

Classic Poetry Series

**Arthur Wentworth
Hamilton Eaton
- poems -**

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Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton(1849-1937)

Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton poet, priest, educator and historian, was born at Kentville, Nova Scotia, the eldest son of William Eaton, a descendant of a Puritan family and at one time Inspector of Schools for his county, and Anna Augusta Willoughby Hamilton, of New England Puritan stock.

His higher education was received at Dalhousie College, Halifax, and at Harvard University where he graduated in arts with the class of 1880. [Of this class, Theodore Roosevelt was a member. The honorary degree, D.C.L., was conferred on him in 1905, by King's College University, in recognition of his literary achievements and high scholastic attainments.

Ordained deacon of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in 1884, and priest the next year, he was, for a time, incumbent of the parish of Chestnut Hill, Boston.

In 1888, Dr. Eaton's first notable work, *The Heart of the Creeds: Historical Religion in the Light of Modern Thought*, was published. This was followed, in 1889, by his first book of verse, *Acadian Legends and Lyrics*, so favourably reviewed by the critics. His third publication, *The Church of England in Nova Scotia, and the Tory Clergy of the Revolution*, a permanently valuable historical work, was issued in 1891. His historical researches have resulted also in a number of authoritative genealogical and family monographs, in the *History of King's County, N.S.: Heart of the Acadian Land*, and in an important *History of Halifax, Nova Scotia*, now being published in instalments, in 'Americana.' Two other volumes of verse appeared in 1905,—*Acadian Ballads*, and *De Soto's Last Dream*, and *Poems of the Christian Year*—and, in 1907, was published *The Lotus of the Nile and Other Poems*.

As Professor of English Literature for years, in a New York college, Dr. Eaton gained a wide reputation as an educator.

Dr. Eaton has made an enviable record as a Canadian litterateur. His *Legends and Ballads* must continue to hold their distinctive place in Canadian verse whilst his historical writings must ever increase in value and importance.

By The Bridge

WITH subtlest mimicry of wave and tide,
Of ocean storm, and current setting free,
Here by the bridge the river deep and wide,
Swaying the reeds along its muddy marge,
Speeds to the wharf the dusky coaling-barge
And dreams itself a commerce-quickenning sea.

Wide sedge-rimmed meadows westward meet the eye,
Brown, silty, sere, where driftwood from the mills
Is thrown, as Spring's full flood sweeps by,

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And weeds grow rank as on the wild salt-marsh,
And lonely cries of sea-gulls, loud and harsh,
Pierce evening's silence to the echoing hills.

The scene, with all its varied, voiceless moods,
My eyes have looked upon so many years
That like my mother's songs, or the deep woods
In whose mysterious shade I used to play,
Weaving sweet fancies all the summer day,
It has strange power to waken joy or tears.

I love the lights that fringe the farther shore,
Great golden fireflies by a silver mere;
Mysterious torches they, that o'er and o'er
Recall to mind the dear souls gone, not set
Cold-gleaming crystals in God's coronet,
But gems that light our way with ruddy cheer.

Sometimes inverted in the wave they seem
Like orient palace-roofs and towers aflame
With rubies, or those sapphire walls that gleam
Amidst the visions of the holy Seer,
Who by the blue Ægean, with vision clear,
Saw splendours in the heavens he might not name.

When all the river lies encloaked in mist

So far away those trembling orbs of light
They symbol memories fair that still persist,
With glow or glimmer, of the shrouded years
Before we left, for laughter, cries and tears,
That world serene where souls are born in light.

I cannot watch unmoved the sunset here,
When swift volcanic fires of liquid gold
Alight on hills of purple haze appear,
And clouds, deep-crimsoned in the day's decline,
Like snowy festal-garments splashed with wine,
Lie careless, resting fleecy fold on fold.

So deep the meanings in these changing moods
Of earth and heaven, that I who reverent stand
Before a flower, and in the sombre woods
Hear speech that silences the common creeds,
Stand lost in wonder, like a man who reads
Immortal prophecies none can understand.

Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton

I Watch The Ships

PROUD, languid lily of the sacred Nile,
'Tis strange to see thee on our western wave,
Far from those sandy shores that mile on mile,
Papyrus-plumed, stretch silent as the grave.

O'er limpid pool, and wide, palm-sheltered bay,
And round deep-dreaming isles, thy leaves expand,
Where Alexandrian barges plough their way,
Full-freighted, to the ancient Theban land.

On Karnak's lofty columns thou wert seen,
And spacious Luxor's temple-palace walls,
Each royal Pharaoh's emeralded queen
Chose thee to deck her glittering banquet halls;

Yet thou art blossoming on this fairy lake
As regally, amidst these common things,
As on the shores where Nile's brown ripples break,
As in the ivory halls of Egypt's kings.

Thy grace meets every passer's curious eyes,
But he whose thought has ranged through faiths of old
Gazing at thee feels lofty temples rise
About him, sees long lines of priests, white-stoled,

That chant strange music as they slowly pace
Dim-columned aisles; hears trembling overhead
Echoes that lose themselves in that vast space,
Of Egypt's solemn ritual for the dead.

Ay, deeper thoughts than these, though undefined,
Start in the reflective soul at sight of thee,
For this majestic orient faith enshrined
Man's yearning hope of immortality.

And thou didst symbolize the deathless power
That under all decaying forms lies hid,
The old world worshipped thee, O Lotus flower,

Then carved its sphinx and reared its pyramid!

Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton

L'Ile Sainte Croix

WITH tangled brushwood overgrown,
And here and there a lofty pine,
Around whose form strange creepers twine,
And crags that mock the wild sea's moan,

And little bays where no ships come,
Though many a white sail passes by,
And many a drifting cloud on high
Looks down and shames the sleeping foam,

Unconscious on the waves it lies,
While midst the golden reeds and sedge
That, southward, line the water's edge,
The thrush sings her shrill melodies.

No human dwelling now is seen
Upon its rude, unfertile slopes,
Though many a summer traveller gropes
For ruins midst the tangled green,

And seeks upon the northern shore
The graves of that adventurous band
That followed to the Acadian land
Champlain, De Monts, and Poutrincourt.

There stood the ancient fort that sent
Fierce cannon echoes through the wold,
There waved the Bourbon flag that told
The mastery of a continent;

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There through the pines the echoing wail
Of ghostly winds was heard at eve,
And hoarse, deep sounds like those that heave
The breasts of stricken warriors pale.

There Huguenots and cassocked priests,
And noble-born and sons of toil,

Together worked the barren soil,
And shared each other's frugal feasts,

And dreamed beneath the yellow moon
Of golden reappings that should be,
Conjuring from the sailless sea
A glad, prophetic harvest-tune,

Till stealthy winter through the reeds
Crept, crystal-footed, to the shore,
And to the little hamlet bore
His hidden freight of deathly seeds.

Spring came at last, and o'er the waves
The welcome sail of Pontgravé,
But half the number silent lay,
Death's pale first-fruits, in western graves.

Sing on, wild sea, your sad refrain
For all the gallant sons of France,
Whose songs and sufferings enhance
The witchery of the western main,

Keep kindly watch before the strand
Where lie in hidden mounds, secure,
The men De Monts and Poutrincourt
First led to the Acadian land.

Arthur Wentworth Hamilton Eaton

Pray For The Dead

PRAY for the dead—who bids thee not?□
Do all our human loves grow pale,□
Or are the old needs all forgot□
When men have passed within the veil?□

Shall prayer's strong pleadings pierce the skies□
For those we still keep with us here,□
And not a single wish arise□
For loved ones in a happier sphere?□

Have they no conquests yet to win,□
No rugged heights of truth to climb;□
Does no strange syllable of sin□
Mar the soft cadence of their rhyme;□

Or has God snapped the strong, sweet ties□
He took such loving pains to weld,□
And said, "Henceforth their memories□
In prayerless silence must be held"?□

Pray for the dead: the links that bound□
Thy soul to theirs were forged on high;□
Borne upward, they have surely found□
The chain still fastened in the sky.□

And who of us so wise to say□
That they have lost the need of prayer!□
Heaven's gates are not so far away□
That earth goes unremembered there.□

Pray for the dead, nor dare repress□
Thy longings at the throne of grace;□
Our dead ones are more dear, not less,□
In the pure presence of God's face.□

And strength and faith are needed, there□
As here, inspired life to win—□
Nor see alone the gateways fair□
Of Heaven's great life, but enter in.□

Love well and pray for all thy dead:□
God gives thee such sweet liberty,□
He means where'er their souls are sped,□
That they shall be in touch with thee.

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The Lotus Of The Nile

PROUD, languid lily of the sacred Nile,
'Tis strange to see thee on our western wave,
Far from those sandy shores that mile on mile,
Papyrus-plumed, stretch silent as the grave.

O'er limpid pool, and wide, palm-sheltered bay,
And round deep-dreaming isles, thy leaves expand,
Where Alexandrian barges plough their way,
Full-freighted, to the ancient Theban land.

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The Phantom Light Of The Baie Des Chaleurs

'TIS the laughter of pines that swing and sway
Where the breeze from the land meets the breeze from the bay;
'Tis the silvery foam of the silver tide
In ripples that reach to the forest side;
'Tis the fisherman's boat, in a track of sheen
Plying through tangled seaweed green,
O'er the Baie des Chaleurs.

Who has not heard of the phantom light
That over the moaning waves, at night,
Dances and drifts in endless play,
Close to the shore, then far away,
Fierce as the flame in sunset skies,
Cold as the winter light that lies
On the Baie des Chaleurs.

They tell us that many a year ago,
From lands where the palm and the olive grow,
Where vines with their purple clusters creep
Over the hillsides gray and steep,
A knight in his doublet, slashed with gold,
Famed, in that chivalrous time of old,
For valorous deeds and courage rare,
Sailed with a princess wondrous fair
To the Baie des Chaleurs.

That a pirate crew from some isle of the sea,
A murderous band as e'er could be,
With a shadowy sail, and a flag of night,
That flaunted and flew in heaven's sight,
Swept in the wake of the lovers there,
And sank the ship and its freight so fair
In the Baie des Chaleurs.

Strange is the tale that the fishermen tell,-
They say that a ball of fire fell
Straight from the sky, with crash and roar,
Lighting the bay from shore to shore;
That the ship, with a shudder and a groan,

Sank through the waves to the caverns lone
Of the Baie des Chaleurs.

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That was the last of the pirate crew;
But many a night a black flag flew
From the mast of a spectre vessel, sailed
By a spectre band that wept and wailed
For the wreck they had wrought on the sea, on the land,
For the innocent blood they had spilt on the sand
Of the Baie des Chaleurs.

This is the tale of the phantom light
That fills the mariner's heart, at night,
With dread as it gleams o'er his path on the bay,
Now by the shore, then far away,
Fierce as the flame in sunset skies,
Cold as the winter moon that lies
On the Baie des Chaleurs.

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