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Joyce Kilmer**

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# **TREES AND OTHER POEMS**

**by Joyce Kilmer**

[Alfred Joyce Kilmer, American  
(New Jersey & New York) Poet — 1886-1918.]

**Edition of 1914.**

[A number of these poems originally appeared in various periodicals.]

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## **TREES AND OTHER POEMS**

*"Mine is no horse with wings, to gain  
The region of the Spheral chime;  
He does but drag a rumbling wain,  
Cheered by the coupled bells of rhyme."*

*Coventry Patmore*

**To My Mother**

Gentlest of critics, does your memory hold  
(I know it does) a record of the days  
When I, a schoolboy, earned your generous praise  
For halting verse and stories crudely told?  
Over these childish scrawls the years have rolled,  
They might not know the world's unfriendly gaze;  
But still your smile shines down familiar ways,  
Touches my words and turns their dross to gold.

More dear to-day than in that vanished time  
Comes your high praise to make me proud and strong.  
In my poor notes you hear Love's splendid chime,  
So unto you does this, my work belong.  
Take, then, a little gift of fragile rhyme:  
Your heart will change it to authentic song.

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## TREES AND OTHER POEMS

### The Twelve-Forty-Five

(For Edward J. Wheeler)

Within the Jersey City shed  
The engine coughs and shakes its head,  
The smoke, a plume of red and white,  
Waves madly in the face of night.  
And now the grave incurious stars  
Gleam on the groaning hurrying cars.  
Against the kind and awful reign  
Of darkness, this our angry train,  
A noisy little rebel, pouts  
Its brief defiance, flames and shouts –  
And passes on, and leaves no trace.  
For darkness holds its ancient place,  
Serene and absolute, the king  
Unchanged, of every living thing.  
The houses lie obscure and still  
In Rutherford and Carlton Hill.  
Our lamps intensify the dark  
Of slumbering Passaic Park.  
And quiet holds the weary feet  
That daily tramp through Prospect Street.  
What though we clang and clank and roar  
Through all Passaic's streets? No door  
Will open, not an eye will see  
Who this loud vagabond may be.  
Upon my crimson cushioned seat,  
In manufactured light and heat,  
I feel unnatural and mean.  
Outside the towns are cool and clean;  
Curtained awhile from sound and sight  
They take God's gracious gift of night.  
The stars are watchful over them.  
On Clifton as on Bethlehem  
The angels, leaning down the sky,  
Shed peace and gentle dreams. And I –  
I ride, I blasphemously ride  
Through all the silent countryside.  
The engine's shriek, the headlight's glare,  
Pollute the still nocturnal air.  
The cottages of Lake View sigh  
And sleeping, frown as we pass by.  
Why, even strident Paterson  
Rests quietly as any nun.  
Her foolish warring children keep  
The grateful armistice of sleep.  
For what tremendous errand's sake  
Are we so blatantly awake?  
What precious secret is our freight?  
What king must be abroad so late?  
Perhaps Death roams the hills to-night  
And we rush forth to give him fight.  
Or else, perhaps, we speed his way  
To some remote unthinking prey.  
Perhaps a woman writhes in pain  
And listens – listens for the train!  
The train, that like an angel sings,  
The train, with healing on its wings.  
Now "Hawthorne!" the conductor cries.  
My neighbor starts and rubs his eyes.  
He hurries yawning through the car  
And steps out where the houses are.  
This is the reason of our quest!  
Not wantonly we break the rest  
Of town and village, nor do we  
Lightly profane night's sanctity.  
What Love commands the train fulfills,  
And beautiful upon the hills  
Are these our feet of burnished steel.  
Subtly and certainly I feel  
That Glen Rock welcomes us to her  
And silent Ridgewood seems to stir

*And smile, because she knows the train  
Has brought her children back again.  
We carry people home – and so  
God speeds us, wheresoe'er we go.  
Hohokus, Waldwick, Allendale  
Lift sleepy heads to give us hail.  
In Ramsey, Mahwah, Suffern stand  
Houses that wistfully demand  
A father – son – some human thing  
That this, the midnight train, may bring.  
The trains that travel in the day  
They hurry folks to work or play.  
The midnight train is slow and old  
But of it let this thing be told,  
To its high honor be it said  
It carries people home to bed.  
My cottage lamp shines white and clear.  
God bless the train that brought me here.*

