

Classic Poetry Series

**Alan Sullivan**  
**- poems -**

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# Alan Sullivan(29 November 1868 - 6 August 1947)

Edward Alan Sullivan was a Canadian poet and author of short stories.

## <b>Life</b>

Born in St. George's Rectory, Montreal, Alan Sullivan was the oldest son of Edward Sullivan and Frances Mary Renaud. In 1869, his father became rector of Trinity Church, Chicago. The family moved to the city in 1871, and thus witnessed the Great Chicago Fire. When he was 15, Alan began attending Loretto in Musselburgh, Scotland, a famous school for boys.

On his return to Canada, he attended the School of Practical Science, Toronto. After this he did railway exploration work in the West, and later worked in mining. He was assistant engineer in the Clergue enterprises at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario for a year and a half, before the organization of the Consolidated Lake Superior Company. Subsequently he spent several years as a mining engineer in the Lake of the Woods district during the period of its gold exploitation.

## <b>Writing</b>

Sullivan gained recognition in the United States through his poems, short stories and comprehensive articles on various themes. These frequently appeared in Harper's Magazine, the Atlantic Monthly, and other leading American periodicals.

## <b>Recognition</b>

In 1941 he won the Governor General's Award for English language fiction for the novel Three Came to Ville Marie and the The Magic Makers in 1930.

# Brébeuf And Lalemant

Came Jean Brébeuf from Rennes, in Normandy,  
To preach the written word in Sainte Marie—  
The Ajax of the Jesuit enterprise:  
Huge, dominant and bold—augustly wise.  
The zealot's flame deep in the hot brown eyes  
That glowed with strange and holy whisperings,  
And searched the stars, and caught angelic wings  
Beating through visions of mysterious things.  
Once, in the sky, a cross and martyr's crown  
Hung o'er the squalor of the Huron town.  
And spectres, armed with javelin and sword,  
Foreshadowed the dread army of the Lord;  
But, onward through the forest, to his fate  
Marched the great priest, unawed by Huron hate:  
In every scourge he glimpsed the sacred Tree  
And the dear Master of his embassy.

[Page 287]

'Twas in St. Louis, where the Hurons lay,  
Screened from the blue sweep of the Georgian Bay,  
That the frail brother Lalemant, and Brébeuf,  
Built a strange sanctuary, whose trembling wall  
Was birchen bark, on whose long, curving roof  
Lay tawny skins. A spirit seemed to call  
In supplication through the holy place  
For some strong mercy on the untamed race  
That, naked, sat in this thrice wondrous room;  
And, peering through the incense-burdened gloom,  
Stared at the altar, where the black-robés bent  
O'er the bright vessels of their sacrament.

Till, on the grim and memorable day,  
When, to the Host, they bade their converts pray,  
There flashed a gasping runner through the wood:  
'The Iroquois! The Iroquois!' he cried.  
As fire that stings the forest into blood  
And drives red gales of ruin far and wide,  
So frenzied fear ran riot, in a flood

That surged convulsive. But the great priest stood  
Like a strong tower, when fretted billows race  
Tumultuously about its massy base:  
'Courage, my children, through the flame I see  
The dear white Christ, whose long sought sons are ye.'

Then suddenly from out the wood there rose  
The shouting of innumerable foes,  
And waves of painted warriors from the glade  
Swept yelping, through the tottering palisade.  
Were devils ere so murderous as men  
In whose brown breasts those devils breathed again,  
When agony the shuddering sky assailed,  
When age and youth in choking anguish wailed?  
Torn from the breast, the child was cleft in twain,  
The mother shrieked, then fell among the slain;  
Age had no power to swerve the dripping knife,  
Youth gained but torture as the end of life,  
The wounded perished in the bursting flame  
That left St. Louis but a woeful name.  
But 'midst the dead and dying moved the priest,

[Page 288]

Closing dead eyes, speeding the soul released;  
'Absolvo te'—to trembling lips the word  
Descended from the Hurons' new found Lord.  
And, ere the night took pity on the dead,  
Brébeuf and Lalemant in chains were led;  
And one, the giant of Normandy, was bound  
To a great stake; when staring boldly round  
With ardent gaze, he saw the convert throng  
Captive. 'Have courage! It will not be long;  
Torture is but salvation's earthly price.  
To-day we meet the Christ in Paradise.'

O heart of iron, O strange supernal zeal,  
That braves the fire, the torture and the steel!  
O torn and shrinking flesh that yet can find  
The crown of thorns mysteriously entwined!  
O sightless orbs that still their Lord discern,  
Howe'er the coals their blackened sockets burn.

Thus sped the Jesuit's triumphant soul.  
And Lalemant, ere the rising of the sun,  
Achieved through torment his far-shining goal.  
And all the Huron missions, one by one,  
Were driven by the Iroquois like spray  
That strong winds snatch and swiftly whirl away.

Sleep, Lalemant! Brébeuf, a long surcease!  
Still moves your martyr's spirit through the glade;  
Still mourns the northern forest, when the peace  
And benediction of the twilight shade  
Awakens in the dark memorial pines  
A velvet-footed, cedar-scented breeze,  
That whispers where the green and knotted vines  
Enmesh the cloistered colonnade of trees.

