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Title: England Over Seas

Author: Lloyd Roberts

Release date: January 24, 2005 [EBook #14782]

Most recently updated: December 19, 2020

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ENGLAND OVER SEAS ***

E-text prepared by Al Haines

ENGLAND OVER SEAS

by

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London
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TO

HOPE

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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 up, 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.

The Madness of Winds

On all the upland pastures the strong winds gallop free,
Trampling down the flowered stalks sleepy in the sun,
Whirl away in blue and gold all their finery,
Till naked crouch the gentle hosts where the winds have run.

Along the rocking hillsides shaggy heads are bent;
Out upon the tawny plains tortured dust leaps high;
The red roof of the sunset is torn away and rent,
And chaos lifts the heavy sea and bends the hollow sky.

The winds are drunk with freedom—the crowded valleys roar;
The madness surges through their veins, and when they gallop out
The black rain follows close behind, the pale sun flees before,
And recklessly across the world goes all the broken rout.

I was striding on the uplands when the host was running mad,
I saw them threshing through the leaves and daisy tops below,
And as their feet came up the hill, my tired heart grew glad—
Till at the music of their throats I knew that I must go.

So the winds are now my brothers, they have joined me to their ranks,
And when their rampant strength wells up and drives them singing forth,
I am with them when they roll the fog across the oily banks,
And tumble out the sleeping bergs that crowd beyond the north.

The woods are drenched with moonlight and every leaf awake;
The little beads of dew sit white on every twig and blade;
A thousand stars are scattered thick beneath the forest lake;
We pass—with only laughter for the havoc we have made.

There's not a wind that brushes the long bright fields of corn,
Or, shrieking, drives the broken wreck beneath a blackened sea,
There's not a wind that draws the rain across the face of morn
That does not rise when I arise and sink again with me.

Young Blood

They took me from the forests and they put me in the town;
They bid me learn the wisdom the wise men have laid down,
To put by my childish ways
And forget my Golden Days,
With my feet upon the ladder that runs up to high renown.

So I would not hear the voices that were calling day and night,
And I would not see the visions that were ever in my sight;
But I mingled with the throngs,
Heard their curses and their songs,
And raised the brimming glass on high to catch the yellow light.

But I was not meant to wander where the wild things never came,
Where the night-time was like day-time and the seasons were the same;
Where the city's sullen roar
Ever surged against my door,
And the only peace was battle and the only goal was fame.

For my blood pulsed hot within me and the prize seemed wondrous small;
And my soul cried out for freedom in a world beyond a wall.
Oh, fame can well be sung
By those no longer young,
By wisdom, age and learning; but youth transcends them all!

So I'll let the spring of life well up and drown the empty quest;
And I'll watch the stars more bright than fame gleam red along the crest;
And taste the driving rain
Between my lips again,
And know that to the blood of youth the open road is best.

With Spring-time in the woodlands will my pulses stir and thrill;
I'll run below the wet young moon where myriad frogs pipe shrill;
I'll forget the world of strife,
Where fame is more than life;
And I'll mate with youth and beauty when the sun is on the hill.

The Homesteader

Mother England, I am coming, cease your calling for a season,
For the plains of wheat need reaping, and the thrasher's at the door.
All these long years I have loved you, but you cannot call it treason
If I loved my shack of shingles and my little baby more.

Now my family have departed—for the good Lord took them early—
And I turn to thee, O England, as a son that seeks his home.
Now younger folk may plough and plant the plains I love so dearly,
Whose acres stretch too wide for feet that can no longer roam.

If the western skies are bluer and the western snows are whiter,
And the flowers of the prairie-lands are bright and honey-sweet,
'Tis the scent of English primrose makes my weary heart beat lighter

As I count the days that part me from your little cobble street.

For the last time come the reapers (you can hear the knives ring cheery
As they pitch the bearded barley in a thousand tents of gold);
For I see the cliffs of Devon bulking dark beyond the prairie,
And hear the skylarks calling to a heart that's growing old.