## Pennies

*A few long-hoarded pennies in his hand  
Behold him stand;  
A kilted Hedonist, perplexed and sad.  
The joy that once he had,  
The first delight of ownership is fled.  
He bows his little head.  
Ah, cruel Time, to kill  
That splendid thrill!*

*Then in his tear-dimmed eyes  
New lights arise.  
He drops his treasured pennies on the ground,  
They roll and bound  
And scattered, rest.  
Now with what zest  
He runs to find his errant wealth again!*

*So unto men  
Doth God, depriving that He may bestow.  
Fame, health and money go,  
But that they may, new found, be newly sweet.  
Yea, at His feet  
Sit, waiting us, to their concealment bid,  
All they, our lovers, whom His Love hath hid.*

*Lo, comfort blooms on pain, and peace on strife,  
And gain on loss.  
What is the key to Everlasting Life?  
A blood-stained Cross.*

## Trees

*(For Mrs. Henry Mills Alden)*

*I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.*

*A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;*

*A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;*

*A tree that may in Summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;*

*Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.*

*Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.*

## Stars

*(For the Rev. James J. Daly, S. J.)*

*Bright stars, yellow stars, flashing through the air,  
Are you errant strands of Lady Mary's hair?  
As she slits the cloudy veil and bends down through,  
Do you fall across her cheeks and over heaven too?*

*Gay stars, little stars, you are little eyes,  
Eyes of baby angels playing in the skies.  
Now and then a winged child turns his merry face  
Down toward the spinning world – what a funny place!*

*Jesus Christ came from the Cross (Christ receive my soul!)  
In each perfect hand and foot there was a bloody hole.  
Four great iron spikes there were, red and never dry,  
Michael plucked them from the Cross and set them in the sky.*

*Christ's Troop, Mary's Guard, God's own men,  
Draw your swords and strike at Hell and strike again.  
Every steel-born spark that flies where God's battles are,  
Flashes past the face of God, and is a star.*

## Old Poets

*(For Robert Cortez Holliday)*

*If I should live in a forest  
And sleep underneath a tree,  
No grove of impudent saplings  
Would make a home for me.*

*I'd go where the old oaks gather,  
Serene and good and strong,  
And they would not sigh and tremble  
And vex me with a song.*

*The pleasantest sort of poet  
Is the poet who's old and wise,  
With an old white beard and wrinkles  
About his kind old eyes.*

*For these young flippergibbets  
A-rhyming their hours away  
They won't be still like honest men  
And listen to what you say.*

*The young poet screams forever  
About his sex and his soul;  
But the old man listens, and smokes his pipe,  
And polishes its bowl.*

*There should be a club for poets  
Who have come to seventy year.  
They should sit in a great hall drinking  
Red wine and golden beer.*

*They would shuffle in of an evening,  
Each one to his cushioned seat,  
And there would be mellow talking  
And silence rich and sweet.*

*There is no peace to be taken  
With poets who are young,  
For they worry about the wars to be fought  
And the songs that must be sung.*

*But the old man knows that he's in his chair  
And that God's on His throne in the sky.  
So he sits by the fire in comfort  
And he lets the world spin by.*

## Delicatessen

*Why is that wanton gossip Fame  
So dumb about this man's affairs?  
Why do we titter at his name  
Who come to buy his curious wares?*

*Here is a shop of wonderment.  
From every land has come a prize;  
Rich spices from the Orient,  
And fruit that knew Italian skies,*

*And figs that ripened by the sea  
In Smyrna, nuts from hot Brazil,  
Strange pungent meats from Germany,  
And currants from a Grecian hill.*

*He is the lord of goodly things  
That make the poor man's table gay,  
Yet of his worth no minstrel sings  
And on his tomb there is no bay.*

*Perhaps he lives and dies unpraised,  
This trafficker in humble sweets,  
Because his little shops are raised  
By thousands in the city streets.*

*Yet stars in greater numbers shine,  
And violets in millions grow,  
And they in many a golden line  
Are sung, as every child must know.*

*Perhaps Fame thinks his worried eyes,  
His wrinkled, shrewd, pathetic face,  
His shop, and all he sells and buys  
Are desperately commonplace.*

