ever.'

They dreamed upon the cricket's tune,
The winds that stirred the withered grasses:
But never saw the blood-red moon
That lit the spectre mountain-passes.

They sat and marked the brooklet steal
In smoke-mist o'er its silvered surges:
But marked not, with its peal on peal,
The storm that swept the granite gorges.

They dreamed the shimmer and the shade,
And sought in pools for haunted faces:
Nor heard again the cannonade
In dreams from earth's old battle-places.

They spake, 'The ages all are dead,
The strife, the struggle, and the glory;
We are the silences that wed
Betwixt the story and the story.

'We are the little winds that moan
Between the woodlands and the meadows;
We are the ghosted leaves, wind-blown
Across the gust-light and the shadows.'

Then came a soul across those lands
Whose face was all one glad, rapt wonder,
And spake: 'The skies are ribbed with bands
Of fire, and heaven all racked with thunder.

'Climb up and see the glory spread,
High over cliff and 'scarpment yawning:
The night is past, the dark is dead,
Behold the triumph of the dawning!'

Then laughed they with a wistful scorn,
'You are a ghost, a long-dead vision;
You passed by ages ere was born
This twilight of the days elysian.

'There is no hope, there is no strife,
But only haunted hearts that hunger

About a dead, scarce-dreamed-of life,
Old ages when the earth was younger.'

Then came by one in mad distress,
'Haste, haste below, where strong arms weaken,
The fighting ones grow less and less!
Great cities of the world are taken!

'Dread evil rolls by like a flood,
Men's bones beneath his surges whiten,
Go where the ages mark in blood
The footsteps that their days enlighten.'

Still they but heard, discordant mirth,
The thin winds through the dead stalks rattle,
While out from far-off haunts of earth
There smote the mighty sound of battle.

Now there was heard an awful cry,
Despair that rended heaven asunder,
White pauses when a cause would die,
Where love was lost and souls went under,

The while these feebly dreamed and talked
Betwixt the brown earth and the heaven,
Faint ghosts of men who breathed and walked,
But deader than the dead ones even.

And out there on the middle height
They sought in pools for haunted faces,
Nor heard the cry across the night
That swept from earth's dread battle-places.

William Wilfred Campbell

The End of the Furrow

When we come to the end of the furrow,
When our last day's work is done,
We will drink of the long red shaft of light
That slants from the westering sun.

We will turn from the field of our labour,
From the warm earth glad and brown,
And wend our feet up that village street,
And with our folk lie down.

Yea, after the long toil, surcease,
Rest to the hearts that roam,
When we join in the mystic silence of eve
The glad procession home.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Higher Kinship

Life is too grim with anxious, eating care
To cherish what is best. Our souls are scarred
By daily agonies, and our conscience marred
By petty tyrannies that waste and wear.
Why is this human fate so hard to bear?
Could we but live with hill-lakes silver-starred,
Or where the eternal silence leaneth toward
The awful front of nature, waste and bare:

Then might we, brothers to the lofty thought
And inward self-communion of her dream,
Into that closer kin with love be brought,
Where mighty hills and woods and waters, wan,
Moon-paved at midnight or godlike at dawn,
Hold all earth's aspirations in their gleam.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Last Prayer

MASTER of life, the day is done;
My sun of life is sinking low;
I watch the hours slip one by one
And hark the night-wind and the snow.

And must Thou shut the morning out,
And dim the eye that loved to see;
Silence the melody and rout,
And seal the joys of earth for me?

And must Thou banish all the hope,
The large horizon's eagle-swim,
The splendour of the far-off slope
That ran about the world's great rim,

That rose with morning's crimson rays
And grew to noonday's gloried dome,
Melting to even's purple haze
When all the hopes of earth went home?

Yea, Master of this ruined house,
The mortgage closed, outruns the lease;
Long since is hushed the gay carouse,
And now the windowed lights must cease.

The doors all barred, the shutters up,
Dismantled, empty, wall and floor,
And now for one grim eve to sup
With Death, the bailiff, at the door.

Yea, I will take the gloomward road
Where fast the Arctic nights set in,
To reach the bourne of that abode
Which Thou hast kept for all my kin.

And all life's splendid joys forego,
Walled in with night and senseless stone,
If at the last my heart might know
Through all the dark one joy alone.

Yea, Thou mayst quench the latest spark
Of life's weird day's expectancy,
Roll down the thunders of the dark
And close the light of life for me;

Melt all the splendid blue above
And let these magic wonders die,
If Thou wilt only leave me, Love,
And Love's heart-brother, Memory.

Though all the hopes of every race
Crumbled in one red crucible,

And melted, mingled into space,
Yet, Master, Thou wert merciful.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Mother

I

IT was April, blossoming spring,
They buried me, when the birds did sing;

Earth, in clammy wedging earth,
They banked my bed with a black, damp girth.