Alan Sullivan

# Came Those Who Saw And Loved Her

Came those who saw and loved her,  
She was so fair to see!  
No whit their homage moved her,  
So proud she was, so free;  
But, ah, her soul was turning  
With strange and mystic yearning,  
With some divine discerning,  
Beyond them all—to me!

As light to lids that quiver  
Throughout a night forlorn,  
She came—a royal giver—  
My temple to adorn;  
And my soul rose to meet her,  
To welcome her, to greet her,  
To name, proclaim, her sweeter  
And dearer than the morn:

For her most rare devising  
Was mixed no common clay,  
Nor earthly form, disguising  
Its frailty for a day;  
But sun and shadow blended,  
And fire and love descended  
In one creation splendid  
Nor less superb than they.

. . . . .

You—of the finer moulding,  
You—of the clearer light,  
Whose spirit life, unfolding,  
Illumed my spirit's night,  
Stoop not to end my dreaming,

[Page 286]

To stain the vision gleaming,  
Or mar that glory, seeming

Too high for touch or sight.

Dear as the viewless portal  
Of dream embroidered sleep,  
Lift me to dreams immortal,  
Till, purified, I leap  
To hear the distant thunder  
Of dark veils rent asunder,  
And lose myself in wonder  
At mysteries so deep.

Till, past the sombre meadows,  
Tearless and unafraid,  
Linked even in the shadows,  
Our deathless souls have strayed;  
And you, my soul's defender  
O valiant one and tender,  
Cry out to God's own splendour,  
'Behold the man I made!'

Alan Sullivan

# Prospice

The ancient and the lovely land  
Is sown with death; across the plain  
Ungarnered now the orchards stand,  
The Maxim nestles in the grain,  
The shrapnel spreads a stinging flail  
Where pallid nuns the cloister trod,  
The airship spills her leaden hail;  
But—after all the battles—God.

Athwart the vineyard's ordered banks,  
Silent the red rent forms recline,  
And from their stark and speechless ranks  
There flows a richer, ruddier wine;  
While down the lane and through the wall  
The victors writhe upon the sod,  
Nor heed the onward bugle call;  
But—after all the bugles—God.

By night the blazing cities flare  
Like mushroom torches in the sky;  
The rocking ramparts tremble ere  
The sullen cannon boom reply,  
And shattered is the temple spire,  
The vestment trampled on the clod,  
And every altar black with fire;  
But—after all the altars—God.

And all the prizes we have won  
Are buried in a deadly dust;

[Page 284]

The things we set our hearts upon  
Beneath the stricken earth are thrust;  
Again the Savage greets the sun,  
Again his feet, with fury shod,  
Across a world in anguish run;  
But—after all the anguish—God.



The grim campaign, the gun, the sword,  
The quick volcano from the sea,  
The honour that reveres the word,  
The sacrifice, the agony—  
These be our heritage and pride,  
Till the last despot kiss the rod,  
And, with man's freedom purified,  
We mark—behind our triumph—God.

Alan Sullivan

# Suppliant

Grant me, dear Lord, the alchemy of toil,  
Clean days of labour, dreamless nights of rest,  
And that which shall my weariness assoil  
The sanctuary of one beloved breast:

Laughter of children, hope and thankful tears,  
Knowledge to yield, with valour to defend,  
A faith immutable, and stedfast years  
That move unvexed to their mysterious end.

Alan Sullivan

# The Kite

Upon the liquid tide of air  
It swayed beside a dappled cloud:  
It seemed athwart the sun to fare  
Full of strong flight, as though endowed  
With vibrant life. Buoyed in the sky  
It swam, and hardly might the eye  
Traverse the fields of ambient light  
To scan its heaven aspiring height.  
And, like a spider's web, there slipped  
A pulsing earthward thread, that dipped  
In tenuous line, that throbbed and spoke,  
Down through the sunlight and the smoke,  
Down to a small and blackened brood  
Of puny city waifs that stood,  
And—lost to hunger, want or time—  
Stared, rigid, through the city's grime  
At the far envoy they had given  
As hostage to the winds of heaven.

Thus may the Soul to heights elysian  
Send argosies of dream and vision:  
Send far flung messengers that rise  
Strong pinioned, cleaving to the skies,  
To float amid the poisèd spheres,

Beyond the tumult of the years,  
Till,—down the rare and rainbow line  
That earthward trails from fields divine—  
Shall pulse the throb of mystic wings,  
And faint, sweet, rapturous whisperings  
Of incommunicable things.

Alan Sullivan

# The Little Street

Listen. The clop of wooden soles still sounds  
along this crudely cobbled alleyway,  
a washerwoman sings a rondelet,  
and two young truants haggle over rounds  
of jacks. Somewhere an unseen bell resounds,  
tolling the passage of an August day;  
yet nothing moves. These shutters never sway.  
These children never leave their checkered bounds  
beside the entryway. The clouds diffuse  
a dropp of rain or flush with sunset's blush.  
No bargeman hauls; no windmill fills a sluice.  
Upon some far-off field of war, a truce  
as time stands still beneath the artist's brush.

Alan Sullivan