

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Lloyd Roberts**  
**- poems -**

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# Lloyd Roberts(31 October 1884 - 28 June 1966)

William Harris Lloyd Roberts was a Canadian poet, story writer, and essayist.

<b>Life</b>

He was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, the second son of Mary Isabel Fenety and Charles G.D. Roberts. His father was a major Canadian poet later regarded as Canada's leading man of letters. In 1885, the elder Roberts became a professor at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia, a position he would hold for the next ten years. Lloyd Roberts grew up in Windsor, being educated by private tutors and at King's College School. In 1895 the family moved back to Fredericton, where Roberts "finished his education" at Fredericton High School.

In 1897 Charles G.D. Roberts left his wife and family, and went to live in New York City. Lloyd Roberts (just fifteen years old) joined his father in New York in the winter of 1899, "and they spent part of that spring, summer and fall travelling in England and Europe."

In 1904 Lloyd Roberts began his own writing career, taking a job as assistant editor of Outing magazine in New York. Soon he was working as an editorial writer for the National Encyclopedia of American Biography. In 1908 he married Helen Hope Farquhar Balmain, of would bear him one daughter, Patricia Bliss (Henderson) before dying prematurely in 1912.

In 1911 Roberts returned to Canada, finding work as a reporter for the Nelson, British Columbia, News. From 1913 until 1920 he worked in the Canadian civil service in Ottawa, as the editor of immigration literature. In 1914 he married Leila White of New York; their marriage would later end in divorce. Also in 1914, Robert published his first volume of verse, *England Over Seas*.

In 1923 he published *The Book of Roberts*, a volume of essays on his literary family.

Roberts became a convert to Christian Science, and from 1925 to 1939 he worked as a correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*. During that period he published two more books of poetry: *Along the Ottawa* in 1927, and *I Sing of Life* in 1937. He also wrote "several plays including 'Mother Doneby', 'Let's Pretend', and 'The Bishop of St. Kitt's,' as well as numerous articles and short stories."

In 1939 Roberts became a liaison and public relations officer for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a position he held until 1943. In 1943 he married for a third time, to Julia (Judy) Bristow. They had 2 daughters, Thaia Bliss and Mary Carman.

Lloyd Roberts died in Toronto in 1966.

### **Writing**

The primary literary influence on Lloyd Roberts was unquestionably his father, [Charles G. D. Roberts](#)

"Because of the warm place held in the hearts of Canadian readers, by Charles G. D. Roberts," John Garvin wrote in 1916, "a first volume of poems from the pen of his eldest living son, ... *England Over Seas*, published in the spring of 1914, at once attracted wide attention. It was soon discovered that the son is as true a poet as the father, possessing the same unerring vision and sureness of touch in nature description, and the same fine mastery of words and of rhythmic effects."

Reviewing *England Over Seas*, the Halifax Herald commented:

It is the simplicity of statement, the lyric charm and the spontaneous joy of its utterance which make Mr. Roberts' work such a pleasure and a profit to read. This simplicity is obviously Mr. Roberts' ideal, and with such an ideal held steadily before him, there is no distance he may not travel and no height he may not climb to deliver his message to the world .... Lloyd Roberts comes upon the scene as a writer of true lyric poetry, singing the song of his native land, and with each successive poem fulfilling the promise of becoming one of the way-marks of

### **Canadian literature**

In the Montreal Herald, J.D. Logan described Roberts as "fundamentally a word-painter" rather than a musical writer: "As a verbal musician his rhythms are limited, quite conventional ... But essentially Mr. Roberts shows distinction as a colourist, using words with the same beauty and power that a master-painter in oils uses pigments. He is a master of vivid colourful diction and phrase." He added that "Roberts is a genuine poet because he sings with the poet's chief inspiration, namely: ecstasy of delight in the magic and mystery of earth, and in the lust of life."

The New Brunswick Literary Encyclopedia adds that "Roberts's literature attempts

to capture his native New Brunswick and describes its landscape vividly."

