

Classic Poetry Series

Robert William Service
- poems -

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Robert William Service(16 January 1874 - 11 September 1958)

a poet and writer who has often been called "the Bard of the Yukon".

Service is best known for his poems "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and "The Cremation of Sam McGee", from his first book, *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907; also published as *The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses*). "These humorous tales in verse were considered doggerel by the literary set, yet remain extremely popular to this day." *Songs of a Sourdough* has sold more than three million copies, making it the most commercially successful book of poetry of the 20th century.

Life

Early Life

Robert W. Service was born in Preston, Lancashire, England, the first of ten children. His father, also Robert Service, was a banker from Kilwinning, Scotland who had been transferred to England.

At five years old Robert W. Service went to live in Kilwinning with his three maiden aunts and his paternal grandfather, who was the town's postmaster.

There he is said to have composed his first verse, a grace, on his sixth birthday:

God bless the cakes and bless the jam;
Bless the cheese and the cold boiled ham:
Bless the scones Aunt Jeannie makes,
And save us all from bellyaches. Amen

At nine Service rejoined his parents who had moved to Glasgow. He attended Glasgow's Hillhead High School.

"Service worked in a bank after he left school" ("he joined the Commercial Bank of Scotland which today is the Royal Bank of Scotland"). He was writing at this time and reportedly already "selling his verses". He was also reading poetry: Browning, Keats, Tennyson, and Thackeray.

Service moved to Canada at the age of 21 and travelled to Vancouver Island, British Columbia with his Buffalo Bill outfit and dreams of becoming a cowboy. He

drifted around western North America, "wandering from California to British Columbia," taking and quitting a series of jobs: "Starving in Mexico, residing in a California bordello, farming on Vancouver Island and pursuing unrequited love in Vancouver." This sometimes required him to leech off his parent's Scottish neighbors and friends who had previously immigrated to Canada.

In 1899 Service was a store clerk in Cowichan Bay, British Columbia. He mentioned to a customer (Charles H. Gibbons, editor of the Victoria Daily Colonist) that he wrote verses, with the result that six poems by "R.S." on the Boer Wars had appeared in the Colonist by July 1900 – including "The March of the Dead" that would later appear in his first book. (Service's brother Alick was a prisoner of the Boers at the time, having been captured on November 15, 1899, alongside Winston Churchill.)

The Colonist also published Service's "Music in the Bush" on September 18, 1901, and "The Little Old Log Cabin" on March 16, 1902.

In her 2006 biography, *Under the Spell of the Yukon*, Enid Mallory revealed that Service had fallen in love during this period. He was working as a "farm labourer and store clerk when he first met Constance MacLean at a dance in Duncan B.C, where she was visiting her uncle." MacLean lived in Vancouver, on the mainland, so he courted her by mail. Though he was smitten, "MacLean was looking for a man of education and means to support her" so was not that interested. To please her, he took courses at McGill University's Victoria College, but failed.

Down on his luck in 1903, Service was hired by a Canadian Bank of Commerce branch in Victoria, British Columbia, using his Commercial Bank letter of reference. The bank "watched him, gave him a raise, and sent him to Kamloops in the middle of British Columbia. In Victoria he lived over the bank with a hired piano, and dressed for dinner. In Kamloops, horse country, he played polo. In the fall of 1904 the bank sent him to their Whitehorse branch in the Yukon. With the expense money he bought himself a raccoon coat."

Throughout this period, Service continued writing and saving his verses: "more than a third of the poems in his first volume had been written before he moved north in 1904."

Yukon Period

Whitehorse was a frontier town, less than ten years old. Located on the Yukon River at the Whitehorse Rapids, it had begun in 1897 as a campground for prospectors on their way to Dawson City to join the Klondike Gold Rush. The

railroad that Service rode in on had reached Whitehorse only in 1900.

Settling in, "Service dreamed and listened to the stories of the great gold rush." He also "took part in the extremely active Whitehorse social life. As was popular at the time he recited at concerts – things like 'Casey at the Bat' and 'Gunga Din', but they were getting stale."

One day (Service later wrote), while pondering what to recite at an upcoming church concert he met E.J. "Stroller" White, editor of the Whitehorse Star. White suggested: "Why don't you write a poem for it? Give us something about our own bit of earth. We sure would appreciate it. There's a rich paystreak waiting for someone to work. Why don't you go in and stake it?"

Returning from a walk one Saturday night, Service heard the sounds of revelry from a saloon, and the phrase "A bunch of the boys were whooping it up" popped into his head. Inspired, he ran to the bank to write it down (almost being shot as a burglar), and by the next morning "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" was complete.