When the chaff-piles cease their burning and the frost is closing over
All the barren leagues of stubble that my lonely feet have passed,
I shall spike the door and journey towards the Channel lights of Dover—
That England may receive my dreams and bury them at last!

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'll 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!

The Country Goes to Town

The Country walked to Town, and what did she find there?
Not a bird nor flower, the trees forsaken were;
The folk were walking two-and-two in every lane and street—
You scarce could hear your neighbour for the racket of their feet.

She could not see the sun shine for dust about the sky;
She could not hear the winds call, the walls went up so high;
And even when the night came to brush aside the day,
She found about the city they were driving it away.

"Then what have you got here?" the Country asked the Town.
"There's not a green leaf anywhere, the world is bleak and brown,
I haven't seen a red cheek nor heard a woman's laughter;
I'm going back to Bird Land, but won't you follow after?"

The Town rode to the Country, and what did she find there?
Just a lot of emptiness, with flowers everywhere.
The birds were screaming overhead, the sun was on her face,
The fences were untidy, and the brambles a disgrace.

"Then what have you got here?" the Town cried in her scorn.
"I haven't met a four-in-hand nor heard a motor horn.
It'll cost a pretty penny to restore my riding clothes,
While my beauty is nigh ruined for the freckles on my nose."

"What have I got here? Just azure hills and peace,
Green moss and green fern on roads that never cease.
And if my heart grows weary of such pleasuring as these,

There's a baby who comes romping through the nursery of the trees!"

The Trail from Napoli

From Capo di Sorrento, its poppies and its clover,
The headlands of Fossilipo, the wharves of Napoli,
A wide blue trail runs westward to the ocean rim and over
To where there lies a little town with lights along the sea.

Here pink and blue the villas crowd beside the yellow sand,
And sweet and hot, the scented winds puff sultry to the bay,
The shadow of Vesuvius lies gray across the land—
And on my heart a loneliness that calls me far away.

My restless feet are weary of these hills of purple vines,
These crooked groves of olive trees that scrawl the crooked lanes
The walnuts shoulder weakly round the tall Italian pines,
That whisper like the waves of wheat across the yellow plains.

All day beneath the ruins of Donn' Anna gaunt and black,
The boats of fisher-folk go by with song and trailing net;
And dim the cloud of Capri where the red feluccas tack—
But still the belching funnels smirch the trail I can't forget.

Virgil's tomb gapes empty where the oranges are bright,
Above the Roman corridors that goats and beggars tread;
Soft voices and thin music and laughter all the night—
I only see a thousand leagues the Channel lights burn red;

I only hear dear English tongues forever calling me,
Across the high white English cliffs and flowers of the foam;
I only breathe sweet lilac bloom a-blowing out to sea—
A-blowing down the long sea-lanes to lead a lover home!

The Changing Year

Summer, autumn, winter, spring—
Back and forth the seasons swing;
Sun and snows returning ever,
Like the wild geese on the wing.

When the clean sap climbs the tree,
When the strong winds groan and flee—
Dance the daisies on the hill-tops
To the thin tune of the bee.

When the golden noons hang still,
Crimson flames run down the hill,
And the musk-rats in the bayou
Feel the waters growing chill.

Wood-smoke mists the naked moor;
Dead leaves shroud the forest floor;
When the white frosts cross the threshold,
Summer softly shuts the door.

Like cold love and empty pain,
Fades the sun and drifts the rain.
Tips the world and slips the season,
Swinging wide the doors again.

Runners of the Rain

Gaunt and black the naked pines are scrawled across the sky;
The wild wet winds are clinging where the hard peaks lift and soar;
They watch our long gray hosts of rain forever marching by,
While up through all the canyons we send our sullen roar.

From every sodden meadow we've trodden out the sun;
We've ground the pale green stalks of grass
that lifted through the hills;
Across the yelping torrents a thousand feet have run,
Till waters scream in anger and the wide-mouthed valley fills.

Among the moaning spruces we threshed our heedless way;
And out upon the barrens where the lonely spaces hide,
We stamped the miles of mosses and blackened out the day,
And waked the awful silence where all the winds have died.