*Well, it is true he has no sword  
To dangle at his booted knees.  
He leans across a slab of board,  
And draws his knife and slices cheese.*

*He never heard of chivalry,  
He longs for no heroic times;  
He thinks of pickles, olives, tea,  
And dollars, nickles, cents and dimes.*

*His world has narrow walls, it seems;  
By counters is his soul confined;  
His wares are all his hopes and dreams,  
They are the fabric of his mind.*

*Yet – in a room above the store  
There is a woman – and a child  
Pattered just now across the floor;  
The shopman looked at him and smiled.*

*For, once he thrilled with high romance  
And tuned to love his eager voice.  
Like any cavalier of France  
He wooed the maiden of his choice.*

*And now deep in his weary heart  
Are sacred flames that whitely burn.  
He has of Heaven's grace a part  
Who loves, who is beloved in turn.*

*And when the long day's work is done,  
(How slow the leaden minutes ran!)  
Home, with his wife and little son,  
He is no huckster, but a man!*

*And there are those who grasp his hand,  
Who drink with him and wish him well.  
O in no drear and lonely land  
Shall he who honors friendship dwell.*

*And in his little shop, who knows  
What bitter games of war are played?  
Why, daily on each corner grows  
A foe to rob him of his trade.*

*He fights, and for his fireside's sake;  
He fights for clothing and for bread:  
The lances of his foemen make  
A steely halo round his head.*

*He decks his window artfully,  
He haggles over paltry sums.  
In this strange field his war must be  
And by such blows his triumph comes.*

*What if no trumpet sounds to call  
His armed legions to his side?  
What if, to no ancestral hall  
He comes in all a victor's pride?*

*The scene shall never fit the deed.  
Grotesquely wonders come to pass.  
The fool shall mount an Arab steed  
And Jesus ride upon an ass.*

*This man has home and child and wife  
And battle set for every day;  
This man has God and love and life;  
These stand, all else shall pass away.*

*O Carpenter of Nazareth,  
Whose mother was a village maid,  
Shall we, Thy children, blow our breath  
In scorn on any humble trade?*

*Have pity on our foolishness  
And give us eyes, that we may see  
Beneath the shopman's clumsy dress  
The splendor of humanity!*

## Servant Girl and Grocer's Boy

*Her lips' remark was: "Oh, you kid!"  
Her soul spoke thus (I know it did):*

*"O king of realms of endless joy,  
My own, my golden grocer's boy,*

*I am a princess forced to dwell  
Within a lonely kitchen cell,*

*While you go dashing through the land  
With loveliness on every hand.*

*Your whistle strikes my eager ears  
Like music of the choiring spheres.*

*The mighty earth grows faint and reels  
Beneath your thundering wagon wheels.*

*How keenly, perilously sweet  
To cling upon that swaying seat!*

*How happy she who by your side  
May share the splendors of that ride!*

*Ah, if you will not take my hand  
And bear me off across the land,*

*Then, traveller from Arcady,  
Remain awhile and comfort me.*

*What other maiden can you find  
So young and delicate and kind?"*

*Her lips' remark was: "Oh, you kid!"  
Her soul spoke thus (I know it did).*

## Wealth

*(For Aline)*

*From what old ballad, or from what rich frame  
Did you descend to glorify the earth?  
Was it from Chaucer's singing book you came?  
Or did Watteau's small brushes give you birth?*

*Nothing so exquisite as that slight hand  
Could Raphael or Leonardo trace.  
Nor could the poets know in Fairyland  
The changing wonder of your lyric face.*

*I would possess a host of lovely things,  
But I am poor and such joys may not be.  
So God who lifts the poor and humbles kings  
Sent loveliness itself to dwell with me.*

## Martin

*When I am tired of earnest men,  
Intense and keen and sharp and clever,  
Pursuing fame with brush or pen  
Or counting metal disks forever,  
Then from the halls of Shadowland*

*Beyond the trackless purple sea  
Old Martin's ghost comes back to stand  
Beside my desk and talk to me.*