# Come Quietly, Britain!

Come quietly, Britain, all together, come!  
It is time!  
We have waited, weighed, and wondered  
Who had blundered;  
Stared askance at one another  
As our brother slew our brother,  
And went about our business,  
Saying: 'It will all be right—some day.  
Let the soldiers do the killing—

If they're willing—  
Let the sailors do the manning,  
Let the Cabinets do the planning,  
Let the bankers do the paying,  
And the clergy do the praying.  
The Empire is a fixture—  
Walled and welded by five oceans,  
And a little blood won't move it,  
Nor a flood-tide of emotions.'

Well, now we know the truth  
And the facts of all this fighting;  
How 'tis not for England's glory  
But for all a wide world's righting;  
Not for George nor party power,  
Not for conquest nor for dower,  
Not for fear of our last hour,  
But the lone star of liberty and light.  
What the Puritans left England for,  
What the Irish their green isle;  
What Adolphus pledged his life to,  
And Orange took from Spain—  
The Spain that Grenville throttled,  
And Frankie broke in twain—  
What Washington starved and strove for  
In the long winter night;  
Lincoln wept for, died for—  
Do we doubt if he were right?

Ah! It is time, if the soul of these is ours—  
Time to put an end to reason  
And take the field for right.  
They will lead us, never fear it,  
They will lead us through the night.  
They will steel the soul and sinew  
Of the legions of the land;  
They will pilot up the Dreadnoughts  
With the tillers in their hand—  
Howard and Frobisher and Drake—  
And who would fear to follow

When Nelson sets the course?  
And who would turn his eyes away  
From Wellington's white horse?

Not one, I warrant, now—  
Not one at home to-day;  
In England? In Scotland?  
In the Green Isle 'cross the way?  
No, nor far away to westward  
Beyond the leagues of foam—  
They are coming, they are coming,  
Their feet are turning home.  
In Canada they're singing,  
And love lies like a flame  
About their hearts this morning  
That sea-winds cannot tame.  
Africa? Australia?  
Aye, a million throats proclaim  
That their Motherland is Mother still  
In something more than name!

It is time! Come, all together, come!  
Not to the fife's call, not to the drum;  
Right needs you; Truth claims you—  
That's a call indeed  
One must heed!  
Not for the weeping  
(God knows there is weeping!):  
Not for the horrors

That are blotting out the page;  
Not for our comrades  
(How many now are sleeping!)  
Nor for the pity nor the rage,  
But for the sake of simple goodness  
And His laws,  
We shall sacrifice our all  
For The Cause!

Lloyd Roberts

# England's Fields

England's cliffs are white like milk,  
But England's fields are green;  
The grey fogs creep across the moors,  
But warm suns stand between.  
And not so far from London town, beyond the brimming street,  
A thousand little summer winds are singing in the wheat.

Red-lipped poppies stand and burn,  
The hedges are aglow;  
The daisies climb the windy hills  
Till all grow white like snow.  
And when the slim, pale moon slides down, and dreamy night is near,  
There's a whisper in the beeches for lonely hearts to hear.

Poppies burn in Italy,  
And suns grow round and high;  
The black pines of Posilipo  
Are gaunt upon the sky—

And yet I know an English elm beside an English lane  
That calls me through the twilight and the miles of misty rain.

Tell me why the meadow-lands  
Become so warm in June;  
Why the tangled roses breathe  
So softly to the moon;  
And when the sunset bars come down to pass the feet of day,  
Why the singing thrushes slide between the sprigs of May?

Weary, we have wandered back—  
And we have travelled far—  
Above the storms and over seas  
Gleamed ever one bright star—  
O England! when our feet grow cold and will no longer roam,  
We see beyond your milk-white cliffs the round, green fields of home.

Lloyd Roberts



# Husbands Over Seas

Each morning they sit down to their little bites of bread,  
To six warm bowls of porridge and a broken mug or two.  
And each simple soul is happy and each hungry mouth is fed—  
Then why should she be smiling as the weary-hearted do?