"A month or so later he heard a gold rush yarn from a Dawson mining man about a fellow who cremated his pal." He spent the night walking in the woods composing "The Cremation of Sam McGee," and wrote it down from memory the next day.

Other verses quickly followed. "In the early spring he stood above the heights of Miles Canyon ... the line 'I have gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing else to gaze on' came into his mind and again he hammered out a complete poem, "The Call of the Wild". Conversations with locals led Service to write about things he had not seen (some of which had not actually happened) as well. He did not set foot in Dawson City until 1908, arriving in the Klondike ten years after the Gold Rush when his renown as a writer was already established.

After having collected enough poems for a book, Service "sent the poems to his father, who had emigrated to Toronto, and asked him to find a printing house so they could make it into a booklet. He enclosed a cheque to cover the costs and intended to give these booklets away to his friends in Whitehorse" for Christmas. His father took the manuscript to William Briggs in Toronto, whose employees loved the book. "The foreman and printers recited the ballads while they worked. A salesman read the proofs out loud as they came off the typesetting machines." An "enterprising salesman sold 1700 copies in advance orders from galley proofs." The publisher "sent Robert's cheque back to him and offered a ten percent royalty contract for the book."

Service's book, *Songs of a Sourdough*, was "an immediate success." It went through seven printings even before its official release date. Ultimately, Briggs "sold fifteen impressions in 1907. That same year there was an edition in New York, Philadelphia, and London. The London publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, struck a twenty-third printing in 1910, and thirteen more by 1917. Service eventually earned in excess of \$100,000 for *Songs of a Sourdough* alone (Mackay 14, 408n19)."

(In the United States, the book would be given the more Jack London-ish title, *The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses*).

"When copies of the book reached Whitehorse, Robert's own minister took him aside to let him know how wicked were his stories. Service hung his head in shame.... But, that summer, tourists from the south arrived in Whitehorse looking for the famous poet; and he autographed many of his books."

"In 1908, after working for the bank for three years in Whitehorse, he was sent outside on mandatory paid leave for three months, a standard practice for bank employees serving in the Yukon." According to Enid Mallory, he went to Vancouver and looked up Constance MacLean. Now that he was a successful author, she agreed to become engaged to him.

Following his leave, in 1908 the bank transferred Service to Dawson, where he met and talked to veterans of the Gold Rush, now ten years in the past: "they loved to reminisce, and Robert listened carefully and remembered." He used their tales to write a second book of verse, *Ballads of a Cheechako*, in 1908. "It too was an overwhelming success."

In 1909, when the bank wanted Service to return to Whitehorse as manager, he decided to resign. "After quitting his job, he rented a small two-room cabin on Eighth Avenue in Dawson City from Mrs. Edna Clarke and began his career as a full-time author." He immediately "went to work on his novel.... He went for walks that lasted all night, slept till mid-afternoon, and sometimes didn't come out of the cabin for days. In five months the novel, called *The Trail of '98*, was complete and he took it to a publisher in New York." Service's first novel also "immediately became a best-seller."

Newly wealthy, Service was able to travel to Paris, the French Riviera, Hollywood, and beyond. He returned to Dawson City in 1912 to write his third book of poetry, *Ballads of a Rolling Stone* (1912). During that time he became a freemason, being initiated into Yukon Lodge No. 45 in Dawson.

It is not known what happened between Service and Constance MacLean. There are no known letters between them from after the time Service went to Dawson City. In 1912 she "married Leroy Grant, a surveyor and railroad engineer based in Prince Rupert."

Later Life

Service left Dawson City for good in 1912. From 1912 to 1913 he was a correspondent for the Toronto Star during the Balkan Wars.

In 1913 Service arrived in Paris, where he would live for the next 15 years. He settled in the Latin Quarter, posing as a painter. In June 1913 he married Parisienne Germaine Bougeoin, daughter of a distillery owner, and they purchased a summer home at Lancieux, Côtes-d'Armor, in the Brittany region of France. Thirteen years younger than her husband, Germaine Service lived 31 years following his death, dying at age 102 in 1989.

Robert Service was 41 when World War I broke out; he enlisted, but was turned down "due to varicose veins." He briefly covered the war for the Toronto Star (from December 11, 1915 through January 29, 1916), but "was arrested and nearly executed in an outbreak of spy hysteria in Dunkirk." – then "worked as a stretcher bearer and ambulance driver with the Ambulance Corps of the American Red Cross, until his health broke." Convalescing in Paris, he wrote a new book of mainly war poetry, *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, in 1916. The book was dedicated to the memory of Service's "brother, Lieutenant Albert Service, Canadian Infantry, Killed in Action, France, August 1916."