*Still on his delicate pale face  
A quizzical thin smile is showing,  
His cheeks are wrinkled like fine lace,  
His kind blue eyes are gay and glowing.  
He wears a brilliant-hued cravat,  
A suit to match his soft grey hair,  
A rakish stick, a knowing hat,  
A manner blithe and debonair.*

*How good that he who always knew  
That being lovely was a duty,  
Should have gold halls to wander through  
And should himself inhabit beauty.  
How like his old unselfish way  
To leave those halls of splendid mirth  
And comfort those condemned to stay  
Upon the dull and sombre earth.*

*Some people ask: "What cruel chance  
Made Martin's life so sad a story?"  
Martin? Why, he exhaled romance,  
And wore an overcoat of glory.  
A fleck of sunlight in the street,  
A horse, a book, a girl who smiled,  
Such visions made each moment sweet  
For this receptive ancient child.*

*Because it was old Martin's lot  
To be, not make, a decoration,  
Shall we then scorn him, having not  
His genius of appreciation?  
Rich joy and love he got and gave;  
His heart was merry as his dress;  
Pile laurel wreaths upon his grave  
Who did not gain, but was, success!*

## **The Apartment House**

*Severe against the pleasant arc of sky  
The great stone box is cruelly displayed.  
The street becomes more dreary from its shade,  
And vagrant breezes touch its walls and die.  
Here sullen convicts in their chains might lie,  
Or slaves toil dumbly at some dreary trade.  
How worse than folly is their labor made  
Who cleft the rocks that this might rise on high!*

*Yet, as I look, I see a woman's face  
Gleam from a window far above the street.  
This is a house of homes, a sacred place,  
By human passion made divinely sweet.  
How all the building thrills with sudden grace  
Beneath the magic of Love's golden feet!*

## **As Winds That Blow Against A Star**

*(For Aline)*

*Now by what whim of wanton chance  
Do radiant eyes know sombre days?  
And feet that shod in light should dance  
Walk weary and laborious ways?*

*But rays from Heaven, white and whole,  
May penetrate the gloom of earth;  
And tears but nourish, in your soul,  
The glory of celestial mirth.*

*The darts of toil and sorrow, sent  
Against your peaceful beauty, are  
As foolish and as impotent  
As winds that blow against a star.*



# St. Laurence

*Within the broken Vatican  
The murdered Pope is lying dead.  
The soldiers of Valerian  
Their evil hands are wet and red.*

*Unarmed, unmoved, St. Laurence waits,  
His cassock is his only mail.  
The troops of Hell have burst the gates,  
But Christ is Lord, He shall prevail.*

*They have encompassed him with steel,  
They spit upon his gentle face,  
He smiles and bleeds, nor will reveal  
The Church's hidden treasure-place.*

*Ah, faithful steward, worthy knight,  
Well hast thou done. Behold thy fee!  
Since thou hast fought the goodly fight  
A martyr's death is fixed for thee.*

*St. Laurence, pray for us to bear  
The faith which glorifies thy name.  
St. Laurence, pray for us to share  
The wounds of Love's consuming flame.*

## To A Young Poet Who Killed Himself

*When you had played with life a space  
And made it drink and lust and sing,  
You flung it back into God's face  
And thought you did a noble thing.  
"Lo, I have lived and loved," you said,  
"And sung to fools too dull to hear me.  
Now for a cool and grassy bed  
With violets in blossom near me."*

*Well, rest is good for weary feet,  
Although they ran for no great prize;  
And violets are very sweet,  
Although their roots are in your eyes.  
But hark to what the earthworms say  
Who share with you your muddy haven:  
"The fight was on – you ran away.  
You are a coward and a craven.*

*"The rug is ruined where you bled;  
It was a dirty way to die!  
To put a bullet through your head  
And make a silly woman cry!  
You could not vex the merry stars  
Nor make them heed you, dead or living.  
Not all your puny anger mars  
God's irresistible forgiving.*

*"Yes, God forgives and men forget,  
And you're forgiven and forgotten.  
You might be gaily sinning yet  
And quick and fresh instead of rotten.  
And when you think of love and fame  
And all that might have come to pass,  
Then don't you feel a little shame?  
And don't you think you were an ass?"*

## Memorial Day

*"Dulce et decorum est"*

*The bugle echoes shrill and sweet,  
But not of war it sings to-day.  
The road is rhythmic with the feet  
Of men-at-arms who come to pray.*