The stars flamed brave before us and the greater light hung still
When the white smoke of our breath blew up
and drowned the hollow night.
We crushed them out beneath our feet and leapt from hill to hill,
Till east to east the sweep of space was rocking with our flight.

The little walls of man uprose like shields beneath our feet;
We beat upon their hollow cells a million shafts of rain;
Our wild song of freedom was loud in every street,
While down along the slimy wharves the great ships lift and strain.

The dawn pushed pale thin fingers above the flattened sea,
Groping blind white fingers that clawed the shroud of night;
'Till from the straining eddies the pale forms turned to flee,
And a million tongues of madness rose singing through the fight.

Across the quaking marshes we turned and wandered back;
The trapper in the clearing heard the wan thin hosts of rain.
We moved between the steaming trails where all the woods dripped black,
And high among the empty hills we pitched our tents again.

Spring Madness

I stoop and tear the sandals from my feet
While the green fires glimmer in the gloom;
The hot roar of madness
Swells my veins with gladness;
I smell the rotting wood-stuff
And the drift of willow-bloom,
And the moon's wet face
Lifts above the place
Till gaunt and black the shadows are crowding close for room.

The alder thickets brush against my limbs;
The heavy tramp of water shakes the night;
I cross the naked hills,
Where the thin dawn lifts and fills;
All the black woods wail behind me—
They cannot stay my flight
Till the sun's red stain
Dyes the world again
And winds beyond the heavens are dancing in the light.

One Morning when the Rain-Birds Call

The snows have joined the little streams and slid into the sea;
The mountain sides are damp and black and steaming in the sun;

But Spring, who should be with us now, is waiting timidly
For Winter to unbar the gates and let the rivers run.

It matters not how green the grass is lifting through the mold,
How strong the sap is climbing out to every naked bough,
That in the towns the market-stalls are bright with jonquil gold,
And over marsh and meadowland the frogs are fluting now.

For still the waters groan and grind beneath the icy floor,
And still the winds are hungry-cold that leave the valley's mouth.
Expectantly each day we wait to hear the sullen roar.
And see the blind and broken herd retreating to the south.

One morning when the rain-birds call across the singing rills,
And the maple buds like tiny flames shine red among the green,
The ice will burst asunder and go pounding through the hills—
An endless gray procession with the yellow flood between,

Then the Spring will no more linger, but come with joyous shout,
With music in the city squares and laughter down the lane;
The thrush will pipe at twilight to draw the blossoms out,
And the vanguard of the summer host will camp with us again.

Spring's Singing

Spring once more is here—
Joyous, sweet, and clear—
Singing down the leafless aisles
To the budding year.

Her chanting is the thrush
Through the twilight hush,
And the silver tongues of waters
Where the willows blush;

Stir of lifting heads
Over violet beds;
Piping of the first glad robin
Through the greens and reds;

Croak of sullen crows
When the south wind blows,
Sighing in the shaggy spruces
Wet with melted snows;

Whisper of the rain
Down the hills again,
And the heavy feet of waters
Tramping on the plain.

Now the Goddess Spring
Makes the woodlands ring,
Bringing with a hundred voices
Joy to everything.

The Flutes of the Frogs

'Tis not the notes of the homing birds through the first warm April rain,
Or the scarlet buds and the rising green come back to the land again,
That stirs my heart from its winter sleep to pulse to the old refrain;

But when from the miles of bubbling marsh and
the valley's steaming floor,
Shrilling keen with a million flutes the ancient spring-time lore,

I hear the myriad emerald frogs awake in the world once more.

All day when the clouds drive overhead and the shadows run below,
Crossing the wind-swept pasture lots where the thin, red willows glow,
There's not a throat in the joyous host that does not swell and blow.

And all night long to the march of stars the wild mad music thrills,
Voicing the birth of the glad wet spring in a thousand stops and trills,
Till the pale sun lifts through the rosy mists
and floats from the harbour hills.

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.