With the end of the war, Service "settled down to being a rich man in Paris.... During the day he would promenade in the best suits, with a monocle. At night he went out in old clothes with the company of his doorman, a retired policeman, to visit the lowest dives of the city." During his time in Paris he was reputedly the wealthiest author living in the city, yet was known to dress as a working man and walk the streets, blending in and observing everything around him. Those experiences would be used in his next book of poetry, *Ballads of a Bohemian* (1921), "The poems are given in the persona of an American poet in Paris who serves as an ambulance driver and an infantryman in the war. The verses are separated by diary entries over a period of four years."

In the 1920s Service began writing thriller novels. *The Poisoned Paradise, A Romance of Monte Carlo* (New York, 1922) and *The Roughneck. A Tale of Tahiti* (New York, 1923) would both be made into silent movies.

In 1930 Service returned to Kilwinning, to erect a memorial to his family in the town cemetery. He also visited the USSR in the 1930s and later wrote a satirical "Ballad of Lenin's Tomb". For this reason his poetry has never been translated into Russian in the USSR and he was never mentioned in Soviet encyclopedias.

Service's second trip to the Soviet Union "was interrupted by news of the Hitler-Stalin pact. Service fled across Poland, Latvia, Estonia and the Baltic to Stockholm. He wintered in Nice with his family, then fled France for Canada." Not long after, the Germans invaded France, and "arrived at his home in Lancieux ... looking specifically for the poet who had mocked Hitler in newspaper verse."

During World War II Service lived in California, "and Hollywood had him join with other celebrities in helping the morale of troops – visiting US Army camps to recite his poems. He was also asked to play himself in the movie *The Spoilers* (1942), working alongside Marlene Dietrich and John Wayne." "He was thrilled to play a scene with Marlene Dietrich." After the war Service and his wife returned to his home in Brittany, to find it destroyed. They rebuilt, and he lived there until his death in 1958, though he wintered in Monte Carlo on the French Riviera. Service's wife and daughter, Iris, travelled to the Yukon in 1946 "and visited Whitehorse and Dawson City, which by then was becoming a ghost town. Service could not bring himself to go back. He preferred to remember the town as it had been."

Service wrote prolifically during his last years, publishing six books of verse from 1949 to 1955 (with one more appearing posthumously the following year). It was at Service's flat in Monte Carlo that Canadian broadcaster Pierre Berton recorded, over a period of three days, many hours of autobiographical television interview, for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, in the spring of 1958, not long before Service died.

Service wrote two volumes of autobiography - *Ploughman of the Moon* and *Harper of Heaven*. He died in Lancieux and is buried there in the local cemetery.

Writing

Robert Service wrote the most commercially successful poetry of the century. Yet his most popular works "were considered doggerel by the literary set." During his lifetime, he was nicknamed "the Canadian Kipling." – yet that may have been a double-edged compliment. As T.S. Eliot has said, "we have to defend Kipling against the charge of excessive lucidity," "the charge of being a 'journalist' appealing only to the commonest collective emotion," and "the charge of writing

jingles." All those charges, and more, could be levelled against Service's best known and best loved works.

Certainly Service's verse was derivative of Kipling's. In "The Cremation of Sam McGee," for instance, he uses the form of Kipling's "Ballad of East and West."

In his E.J. Pratt lecture "Silence In the Sea," critic Northrop Frye argued that Service's verse was not "serious poetry," but something else he called "popular poetry": "the idioms of popular and serious poetry remain inexorably distinct." Popular poems, he thought, "preserve a surface of explicit statement" – either being "proverbial, like Kipling's 'If' or Longfellow's 'Song of Life' or Burns's 'For A' That'," or dealing in "conventionally poetic themes, like the pastoral themes of James Whitcomb Riley, or the adventurous themes of Robert Service."

Service himself did not call his work poetry. "Verse, not poetry, is what I was after ... something the man in the street would take notice of and the sweet old lady would paste in her album; something the schoolboy would spout and the fellow in the pub would quote. Yet I never wrote to please anyone but myself; it just happened. I belonged to the simple folks whom I liked to please."

In his autobiography, Service described his method of writing at his Dawson City cabin. "I used to write on the coarse rolls of paper used by paper-hangers, pinning them on the wall and printing my verses in big charcoal letters. Then I would pace back and forth before them, repeating them, trying to make them perfect. I wanted to make them appeal to the eye as well as to the ear. I tried to avoid any literal quality."