*The roses blossom white and red  
On tombs where weary soldiers lie;  
Flags wave above the honored dead  
And martial music cleaves the sky.*

*Above their wreath-strewn graves we kneel,*

*They kept the faith and fought the fight.  
Through flying lead and crimson steel  
They plunged for Freedom and the Right.*

*May we, their grateful children, learn  
Their strength, who lie beneath this sod,  
Who went through fire and death to earn  
At last the accolade of God.*

*In shining rank on rank arrayed  
They march, the legions of the Lord;  
He is their Captain unafraid,  
The Prince of Peace . . . Who brought a sword.*

## The Rosary

*Not on the lute, nor harp of many strings  
Shall all men praise the Master of all song.  
Our life is brief, one saith, and art is long;  
And skilled must be the laureates of kings.  
Silent, O lips that utter foolish things!  
Rest, awkward fingers striking all notes wrong!  
How from your toil shall issue, white and strong,  
Music like that God's chosen poet sings?*

*There is one harp that any hand can play,  
And from its strings what harmonies arise!  
There is one song that any mouth can say, –  
A song that lingers when all singing dies.  
When on their beads our Mother's children pray  
Immortal music charms the grateful skies.*

## Vision

*(For Aline)*

*Homer, they tell us, was blind and could not see the beautiful faces  
Looking up into his own and reflecting the joy of his dream,  
Yet did he seem  
Gifted with eyes that could follow the gods to their holiest places.*

*I have no vision of gods, not of Eros with love-arrows laden,  
Jupiter thundering death or of Juno his white-breasted queen,  
Yet have I seen  
All of the joy of the world in the innocent heart of a maiden.*

## To Certain Poets

*Now is the rhymer's honest trade  
A thing for scornful laughter made.*

*The merchant's sneer, the clerk's disdain,  
These are the burden of our pain.*

*Because of you did this befall,  
You brought this shame upon us all.*

*You little poets mincing there  
With women's hearts and women's hair!*

*How sick Dan Chaucer's ghost must be  
To hear you lisp of "Poesie"!*

*A heavy-handed blow, I think,  
Would make your veins drip scented ink.*

*You strut and smirk your little while  
So mildly, delicately vile!*

*Your tiny voices mock God's wrath,  
You snails that crawl along His path!*

*Why, what has God or man to do  
With wet, amorphous things like you?*

*This thing alone you have achieved:  
Because of you, it is believed*

*That all who earn their bread by rhyme  
Are like yourselves, exuding slime.*

*Oh, cease to write, for very shame,  
Ere all men spit upon our name!*

*Take up your needles, drop your pen,  
And leave the poet's craft to men!*

## Love's Lantern

*(For Aline)*

*Because the road was steep and long  
And through a dark and lonely land,  
God set upon my lips a song  
And put a lantern in my hand.*

*Through miles on weary miles of night  
That stretch relentless in my way  
My lantern burns serene and white,  
An unexhausted cup of day.*

*O golden lights and lights like wine,  
How dim your boasted splendors are.  
Behold this little lamp of mine;  
It is more starlike than a star!*

## St. Alexis

*Patron of Beggars*

*We who beg for bread as we daily tread  
Country lane and city street,  
Let us kneel and pray on the broad highway  
To the saint with the vagrant feet.  
Our altar light is a buttercup bright,  
And our shrine is a bank of sod,  
But still we share St. Alexis' care,  
The Vagabond of God.*

*They gave him a home in purple Rome  
And a princess for his bride,  
But he rowed away on his wedding day  
Down the Tiber's rushing tide.  
And he came to land on the Asian strand  
Where the heathen people dwell;  
As a beggar he strayed and he preached and prayed  
And he saved their souls from hell.*

*Bowed with years and pain he came back again  
To his father's dwelling place.  
There was none to see who this tramp might be,  
For they knew not his bearded face.  
But his father said, "Give him drink and bread  
And a couch underneath the stair."  
So Alexis crept to his hole and slept.  
But he might not linger there.*

*For when night came down on the seven-hilled town,  
And the emperor hurried in,  
Saying, "Lo, I hear that a saint is near  
Who will cleanse us of our sin,"  
Then they looked in vain where the saint had lain,  
For his soul had fled afar,  
From his fleshly home he had gone to roam  
Where the gold-paved highways are.*