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?*

A-Fishing

Now is the time for the luring fly
Spring is awake and the waters high,
Hackle and Doctor and Montreal,
Bend to your cast that a king may die.

Armed with a gaff and a clicking reel,
High jack-boots and an empty creel,
A yard of gut, a split bamboo,
Beginner's luck and a fisherman's zeal.

Over the hills at the rise of day,
Through a sea of mist when the world is grey
I hie me down to the river's bend,
Where the shadows gloom and the ripples play.

Then all the length of an afternoon,
The light reel sings to a thrilling tune,
Till the basket sags with the speckled trout,
And I wander home by an April moon.

The Berry Pickers

When summer winds like scented waves bear fluffy flakes
of cruising seeds,
Above the stems of tawny grass and pale white wreaths of flowered weeds,
And berries splash their scarlet stains across the dipping hills of sun,
Their laughter lifts like silver bells and tinkling echoes sweetly run.

Their faces far below the crests of rippling gold and shadowed green,
They hear the dreams of drowsy bees and watch those buccaneers unseen
Cling yellow to the clover masts and trailing ropes of wild blue pea,
And breathe the brine of daisy froth that drifts
between the walls of sea.

Their fingers pluck the glowing fruit, their lips and cheeks
are smeared and dyed;
Their snowy bonnets brush the grass like lifting top-sails on a tide;
And when their little pails brim red and rosy hands will hold no more,
They steer long shadows down the waves that float
their tired feet to shore.

The Wood Trail

Down between the branches drops a low, soft wind.
Where the narrow trail begins there start I.
Yellow sun and shadow are spinning gold behind,
Long brakes are clutching as my knees brush by.

Hidden glades are pink with the twin linnaea,
Sweet with scented fronds and the warm, wet fern;
Flute the far-off rain-birds sad and clear,
Flash the pigeon blossoms at each sharp turn.

Pungent breathe the balsams by the stream's low banks;
Rotting wood and violets lie side by side;
Glow the scarlet fungus through the alder ranks,
Burning like a light on a still, green tide.

Hilltops bid me linger where the winds run cool;
Hollows hold my feet in the deep, black loam,
But marking purple shadows in the purring pool,
I lift my silent feet on the long trail home.

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 winds black,
He hears the silence shattered by the laughter of the loon.

From Exile

Call to me, call to me, fields of poppied wheat!
Purple thistles by the road call me to return!
Now a thousand shriller throats echo down the street,
And I cannot hear the wind camping in the fern.

Little leaves beside the trail dance your way to town,
Till you find your brother here who remembers yet;
For though a river runs between and the bridge is down,
I've a heart that's roaming and a soul that won't forget.

A sun squats on the house-tops, but his face is hard and dry;
A rain walks up and down the streets, but her voice is harsh—
Sunlight is a different thing where the swallows fly,
And rain-tongues sing with sweeter voice when they're on the marsh.

Once a thousand bending blades stoop to let me pass,
When I sped barefooted through your crowding lines—
Whisper to me gently in the language of the grass,
How I watched the crows of night nest among the pines.

Still the golden pollen smokes, silver runs the rain,
Still the timid mists creep out when the sun lies down—
Oh, I am weary waiting to return to you again,
So take a pale, familiar face out beyond the town.

The Warm Green Sea

The winds run warm on the waves of the grass
that lifts like a scented sea.
No sound of the surf, no sob of the tides;
but the drone of the drowsy bee
Is drawing me out from the purple shades
to wade in the daffodils,
Where the long green billows go drifting by
to lap the feet of the hills.

Like the snow-white spume on the shattered waves
the daisies twist and cream,
Over their heads in a painted mist the myriad
insects gleam.
And the still sea sways in the sun's soft breath
and breaks on the green, green sand,
Till I bare my limbs to the noiseless surf
and wade from the silent land.

The pale stalks eddy from knee to waist and rise
to my sun-flecked face;
Cool on my lips is the daisy foam and the spray
of the Queen Anne's lace.
With half-shut eyes and outstretched arms I swim
through the scented heat.
Oh, never were broad sea winds so warm,

nor Southern seas so sweet?