Under the damp and under the mould,
I kenned my breasts were clammy and cold.

Out from the red beams, slanting and bright,
I kenned my cheeks were sunken and white.

I was a dream, and the world was a dream,
And yet I kenned all things that seem.

I was a dream, and the world was a dream,
But you cannot bury a red sunbeam.

For though in the under-grave's doom-night
I lay all silent and stark and white,

Yet over my head I seemed to know
The murmurous moods of wind and snow,

The snows that wasted, the winds that blew,
The rays that slanted, the clouds that drew

The water-ghosts up from lakes below,
And the little flower-souls in earth that grow.

Under earth, in the grave's stark night,
I felt the stars and the moon's pale light.

I felt the winds of ocean and land
That whispered the blossoms soft and bland.

Though they had buried me dark and low,
My soul with the season's seemed to grow.

II

From throes of pain they buried me low,
For death had finished a mother's woe.

But under the sod, in the grave's dread doom,
I dreamed of my baby in glimmer and gloom.

I dreamed of my babe, and I kenned that his rest
Was broken in wailings on my dead breast.

I dreamed that a rose-leaf hand did cling;
Oh, you cannot bury a mother in spring!

When the winds are soft and the blossoms are red
She could not sleep in her cold earth-bed.

I dreamed of my babe for a day and a night,
And then I rose in my grave-clothes white.

I rose like a flower from my damp earth-bed
To the world of sorrowing overhead.

Men would have called me a thing of harm,
But dreams of my babe made me rosy and warm.

I felt my breasts swell under my shroud;
No star shone white, no winds were loud;

But I stole me past the graveyard wall,
For the voice of my baby seemed to call;

And I kenned me a voice, though my lips were dumb:
Hush, baby, hush! for mother is come.

I passed the streets to my husband's home;
The chamber stairs in a dream I clomb;

I heard the sound of each sleeper's breath,
Light waves that break on the shores of death.

I listened a space at my chamber door,
Then stole like a moon-ray over its floor.

My babe was asleep on a stranger's arm,
'O baby, my baby, the grave is so warm,

'Though dark and so deep, for mother is there!
O come with me from the pain and care!

'O come with me from the anguish of earth,
Where the bed is banked with a blossoming girth,

'Where the pillow is soft and the rest is long,
And mother will croon you a slumber-song–

'A slumber-song that will charm your eyes
To a sleep that never in earth-song lies!

'The loves of earth your being can spare,
But never the grave, for mother is there.'

I nestled him soft to my throbbing breast,

And stole me back to my long, long rest.

And here I lie with him under the stars,
Dead to earth, its peace and its wars;

Dead to its hates, its hopes, and its harms,
So long as he cradles up soft in my arms.

And heaven may open its shimmering doors,
And saints make music on pearly floors,

And hell may yawn to its infinite sea,
But they never can take my baby from me.

For so much a part of my soul he hath grown
That God doth know of it high on His throne.

And here I lie with him under the flowers
That sun-winds rock through the billowy hours,

With the night-airs that steal from the murmuring sea,
Bringing sweet peace to my baby and me.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Politician

Carven in leathern mask or brazen face,
Were I time's sculptor, I would set this man.
Retreating from the truth, his hawk-eyes scan
The platforms of all public thought for place.
There wriggling with insinuating grace,
He takes poor hope and effort by the hand,
And flatters with half-truths and accents bland,
Till even zeal and earnest love grow base.

Knowing no right, save power's grim right-of-way;
No nobleness, save life's ignoble praise;
No future, save this sordid day to day;
He is the curse of these material days:
Juggling with mighty wrongs and mightier lies,
This worshipper of Dagon and his flies!

William Wilfred Campbell

The Sky Watcher

Black rolls the phantom chimney-smoke
Beneath the wintry moon;
For miles on miles, by sound unbroke,
The world lies wrapt in its ermine cloak,
And the night's icy swoon
Sways earthward in great brimming wells
Of luminous, frosty particles.

Far up the roadway, drifted deep,
Where frost-etched fences gleam;
Beneath the sky's wan, shimmering sleep
My solitary way I keep
Across the world's white dream;
The only living moving thing
In all this mighty slumbering.

Up in the eastern range of hill,
The thin wood spectrally
Stirs in its sleep and then is still
(Like querulous age) at the wind's will.
My shadow doggedly
Follows my footsteps where I go,
A grotesque giant on the snow.

Out where the river's arms are wound,
And icy sedges cling,
There comes to me as in a swound
A far-off clear, thin, vibrant sound,--
The distant hammering
Of frost-elves as they come and go,
Forging, in silver chains, his woe.

I stand upon the hill's bleak crest
And note the far night world:
The mighty lake whose passionate breast,
Manacled into arctic rest,
In shrouded sleep is furled:
The steely heavens whose wondrous host
Wheel white from flaming coast to coast.

