

Classic Poetry Series

Thomas O'Hagan
- poems -

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Thomas O'Hagan(6 March 1855 - 1 March 1939)

Dr. Thomas O'Hagan (March 6, 1855 - March 1, 1939) was a Canadian poet, teacher, and academic.

He was born in the Gore of Toronto (now part of Mississauga, Ontario), the youngest of five children of John and Bridget (O'Reilly) O'Hagan. When he was less than a year old, the family moved to rural Bruce Country, near the village of Paisley, where he grew up.

He attended St. Michael's College in Toronto, and then the University of Ottawa, where he received a Bachelor of Arts in 1882 and Master of Arts in 1885., and Syracuse University in 1889, where he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1889.. He also did postgraduate work at Cornell, Columbia, Chicago, Louvain, Grenoble and Fribourg Universities.

He alternated, and paid for, his studies with periods of teaching. From 1884 to 1888 he taught classics and history at Barrie, Pembroke, and Mitchell Collegiates. After graduating from Syracuse he taught at Walkerton High School, and then became principal of Waterdown Collegiate.

He wrote both poetry and academic essays, and became known as a popular lecturer on many subjects. From 1910 to 1913 he was chief editor of *The New World* in Chicago.

He was a regular contributor to the *Catholic World* magazine for over 30 years.

He died, after a two-year illness, at Mercy Hospital in Toronto. He is buried at St. Mary Immaculate Church in Chepstow, Ontario.

Writing

O'Hagan's first book of poetry, *A Gate of Flowers*, was praised by John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., Louis Fréchette, and Charles G.D. Roberts. Poet Nicholas Flood Davin wrote to him: "I cannot deny myself the pleasure of telling you what I think about these verses. They are instinct with true inspiration, and should have, for all time, a place in Irish literature."

The *Canadian Magazine* called "The Song My Mother Sings" (from his second book, *In Dreamland*) "the finest poem of its kind ever published in Canada

An Idyl Of The Farm

O THERE'S joy in every sphere of life from cottage unto throne,
But the sweetest smiles of nature beam upon the farm alone;
And in memory I go back to the days of long ago,
When the teamster shouted 'Haw, Buck! ' 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

I see out in the logging-field the heroes of our land,
With their strong and sturdy faces, each with handspike in his hand;
With shoulders strong as Hercules, they feared no giant foe,
As the teamster shouted 'Haw, Buck! ' 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

The logging-bees are over, and the woodlands all are cleared,
The face that then was young and fair is silvered o'er with beard;
The handspike now holds not the place it did long years ago,
When the teamster shouted 'Haw, Buck! ' 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

On meadow land and orchard field there rests a glory round,
Sweet as the memory of the dead that haunts some holy ground;
And yet there's wanting to my heart some joy of long ago,
When the teamster shouted 'Haw, Buck! ' 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

Demosthenes had silvery tongue, and Cicero knew Greek,
The Gracchi brothers loved old Rome and always helped the weak;
But there's not a Grecian hero, nor Roman high or low,
Whose heart spake braver patriot words than 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

They wore no coat of armour, the boys in twilight days-
They sang no classic music, but the old 'Come all ye' lays;
For armed with axe and handspike, each giant tree their foe,
They rallied to the battle-cry of 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

And so they smote the forest down, and rolled the logs in heaps,
And brought our country to the front in mighty strides and leaps;
And left upon the altar of each home wherein you go,
Some fragrance of the flowers that bloom through 'Gee! ' 'G'lang! ' and 'Whoa! '

Thomas O'Hagan

Ripened Fruit

I KNOW not what my heart hath lost;
I cannot strike the chords of old,
The breath that charmed my morning life
Hath chilled each leaf within the wold.

The swallows twitter in the sky,
But bare the nest within the eaves;
The fledglings of my care are gone,
And left me but the rustling leaves.

And yet, I know my life hath strength,
And firmer hope and sweeter prayer,
For leaves that murmur on the ground
Have now for me a double care.

I see in them the hope of spring,
That erst did plan the autumn day;
I see in them each gift of man
Grow strong in years, then turn to clay.

Not all is lost—the fruit remains
That ripened through the summer's ray;
The nurslings of the nest are gone,
Yet hear we still their warbling lay.

The glory of the summer sky
May change to tints of autumn hue;
But faith that sheds its amber light
Will lend our heaven a tender blue.

O altar of eternal youth!
O faith that beckons from afar,
Give to our lives a blossomed fruit—
Give to our morns an evening star!

Thomas O'Hagan

The Bugle Call

DO you hear the call of our Mother
From over the sea, from over the sea?
The call to her children in every land;
To her sons on Afric's far-stretched veldt;
To her dark-skinned children on India's shore,
Whose souls are nourished on Aryan lore;
To her sons of the Northland where frosty stars

Glitter and shine like a helmet of Mars;
Do you hear the call of our Mother?

Do you hear the call of our Mother
From over the sea, from over the sea?
The call to Australia's legions strong,
That move with the might and stealth of a wave;
To the men of the camp and men of the field,
Whose courage has taught them never to yield;
To the men whose counsel has saved the State
And thwarted the plans of impending fate;
Do you hear the call of our Mother?

Do you hear the call of our Mother
From over the sea, from over the sea?
To the little cot on the wind-swept hill;
To the lordly hall in the city street;
To her sons who toil in the forest deep
Or bind the sheaves where the reapers reap;
To her children scattered far East and West;
To her sons who joy in her Freedom Blest;
Do you hear the call of our Mother?