There's Music in My Heart To-day

There's music in my heart to-day;
The Master-hand is on the keys,
Calling me up to the windy hills
And down to the purple seas.

Let Time draw back when I hear that tune—
Old to the soul when the stars were new—
And swing the doors to the four great winds,
That my feet may wander through.

North or South, and East or West;
Over the rim with the bellied sails,
From the mountain's feet to the empty plains,
Or down the silent trails—

It matters not which door you choose;
The same clear tune blows through them all,
Though one harp leaps to the grind of seas
And one to the rain-bird's call.

However you hide in the city's din
And drown your ears with its siren songs,
Some day steal in those thin, wild notes,
And you leave the foolish throngs.

God grant that the day will find me not
When the tune shall mellow and thrill in vain—
So long as the plains are red with sun,
And the woods are black with rain.

August on the River

The swooning heat of August
Swims along the valley's bed.
The tall reeds burn and blacken,
While the gray elm droops its head,
And the smoky sun above the hills is glaring
hot and red.

Along the shrinking river,
Where the salmon-nets hang brown,
Piles the driftwood of the freshets,
And the naked logs move down
To the clanking chains and shrieking saws
of the mills above the town.

Outside the booms of cedar,
The fish-hawks drop at noon;
When night comes trailing up the stars,
We hear the ghostly loon;
And watch the herons swing their flight
against the crimson moon.

The Wind Tongues

I wandered in the woodlands where the red glades begin,
And a wind in every tree-top was talking small and thin:

"The dead hand of Winter is knocking at the door,
And the white froth of flowers will float no more.

"The gray ranks of grasses are bared of their bees,
Their voices sound like falling spume between the leaden seas;
We hear beyond the alders where the long swamps lie
The creak of broken rushes and the last snipe's cry."

And I marked the poignant sorrow in each high tree tongue,
Conferring there above me where the blue moss hung;
Till anguish grew from far away and broke in sullen roar,
As when a smoking surf meets a rock-ribbed shore.

Musk-Rats

When the mists move down from the barren hill,
To roll where the waters are black and chill,
When the moonlight gleams on the lily-pads
And even the winds are still.

The musk-rats slip from the clammy bank,
Where the tangled reeds are long and dank,
Where the dew lies white on the iris bed,
And the rushes stand in rank.

Their black heads furrow the stagnant stream,
While the water breaks in a silver gleam,
Till it joins the reeds where the night lies hid
And the purple herons dream.

Through the mist and the moon's mysterious light
They hear the honking geese take flight,
Threshing up from the arrow-heads
As the lonely East grows white.

The Kill

Black and white the face of night,
And roar the rapids to the moon;
Dust of stars beyond the bars,
And mirthless laughter of the loon.

Swirling blades through inky shades,
And ghostly shadows slipping by;
Clogging beds of arrowheads,
And jagging spruce tops in the sky,

Rasping groans of birchen cones
Re-answering from shore to shore;
Through the hush the snapping brush—
Then silence, and the stars once more.

Mutters slow, appealing, low,
The throaty pleading of the bark;
Roar of might that rends the night—
His body bulking through the dark.

Then the white, cruel tongue of light
Leaps stinging in his startled eyes;
Red and black the night falls back,
The rocking echo drifts and dies.

On the Marshes

Out on the marsh in the misty rain,
The air is full of the harsh refrain;
The long swamps echo the beat of wings;
The birds are back in the reeds again.

Down from the north they wing their way.
Out of the east they cross the bay.
From north and east they're steering home
To the inland ponds at the close of day.

Hid in the sea of reeds we lie,
And watch the wild geese driving by;
And listen to the plover's piping,—
The gray snipe's thin and lonely cry.

All day over the tangled mass,
The marsh-birds wheel and scream and pass.
The smoke hangs white in the broken rice.
The feathers drift in the water-grass.

The Scarlet Trails

Crimson and gold in the paling sky;
The rampikes black where they tower on high,—
And we follow the trails in the early dawn
Through the glades where the white frosts lie.