*We who beg for bread as we daily tread  
Country lane and city street,  
Let us kneel and pray on the broad highway  
To the saint with the vagrant feet.  
Our altar light is a buttercup bright,  
And our shrine is a bank of sod,  
But still we share St. Alexis' care,  
The Vagabond of God!*

## Folly

*(For A. K. K.)*

*What distant mountains thrill and glow  
Beneath our Lady Folly's tread?  
Why has she left us, wise in woe,  
Shrewd, practical, uncomforted?  
We cannot love or dream or sing,  
We are too cynical to pray,  
There is no joy in anything  
Since Lady Folly went away.*

*Many a knight and gentle maid,  
Whose glory shines from years gone by,  
Through ignorance was unafraid  
And as a fool knew how to die.  
Saint Folly rode beside Jehanne  
And broke the ranks of Hell with her,  
And Folly's smile shone brightly on  
Christ's plaything, Brother Juniper.*

*Our minds are troubled and defiled  
By study in a weary school.  
O for the folly of the child!  
The ready courage of the fool!  
Lord, crush our knowledge utterly  
And make us humble, simple men;  
And cleansed of wisdom, let us see  
Our Lady Folly's face again.*

## Madness

*(For Sara Teasdale)*

*The lonely farm, the crowded street,  
The palace and the slum,  
Give welcome to my silent feet  
As, bearing gifts, I come.*

*Last night a beggar crouched alone,  
A ragged helpless thing;  
I set him on a moonbeam throne –  
Today he is a king.*

*Last night a king in orb and crown  
Held court with splendid cheer;  
Today he tears his purple gown  
And moans and shrieks in fear.*

*Not iron bars, nor flashing spears,  
Not land, nor sky, nor sea,  
Nor love's artillery of tears  
Can keep mine own from me.*

*Serene, unchanging, ever fair,  
I smile with secret mirth  
And in a net of mine own hair  
I swing the captive earth.*

## Poets

*Vain is the chiming of forgotten bells  
That the wind sways above a ruined shrine.  
Vainer his voice in whom no longer dwells  
Hunger that craves immortal Bread and Wine.*

*Light songs we breathe that perish with our breath  
Out of our lips that have not kissed the rod.  
They shall not live who have not tasted death.  
They only sing who are struck dumb by God.*

# Citizen of the World

*No longer of Him be it said  
"He hath no place to lay His head."*

*In every land a constant lamp  
Flames by His small and mighty camp.*

*There is no strange and distant place  
That is not gladdened by His face.*

*And every nation kneels to hail  
The Splendour shining through Its veil.*

*Cloistered beside the shouting street,  
Silent, He calls me to His feet.*

*Imprisoned for His love of me  
He makes my spirit greatly free.*

*And through my lips that uttered sin  
The King of Glory enters in.*

## To a Blackbird and His Mate Who Died in the Spring

*(For Kenton)*

*An iron hand has stilled the throats  
That throbbed with loud and rhythmic glee  
And dammed the flood of silver notes  
That drenched the world in melody.  
The blossomy apple boughs are yearning  
For their wild choristers' returning,  
But no swift wings flash through the tree.*

*Ye that were glad and fleet and strong,  
Shall Silence take you in her net?  
And shall Death quell that radiant song  
Whose echo thrills the meadow yet?  
Burst the frail web about you clinging  
And charm Death's cruel heart with singing  
Till with strange tears his eyes are wet.*

*The scented morning of the year  
Is old and stale now ye are gone.  
No friendly songs the children hear  
Among the bushes on the lawn.  
When babies wander out a-Maying  
Will ye, their bards, afar be straying?  
Unhymned by you, what is the dawn?*

*Nay, since ye loved ye cannot die.  
Above the stars is set your nest.  
Through Heaven's fields ye sing and fly  
And in the trees of Heaven rest.  
And little children in their dreaming  
Shall see your soft black plumage gleaming  
And smile, by your clear music blest.*

## The Fourth Shepherd

*(For Thomas Walsh)*

*I*

*On nights like this the huddled sheep  
Are like white clouds upon the grass,  
And merry herdsmen guard their sleep  
And chat and watch the big stars pass.*