One remarkable thing about both of Service's best-known ballads is how easily he wrote them. When writing about composing "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," 'easy' was exactly the word he used: "For it came so easy to me in my excited state that I was amazed at my facility. It was as if someone was whispering in my ear." And this was just after someone had tried to shoot him. He continued: "As I wrote stanza after stanza, the story seemed to evolve itself. It was a marvelous experience. Before I crawled into my bed at five in the morning, my ballad was in the bag."

Similarly, when he wrote "The Cremation of Sam McGee," the verses just flowed: "I took the woodland trail, my mind seething with excitement and a strange ecstasy.... As I started in: There are strange things done in the midnight sun, verse after verse developed with scarce a check ... and when I rolled happily into bed, my ballad was cinched. Next day, with scarcely any effort of memory I put it on paper."

In 1926, Archibald MacMechan, Professor of English at Canada's Dalhousie University, pronounced on Service's Yukon books in his *Headwaters of Canadian Literature*:

The sordid, the gross, the bestial, may sometimes be redeemed by the touch of genius; but that Promethean touch is not in Mr. Service. In manner he is frankly imitative of Kipling's barrack-room balladry; and imitation is an admission of inferiority. 'Sourdough' is Yukon slang for the provident old-timer ... It is a convenient term for this wilfully violent kind of verse without the power to redeem the squalid themes it treats. The *Ballads of a Cheechako* is a second installment of sourdoughs, while his novel *The Trail of '98* is simply sourdough prose.

MacMechan did give grudging respect to Service's World War I poetry, conceding that his style went well with that subject, and that "his *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* are an advance on his previous volumes. He has come into touch with the grimmest of realities; and while his radical faults have not been cured, his rude lines drive home the truth that he has seen."

Reviewing Service's *Rhymes of a Rebel* in 1952, Frye remarked that the book "interests me chiefly because ... I have noticed so much verse in exactly the same idiom, and I wonder how far Mr. Service's books may have influenced it. There was a time, fifty years ago," he added, "when Robert Service represented, with some accuracy, the general level of poetic experience in Canada, as far as the popular reader was concerned.... there has been a prodigious, and, I should think, a permanent, change in public taste."

Service has also been noted for his use of ethnonyms that would normally be considered offensive "slurs", but with no insult apparently intended. Words used in Service's poetry include *jerries* (Germans), *dago* (Italian), *pickaninny* (in reference to a Mozambican infant), *cheechako* (newcomer to the Yukon and Alaska gold fields, usually from the U.S.), *nigger* (black person), *squaw* (Aboriginal woman), and *Jap* (Japanese).

Recognition

Robert W. Service has been honoured with schools named for him including Service High School in Anchorage, Alaska, Robert Service Senior Public School (Middle/ Jr. High) in Toronto, Ontario and Robert Service School in Dawson City, Yukon. He was also honoured on a Canadian postage stamp in 1976. The Robert Service Way, a main road in Whitehorse, is named after him.

Additionally, the Bard & Banker public house in Victoria, British Columbia is dedicated to him, the building having at one time been a Canadian Bank of Commerce branch where Service was employed while residing in the city. In 2010 Phillips Brewery in Victoria released the Service 1904 Scottish Stone Fired Ale, available only on tap in three Victoria locations: The Bard & Banker, Irish Times, and Penny Farthing public houses.

Service's first novel, *The Trail of '98*, was made into a movie by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, directed by Clarence Brown. "Trail of '98 ... starring Dolores Del Rio, Ralph Forbes and Karl Dante in 1929 ... was the first talking picture dealing with the Klondike gold rush and was acclaimed at the time by critics for depicting the Klondike as it really was."

Folksinger Country Joe MacDonald set some of Service's World War I poetry (plus "The March of the Dead" from his first book), to music for his 1971 studio album, *War War War*.

Dawson City Cabin

Robert Service lived from 1909 to 1912 in a small two-room cabin on 8th Avenue which he rented from Edna Clarke in Dawson City, Yukon. His prosperity allowed him the luxury of a telephone.

Service eventually decided he could not return to Dawson, as it would not be as he remembered it. He wrote in his autobiography:

"Only yesterday an air-line offered to fly me up there in two days, and I refused. It would have saddened me to see dust and rust where once hummed a rousing town; hundreds where were thousands; tumbledown cabins, mouldering warehouses."

After Service left for Europe, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.) took care of the cabin until 1971, preserving it. In 1971 it was taken over by Parks Canada, which maintains it, including its sod roof, as a tourist attraction.

Irish-born actor Tom Byrne created *The Robert Service Show* which was presented in the front yard of the cabin, starting in 1976. This was very popular for summer visitors and set the standard for Robert Service recitations. A resurgence in sales of Service's works followed the institution of these performances.

