

Classic Poetry Series

Hubert Church

- poems -

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Hubert Church(13 June 1857 – 8 April 1932)

Hubert Newman Wigmore Church was an Australian poet.

Biography

Hubert Newman Wigmore Church was born at Hobart, Tasmania, on 13 June 1857, the son of Mary Ann Newman and her husband, Hubert Day Church, a clerk who later became a barrister. In 1865 Hubert was taken to England where he was educated at schools in Guildford and Felstead. He may also have attended Oxford University. When he was 12 he was struck on the head by a cricket ball and became completely deaf. As a result he was thrown largely on his own resources and became an omnivorous reader. In 1873 Church came to New Zealand and studied law at Blenheim. He joined the Colonial Treasurer's Department in Wellington in 1879 and worked there as a clerk. He was married at Wellington on 12 December 1900 to Catherine Livingstone McGregor.

Church's first volume of verse, *The west wind* , was published in Sydney in 1902. It was followed by *Poems* , published in Wellington in 1904, and *Egmont* , published in Melbourne in 1908. Church also contributed poems and provided advice for Victoria College's magazine *the Spike* , which was launched in June 1902. Hubert retired in 1911 and he and Catherine went to Melbourne in 1912. The same year Church collected the best poetry from his earlier volumes and published it with nine additional pieces as *Poems* .

He went to England in 1913 and during the First World War was engaged in voluntary war work. In London in 1916 he published a novel, *Tonks* , which related the amusing adventures of an English nobleman on tour through the North Island. He returned to New Zealand in 1919 and in October 1923 moved to Melbourne where he became well known in literary circles. In addition to his published work Church wrote several short stories, numerous essays and two novels: *Lucky Maidment* , the life of a gambler, and *Old Wairau* , a rustic tale of early Marlborough.

Hubert Church's contemporaries spoke highly of his courtesy and knowledge, though to converse with him they had to write their thoughts down. His poems were well received in both New Zealand and Australia; several were anthologised and some were painted on the inside doors of the Wellington trams. The poet Jessie Mackay said that '*Bowen Falls, Milford Sound*' was 'the clearest, loveliest song of a beauty all our Zealandian own'. She described Church as a 'meditative, detached, abstract'

poet. Since then, however, his verse has steadily gone down in reputation. By 1959 he did not warrant a mention in E. H. McCormick's *New Zealand literature: a survey* .

Church's sense of personal isolation, religious doubt and melancholy contributed to a pervasive sense of gloom throughout his verse. Even in his own time this mood repelled some readers, who found the metaphysical musings and vocabulary of the 1912 *Poems and Egmont* difficult to follow and sometimes to understand. According to F. A. de la Mare many of these verses could 'only be approached with a lexicon in one hand and a philosophical dictionary in the other'. Although his shorter pieces were more popular, it is these pieces with their [Tennysonian](http://www.poemhunter.com/alfred-lord-tennyson/) echoes that have attracted most modern criticism.

Hubert Church died at East Malvern, Melbourne, on 8 April 1932, survived by his wife. They had had no children, but as Jessie Mackay said after Church's death, 'His poems were his children, and hers, too, for she inspired them.' Indeed, in speaking of his wife Church had told Mackay, 'She, you know, is the West Wind.' In 1945 the Hubert Church Memorial Award for Prose was established with the help of a bequest to the New Zealand Centre of PEN from Catherine Church.

Lowry Bay

I am not here alone. A hidden throng
Is round me in the vesper of the sky.
Dead Babylon and Nineveh are nigh;
Rome, Antioch; the slave who felt the thong;
The lord that slew him when the day was long
And the soul heavy with satiety.
And some are near who saw the Christ go by;
While Pilate shut aloof, at gaze with wrong.
And what are they these ministers surround?
The cliff, the sand, the island at my feet
Reef-scattered far below all human ken.
Lo! God hath made a mighty angel beat
His wings, a benediction in their sound,
Above the roof of the most forlorn of men

Hubert Church

Rosalind

Rosalind has come to town!
All the street's a meadow,
Balconies are beeches brown
With a drowsy shadow,
And the long-drawn window panes
Are the foliage of her lanes.

Rosalind about me brings
Sunny brooks that quiver
Unto palpitating wings
Ere they kiss the river,
And her eyes are trusting birds
That do nestle without words.

Rosalind! to me you bear
Memories of a meeting
When the love-star smote the air
15
With a pulse's beating:
Does your spirit love to pace
In the temple of that place?

Rosalind! be thou the fane
For my soul's uprising,
 Where my heart may reach again
Thoughts of heaven's devising:
Be the solace self-bestowed
In the shrine of Love's abode!

Hubert Church

Spring In New Zealand

Thou wilt come with suddenness,
Like a gull between the waves,
Or a snowdrop that doth press
Through the white shroud on the graves;
Like a love too long withheld,
That at last has over-welled.

What if we have waited long,
Brooding by the Southern Pole,
Where the towering icebergs throng,
And the inky surges roll:
What can all their terror be
When thy fond winds compass thee?

They shall blow through all the land
Fragrance of thy cloudy throne,
Underneath the rainbow spanned
Thou wilt enter in thine own,
And the glittering earth shall shine
Where thy footstep is divine

Hubert Church

To A Sea Shell

Friend of my chamber--O thou spiral shell
That murmurest of the ever-murmuring sea!
Repeating with eternal constancy
Whatever memories the wave can tell;
Whatever harmonies may rise and swell,
Whatever sadness in the deep may be--
They are the ocean's, and desired of thee;
Thou treasurest what thou dost love so well.
So all my heart is one voluted fold,
Shielding one face, and evermore it seems
Upon the threshold of the prying day,
Hid in the tangle of reluctant dreams;
And in the noontide, and the evening grey,
Its light illumines secrecies untold

Hubert Church