*It is a pleasant thing to lie  
Upon the meadow on the hill  
With kindly fellowship near by  
Of sheep and men of gentle will.*

*I lean upon my broken crook  
And dream of sheep and grass and men –  
O shameful eyes that cannot look  
On any honest thing again!*

*On bloody feet I clambered down  
And fled the wages of my sin,  
I am the leavings of the town,  
And meanly serve its meanest inn.*

*I tramp the courtyard stones in grief,  
While sleep takes man and beast to her.  
And every cloud is calling "Thief!"  
And every star calls "Murderer!"*

II

*The hand of God is sure and strong,  
Nor shall a man forever flee  
The bitter punishment of wrong.  
The wrath of God is over me!*

*With ashen bread and wine of tears  
Shall I be solaced in my pain.  
I wear through black and endless years  
Upon my brow the mark of Cain.*

III

*Poor vagabond, so old and mild,  
Will they not keep him for a night?  
And She, a woman great with child,  
So frail and pitiful and white.*

*Good people, since the tavern door  
Is shut to you, come here instead.  
See, I have cleansed my stable floor  
And piled fresh hay to make a bed.*

*Here is some milk and oaten cake.  
Lie down and sleep and rest you fair,  
Nor fear, O simple folk, to take  
The bounty of a child of care.*

IV

*On nights like this the huddled sheep –  
I never saw a night so fair.  
How huge the sky is, and how deep!  
And how the planets flash and glare!*

*At dawn beside my drowsy flock  
What winged music I have heard!  
But now the clouds with singing rock  
As if the sky were turning bird.*

*O blinding Light, O blinding Light!  
Burn through my heart with sweetest pain.  
O flaming Song, most loudly bright,  
Consume away my deadly stain!*

V

*The stable glows against the sky,  
And who are these that throng the way?  
My three old comrades hasten by  
And shining angels kneel and pray.*

*The door swings wide – I cannot go –  
I must and yet I dare not see.  
Lord, who am I that I should know –  
Lord, God, be merciful to me!*

VI

*O Whiteness, whiter than the fleece  
Of new-washed sheep on April sod!  
O Breath of Life, O Prince of Peace,  
O Lamb of God, O Lamb of God!*

## Easter

*The air is like a butterfly  
With frail blue wings.  
The happy earth looks at the sky  
And sings.*

Serene he stands, with mist serenely crowned,  
And draws a cloak of trees about his breast.  
The thunder roars but cannot break his rest  
And from his rugged face the tempests bound.  
He does not heed the angry lightning's wound,  
The raging blizzard is his harmless guest,  
And human life is but a passing jest  
To him who sees Time spin the years around.

But fragile souls, in skyey reaches find  
High vantage-points and view him from afar.  
How low he seems to the ascended mind,  
How brief he seems where all things endless are;  
This little playmate of the mighty wind  
This young companion of an ancient star.

## The House with Nobody in It

Whenever I walk to Suffern along the Erie track  
I go by a poor old farmhouse with its shingles broken and black.  
I suppose I've passed it a hundred times, but I always stop for a minute  
And look at the house, the tragic house, the house with nobody in it.

I never have seen a haunted house, but I hear there are such things;  
That they hold the talk of spirits, their mirth and sorrowings.  
I know this house isn't haunted, and I wish it were, I do;  
For it wouldn't be so lonely if it had a ghost or two.

This house on the road to Suffern needs a dozen panes of glass,  
And somebody ought to weed the walk and take a scythe to the grass.  
It needs new paint and shingles, and the vines should be trimmed and tied;  
But what it needs the most of all is some people living inside.

If I had a lot of money and all my debts were paid  
I'd put a gang of men to work with brush and saw and spade.  
I'd buy that place and fix it up the way it used to be  
And I'd find some people who wanted a home and give it to them free.

Now, a new house standing empty, with staring window and door,  
Looks idle, perhaps, and foolish, like a hat on its block in the store.  
But there's nothing mournful about it; it cannot be sad and lone  
For the lack of something within it that it has never known.

But a house that has done what a house should do,  
a house that has sheltered life,  
That has put its loving wooden arms around a man and his wife,  
A house that has echoed a baby's laugh and held up his stumbling feet,  
Is the saddest sight, when it's left alone, that ever your eyes could meet.