All day the house has echoed to their tiny, treble laughter  
(Six little rose-faced cherubs who trip shouting through the day),  
Till the candle lights the cradle and runs dark along the rafter—  
Then why should she be watching while the long night wastes away?

She tells them how their daddy has sailed out across the seas,  
And they'd be going after when the May begins to bloom.  
Oh, they clap their hands together as they cluster round her knees—  
Then why should she be weeping as they tumble from the room?

The May has bloomed and withered and the haws are clinging red,

The winter winds are talking in the dead ranks of the trees;  
And still she tells of daddy as she tucks each tot in bed—  
God pity all dear women who have husbands over seas!

Lloyd Roberts

# Miss Pixie

Did you ever meet Miss Pixie of the Spruces,  
Did you ever glimpse her mocking elfin face,  
Did you ever hear her calling while the whip-poor-wills were calling,  
And slipped your pack and taken up the chase?

Her feet are clad in moccasins and beads.  
Her dress? Oh, next to nothing! Though undressed,  
Her slender arms are circled round with vine  
And dusky locks cling close about her breast.

Red berries droop below each pointed ear;  
Her nut-brown legs are criss-crossed white with scratches;  
Her merry laughter sifts among the pines;  
Her eager face gleams pale from milk-weed patches.

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And though I never yet have reached her hand—  
God knows I've tried with all my heart's desire,—  
One morning just at dawn she caught me sleeping  
And with her soft lips touched my soul with fire.

And once when camping near a foaming rip,  
Lying wide-eyed beneath the milky stars,  
Sudden I heard her voice ring sweet and clear,  
Calling my soul beyond the river bars.

Dear, dancing Pixie of the wind and weather,  
Aglow with love and merriment and sun,  
I chase thee down my dreams, but catch thee never—  
God grant I catch thee ere the trail is done!

Did you ever meet Miss Pixie of the Thickets,  
Where the scarlet leaves leap tinkling from your feet,  
Have you ever heard her calling while a million feet were falling,  
And a million lights were crowding all the street?

Lloyd Roberts

# The Fruit-Rancher

He sees the rosy apples cling like flowers to the bough:  
He plucks the purple plums and spills the cherries on the grass;  
He wanted peace and silence,—God gives him plenty now—  
His feet upon the mountain and his shadow on the pass.

He built himself a cabin from red cedars of his own;  
He blasted out the stumps and twitched the boulders from the soil;  
And with an axe and chisel he fashioned out a throne  
Where he might dine in grandeur off the first fruits of his toil.

His orchard is a treasure-house alive with song and sun,  
Where currants ripe as rubies gleam and golden pippins glow;  
His servants are the wind and rain whose work is never done,  
Till winter rends the scarlet roof and banks the halls with snow.

He shouts across the valley, and the ranges answer back;  
His brushwood smoke at evening lifts a column to the moon;  
And dim beyond the distance where the Kootenai snakes black,  
He hears the silence shattered by the laughter of the loon.

Lloyd Roberts

# The Winter Harvest

Between the blackened curbs lie stacked the harvest of the skies,  
Long lines of frozen, grimy cocks befouled by city feet;  
On either side the racing throngs, the crowding cliffs, the cries,  
And ceaseless winds that eddy down to whip the iron street.

The wagons whine beneath their loads, the raw-boned horses strain;  
A hundred sullen shovels claw and heave the sodden mass—  
There lifts no dust of scented moats, no cheery call of swain,  
Nor birds that pipe from border brush across the yellow grass.

No cow-bells honk from upland fields, no sunset thrushes call  
To swarthy, bare-limbed harvesters beyond the stubble roads;  
But flanges grind on frosted steel, the weary snow-picks fall,  
And twisted, toiling backs are bent to pile the bitter loads.

No shouting from the intervalles, no singing from the hill,  
No scent of trodden tansy weeds among the golden grain—  
Only the silent, cringing forms beneath the aching chill.  
Only the hungry eyes of want in haggard cheeks of pain.

Lloyd Roberts