Then down the night's dim luminous ways,
Meseems they come once more,
Those great star-watchers of old days
The lonely, calm-ones, whose still gaze,
On old-time, orient shore,
Dreamed in the wheeling sons of light,
The awful secrets of earth's night.

They come, those lofty ones of old,
And take me by the hand,
And call me brother; ages rolled
Are but a smoke-mist; kindred-souled,

They lift me to their band;
Like lights that from pale starbeams shine,
Their clear eyes look with peace on mine.

In language of no common kind
These watchers speak to me;
Their thoughts the depths of heaven find
Like plummets true. It were a kind
Of immortality
To spend with them one holy hour,
And know their love and grasp their power.

And wrapt around with glad content,
I learn with soul serene,
Caught from the beauty that is blent
In earth, the heaven's luminous tent,
The frost-lit dreams between,
And something holier out of sight,
Glad visions of the infinite.

Then backward past the sere hill's breast,
The spectral moaning wood,
With great peace brooding in my breast,
I turn me toward the common rest
Of earth's worn brotherhood;
But as I pass, a sacred sign,
Each lays his holy lips on mine:--

Gives me the golden chrism of song,
Tips my hushed heart with fire;
Till high in heaven I hear that throng
Who march in mystic paths along,
Great Pleiades, The Lyre,
The Te-Deum of the ages swell,
To earth-tuned ear inaudible.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Wind's Royalty

This summer day is all one palace rare,
Builded by architects of life unseen,
In elfin hours the sun and moon between,
Up out of quarries of the sea and air,
And earth's fine essences. Aladdin's were
But tinsel sheen beside this gloried dream,
High, sunny-windowed, walled by wood and stream,
And high, dome-roofed, blue-burnished, beyond compare.
Here reigns a king, the happiest known on earth,
That blithesome monarch mortals call the wind,
Who roves his galleries wide in vagrant mirth,
His courtier clouds obedient to his mind;
Or when he sleeps his sentinal stars are still,
With ethiop guards o'ertopping some grave hill.

William Wilfred Campbell

The Winter Lakes

Out in a world of death far to the northward lying,
Under the sun and the moon, under the dusk and the day;
Under the glimmer of stars and the purple of sunsets dying,
Wan and waste and white, stretch the great lakes away.

Never a bud of spring, never a laugh of summer,
Never a dream of love, never a song of bird;
But only the silence and white, the shores that grow chiller and dumber,
Wherever the ice winds sob, and the griefs of winter are heard.

Crags that are black and wet out of the grey lake looming,
Under the sunset's flush and the pallid, faint glimmer of dawn;
Shadowy, ghost-like shores, where midnight surfs are booming
Thunders of wintry woe over the spaces wan.

Lands that loom like spectres, whited regions of winter,
Wastes of desolate woods, deserts of water and shore;
A world of winter and death, within these regions who enter,
Lost to summer and life, go to return no more.

Moons that glimmer above, waters that lie white under,
Miles and miles of lake far out under the night;
Foaming crests of waves, surfs that shoreward thunder,
Shadowy shapes that flee, haunting the spaces white.

Lonely hidden bays, moon-lit, ice-rimmed, winding,
Fringed by forests and crags, haunted by shadowy shores;
Hushed from the outward strife, where the mighty surf is grinding
Death and hate on the rocks, as sandward and landward it roars.

William Wilfred Campbell

To a Robin in November

Sweet, sweet and the soft listening heaven reels
In one blue ecstasy above thy song
In the red heart of all the opening year,
In the hushed murmur of low dreaming fields
Hung under heaven ’twixt dim blue and blue;
Where the young Summer, purpled and pearled in dew,
Mirrors herself in June, and knows no wrong.

Sweet, sweet, throwing thy lack of fear
Back to the heart of God, till heaven feels
The throbbing of earth’s music through and through.

Dreaming in song,—great pulsing-hearted hills,
Cradling the dawn in mists and purple veils
Of vapors, over pearls of lakes and brooks
Girdled about the neck of half the world,
When the red birth of the young dreaming June
Kisses the lands with gales, and murmurs, and trills
Of melody, lips that blossom with tales
Of music and color and form and beauty of looks
And snowy argosies in heaven furled,
All summer set to one sweet warbled tune.

And thou, red-throated, comest back to me
Here in the bare November bleak and chill,
Breathing the red-ripe of the lusty June
Over the rime of withered field and mere;
O heart of music, while I dream of thee,
Thou gladdest note in the dead Summer’s tune,
Great God! thou liest dead outside my sill,
Starved of the last chill berry on thy tree,
Like some sweet instrument left all unstrung,
The melodious orchestra of all the year.
Dead with the sweet dead summer thou had’st sung;
Dead with the dead year’s voices and clasp of hands;
Dead with all music and love and laughter and light;
While chilly and bleak comes up the winter night,
And shrieks the gust across the leafless lands.

William Wilfred Campbell