Thomas O'Hagan

The Chrism Of Kings

IN the morn of the world, at the day break of time,
When kingdoms were few and empires unknown,
God searched for a Ruler to sceptre the land,
And gather the harvest from the seed He had sown.
He found a young shepherd boy watching his flock
Where the mountains looked down on deep meadows of green;
He hailed the young shepherd boy king of the land
And anointed his brow with a Chrism unseen.

He placed in his frail hands the sceptre of power,
And taught his young heart all the wisdom of love;
He gave him the vision of prophet and priest,
And dowered him with counsel and light from above.
But alas! came a day when the shepherd forgot
And heaped on his realm all the woes that war brings,
And bartering his purple for the greed of his heart
He lost both the sceptre and Chrism of Kings.

Thomas O'Hagan

The Dance At McDougall's

IN a little log house near the rim of the forest
With its windows of sunlight, its threshold of stone,
Lived Donald McDougall, the quaintest of Scotchmen,
And Janet his wife, in their shanty, alone:
By day the birds sang them a chorus of welcome,
At night they saw Scotland again in their dreams;
They toiled full of hope 'mid the sunshine of friendship,
Their hearts leaping onward like troutlets in streams,
In the little log home of McDougall's.

At evening the boys and the girls would all gather
To dance and to court 'neath McDougall's roof-tree;
They were wild as the tide that rushes up Solway
When lashed by the tempests that sweep the dark sea:
There Malcolm and Flora and Angus and Katie
With laughter-timed paces came tripping along,
And Pat, whose gay heart had been nursed in Old Erin,
Would link each Scotch reel with a good Irish song,
Down at the dance at McDougall's.

For the night was as day at McDougall's log shanty,
The blaze on the hearth shed its halo around,
While the feet that tripped lightly the reel 'Tullagorum,'
Pattered each measure with 'ooch!' and with bound;
No 'Lancers' nor 'Jerseys' were danced at McDougall's,
Nor the latest waltz-step found a place on the floor,
But reels and strathspeys and the liveliest hornpipes
Shook the room to its centre from fireplace to door,
In the little log house at McDougall's.

Gone now is the light in McDougall's log shanty,
The blaze on the hearth long has sunk into gloom,
And Donald and Janet who dreamed of 'Auld Scotia'
Are dreaming of Heaven in the dust of the tomb.

While the boys and the girls—the 'balachs' and 'calahs'—
Who toiled during day and danced through the night,
Live again in bright dreams of Memory's morning

When their hearts beat to music of life, love and light,
Down at the dance at McDougall's.

Thomas O'Hagan

The Old Brindle Cow

OF all old memories that cluster round my heart,
With their root in my boyhood days,
The quaintest is linked to the old brindle cow
With sly and mysterious ways.
She'd linger round the lot near the old potato patch,
A sentinel by night and by day,
Watching for the hour when all eyes were asleep,
To start on her predatory way.

The old brush fence she would scorn in her course,
With turnips and cabbage just beyond,
And corn that was blooming through the halo of the night—
What a banquet so choice and so fond!
But when the stars of morn were paling in the sky
The old brindle cow would take the cue,
And dressing up her line she'd retreat beyond the fence,
For the old cow knew just what to do.

What breed did you say? Why the very best blood
That could flow in a democratic cow;
No herd-book could tell of the glory in her horns
Or whence came her pedigree or how:
She was Jersey in her milk and Durham in her build,
And Ayrshire when she happened in a row,
But when it came to storming the old 'slash' fence
She was simply the old brindle cow.

It seems but a day since I drove her to the gate
To yield up her rich and creamy prize;
For her theft at midnight hour she would yield a double dower,
With peace of conscience lurking in her eyes.

But she's gone—disappeared with the ripened years of time,
Whose memories my heart enthrall e'en now;
And I never hear a bell tinkling through the forest dell
But I think of that old brindle cow.

Thomas O'Hagan

The Song My Mother Sings

SWEET unto my heart is the song my mother sings
As eventide is brooding on its dark and noiseless wings;
Every note is charged with memory—every memory bright with rays
Of the golden hours of promise in the lap of childhood's days;
The orchard blooms anew and each blossom scents the way,
And I feel again the breath of eve among the new-mown hay;
While through the halls of memory in happy notes there rings
All the life-joy of the past in the song my mother sings.

I have listened to the dreamy notes of Chopin and of Liszt,
As they dripped and drooped about my heart and filled my eyes with mist;
I have wept strong tears of pathos 'neath the spell of Verdi's power,
As I heard the tenor voice of grief from out the donjon tower;
And Gounod's oratorios are full of notes sublime
That stir the heart with rapture through the sacred pulse of time;
But all the music of the past and the wealth that memory brings
Seem as nothing when I listen to the song my mother sings.

It's a song of love and triumph, it's a song of toil and care;
It is filled with chords of pathos and it's set in notes of prayer;
It is bright with dreams and visions of the days that are to be,
And as strong in faith's devotion as the heart-beat of the sea;
It is linked in mystic measure to sweet voices from above,
And is starred with ripest blessing through a mother's sacred love;
Oh, sweet and strong and tender are the memories that it brings,
As I list in joy and rapture to the song my mother sings.

Thomas O'Hagan