Down where the flaming maples meet;
Where the leaves are blood before our feet
We follow the lure of the twisting paths
While the air tastes thin and sweet

Leggings and jackets are drenched with dew
The long twin barrels are cold and blue;
But the glow of the Autumn burns in our veins,
And our eyes and hands are true.

Where the sun drifts down from overhead
(Tangled gleams in the scarlet bed),
Rush of wings through the forest aisle—
And the leaves are a brighter red.

Loud drum the cocks in the thickets nigh;
Gray is the smoke where the ruffed grouse die.
There's blackened shell in the trampled fern
When the white moon swims the sky.

At the Year's End

The plowed field sinks in the drifting snows.
The last gray feather to southward goes.
Rattle the reeds in the frozen swamp,
When the lonely north-wind blows.

The harrow and sickle are laid away.
The barns are warm with the scent of hay;
While Death stalks free in the silent world,
Through the gloom of a winter's day.

In the creeping night the black winds cry.
The daylight comes like a stifled sigh.
The hearths gleam red, while the long smoke

Crawls up to a grayer sky.

Winter Winds

Like a hard cruel lash the long lean winds
are laid on the back of the land,
Curling over the breast of the hills and cutting
the feet of the plain,
Till the naked limbs of the forest host cringe
at the lift of the hand,
And the white-ribbed waves on the granite shore
moan and sob in their pain.

Never a sail on that sharp straight line
that marks the steel of the sky;
Never a wing flees in from death to crouch
in the rattling reeds;
In the shaggy heads of the black coast pines
the frozen spume drives high;
And even the hand of the leering sun lies cold
on the tattered weeds.

A month ago and the warm winds ran over the stalks
of gold,
With the grass-heads wet in the morning mists
and the daisies topped with bees;
And now the last of the year lies dead,
the world walks bent, and old,
And only the bitter lash of the wind sweeps
in from the iron seas.

Dead Days

The haws cling to the thorn,
Shrivelled and red;
The limbs long dead
Clutch at a leaf long torn—
It taps all day on the spikes
As the spume licks over the dikes.

The reeds creak in the dawn
By the dead pond;
Dry tongues respond
From grasses yellow and drawn;
And ever scourged by the wind,
The alders clatter and grind.

Vines furred with the frost
String from the wall:
Their bones recall
Summer leaves long lost,
Cricket and fly and bee
And their low melody.

No bird wails to the waste
Of scentless snow,
Where streaming low
The steel-blue shadows haste;
But through the hard night
The dead moon takes flight

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.

Flowers of the Sky

The snow was four feet deep beyond my door.
(I never knew the cold so cruel before.)
The frost was white as death, and in the wood
Shattered the aching aisles of solitude.
Here lay the winter wrapped about with gloom;
But overhead God's flowers were in bloom!

At dawn, above the ink-black trunks and night,
A pale pink petal drifted with the light;
And presently the gates of sun swung wide,
And through them flowed a crimson, scented tide:
Roses that bloomed and bloomed again and died,
Staining the lonely hills on either side.

And scarce were God's fields swept of this warm glow,
When purest gold fell softly to the snow—
Petals of gold from where there rolled on high
A sea of tulips lapping all the sky.
The blossoms clung so close I could not see
One nook of empty blue where more could be.

Snow and the winds that eat into the bone,
Here where the sun lies cold and waters moan.
God's pastures still are bearing for His feet
A million purple blooms all dewy sweet:

Violets and asters, hyacinths and phlox,
And streaming shafts of starry hollyhocks.

Late in the day when I crawled up the hills,
Dogged by the cold that tortures ere it kills;
I needs must stand and stare beyond the rim,
And watch the garden once more laid for Him;
Until the moon's great dripping calyx came,
And all the myriad star-buds burst in flame.

Then bitter envy gnawed upon my heart.
Flowers in Heaven, and I stand here apart!
"O God," I cried, "take me from this place,
Where I may feel the warm grass brush my face!"
Then 'cross the snow a whisper caught my ear:
"Peace, for the Spring—the Spring once more is here."

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