So whenever I go to Suffern along the Erie track  
I never go by the empty house without stopping and looking back,  
Yet it hurts me to look at the crumbling roof and the shutters fallen apart,  
For I can't help thinking the poor old house is a house with a broken heart.

## Dave Lilly

There's a brook on the side of Greylock that used to be full of trout,  
But there's nothing there now but minnows; they say it is all fished out.  
I fished there many a Summer day some twenty years ago,  
And I never quit without getting a mess of a dozen or so.

There was a man, Dave Lilly, who lived on the North Adams road,  
And he spent all his time fishing, while his neighbors reaped and sowed.  
He was the luckiest fisherman in the Berkshire hills, I think.  
And when he didn't go fishing he'd sit in the tavern and drink.

Well, Dave is dead and buried and nobody cares very much;  
They have no use in Greylock for drunkards and loafers and such.  
But I always liked Dave Lilly, he was pleasant as you could wish;  
He was shiftless and good-for-nothing, but he certainly could fish.

The other night I was walking up the hill from Williamstown  
And I came to the brook I mentioned,  
and I stopped on the bridge and sat down.  
I looked at the blackened water with its little flecks of white  
And I heard it ripple and whisper in the still of the Summer night.

And after I'd been there a minute it seemed to me I could feel  
The presence of someone near me, and I heard the hum of a reel.  
And the water was churned and broken, and something was brought to land  
By a twist and flirt of a shadowy rod in a deft and shadowy hand.

*I scrambled down to the brookside and hunted all about;  
There wasn't a sign of a fisherman; there wasn't a sign of a trout.  
But I heard somebody chuckle behind the hollow oak  
And I got a whiff of tobacco like Lilly used to smoke.*

*It's fifteen years, they tell me, since anyone fished that brook;  
And there's nothing in it but minnows that nibble the bait off your hook.  
But before the sun has risen and after the moon has set  
I know that it's full of ghostly trout for Lilly's ghost to get.*

*I guess I'll go to the tavern and get a bottle of rye  
And leave it down by the hollow oak, where Lilly's ghost went by.  
I meant to go up on the hillside and try to find his grave  
And put some flowers on it – but this will be better for Dave.*

## Alarm Clocks

*When Dawn strides out to wake a dewy farm  
Across green fields and yellow hills of hay  
The little twittering birds laugh in his way  
And poise triumphant on his shining arm.  
He bears a sword of flame but not to harm  
The wakened life that feels his quickening sway  
And barnyard voices shrilling "It is day!"  
Take by his grace a new and alien charm.*

*But in the city, like a wounded thing  
That limps to cover from the angry chase,  
He steals down streets where sickly arc-lights sing,  
And wanly mock his young and shameful face;  
And tiny gongs with cruel fervor ring  
In many a high and dreary sleeping place.*

## Waverley

1814-1914

*When, on a novel's newly printed page  
We find a maudlin eulogy of sin,  
And read of ways that harlots wander in,  
And of sick souls that writhe in helpless rage;  
Or when Romance, bespectacled and sage,  
Taps on her desk and bids the class begin  
To con the problems that have always been  
Perplexed mankind's unhappy heritage;*

*Then in what robes of honor habited  
The laureled wizard of the North appears!  
Who raised Prince Charlie's cohorts from the dead,  
Made Rose's mirth and Flora's noble tears,  
And formed that shining legion at whose head  
Rides Waverley, triumphant o'er the years!*

The following biographical information is taken from the 1917 edition of Jessie B. Rittenhouse's anthology of Modern Verse.

Kilmer, Joyce. Born at New Brunswick, New Jersey, December 6, 1886, and graduated at Columbia University in 1908. After a short period of teaching he became associated with Funk and Wagnalls Company, where he remained from 1909 to 1912, when he assumed the position of literary editor of "The Churchman". In 1913 Mr. Kilmer became a member of the staff of the "New York Times", a position which he still occupies. His volumes of poetry are: "A Summer of Love", 1911, and "Trees, and Other Poems", 1914.

Kilmer died in France in 1918, and also published another volume, "Main Street and Other Poems", 1917, as well as individual poems, essays, etc.

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