Mr. Byrne discontinued the show at the cabin in 1995, moving it to a Front Street storefront. Since 2004 the show has been held at the Westmark Hotel in Dawson City at 3:00 p.m. every day during the summer months. Mr. Byrne collects Robert Service first editions, and corresponded with Mr. Service's widow for years.

At the Service Cabin, local Dawson entertainers dressed in period costumes and employed by Parks Canada offer biographical information and recite Service's poetry for visitors sitting on benches on the front lawn. Johnny Nunan performed this role through 2006. The present performer shares his first name (Fred).

Following the presentation, visitors can view Service's home through the windows and front door. The fragility of the house, and the rarity of the artifacts, precludes any possibility of allowing visitors to enter the house itself.

"?"

If you had the choice of two women to wed,
(Though of course the idea is quite absurd)
And the first from her heels to her dainty head
Was charming in every sense of the word:
And yet in the past (I grieve to state),
She never had been exactly "straight".

And the second -- she was beyond all cavil,
A model of virtue, I must confess;
And yet, alas! she was dull as the devil,
And rather a dowd in the way of dress;
Though what she was lacking in wit and beauty,
She more than made up for in "sense of duty".

Now, suppose you must wed, and make no blunder,
And either would love you, and let you win her --
Which of the two would you choose, I wonder,
The stolid saint or the sparkling sinner?

Robert William Service

"Fighting Mac"

A Life Tragedy

A pistol shot rings round and round the world;
In pitiful defeat a warrior lies.
A last defiance to dark Death is hurled,
A last wild challenge shocks the sunlit skies.
Alone he falls, with wide, wan, woeful eyes:
Eyes that could smile at death -- could not face shame.

Alone, alone he paced his narrow room,
In the bright sunshine of that Paris day;
Saw in his thought the awful hand of doom;
Saw in his dream his glory pass away;
Tried in his heart, his weary heart, to pray:
"O God! who made me, give me strength to face
The spectre of this bitter, black disgrace."

* * * * *

The burn brawls darkly down the shaggy glen;
The bee-kissed heather blooms around the door;
He sees himself a barefoot boy again,
Bending o'er page of legendary lore.
He hears the pibroch, grips the red claymore,
Runs with the Fiery Cross, a clansman true,
Sworn kinsman of Rob Roy and Roderick Dhu.

Eating his heart out with a wild desire,
One day, behind his counter trim and neat,
He hears a sound that sets his brain afire --
The Highlanders are marching down the street.
Oh, how the pipes shrill out, the mad drums beat!
"On to the gates of Hell, my Gordons gay!"
He flings his hated yardstick away.

He sees the sullen pass, high-crowned with snow,
Where Afghans cower with eyes of gleaming hate.
He hurls himself against the hidden foe.
They try to rally -- ah, too late, too late!

Again, defenseless, with fierce eyes that wait
For death, he stands, like baited bull at bay,
And flouts the Boers, that mad Majuba day.

He sees again the murderous Soudan,
Blood-slaked and rapine-swept. He seems to stand
Upon the gory plain of Omdurman.

Then Magersfontein, and supreme command
Over his Highlanders. To shake his hand
A King is proud, and princes call him friend.
And glory crowns his life -- and now the end,

The awful end. His eyes are dark with doom;
He hears the shrapnel shrieking overhead;
He sees the ravaged ranks, the flame-stabbed gloom.
Oh, to have fallen! -- the battle-field his bed,
With Wauchope and his glorious brother-dead.
Why was he saved for this, for this? And now
He raises the revolver to his brow.

* * * * *

In many a Highland home, framed with rude art,
You'll find his portrait, rough-hewn, stern and square;
It's graven in the Fuyam fellah's heart;
The Ghurka reads it at his evening prayer;
The raw lands know it, where the fierce suns glare;
The Dervish fears it. Honor to his name
Who holds aloft the shield of England's fame.

Mourn for our hero, men of Northern race!
We do not know his sin; we only know
His sword was keen. He laughed death in the face,
And struck, for Empire's sake, a giant blow.
His arm was strong. Ah! well they learnt, the foe
The echo of his deeds is ringing yet --
Will ring for aye. All else . . . let us forget.

Robert William Service

(the Sunshine Seeks My Little Room)

The sunshine seeks my little room
To tell me Paris streets are gay;
That children cry the lily bloom
All up and down the leafy way;
That half the town is mad with May,
With flame of flag and boom of bell:
For Carnival is King to-day;
So pen and page, awhile farewell.

Robert William Service

A Bachelor

'Why keep a cow when I can buy,'
Said he, 'the milk I need,'
I wanted to spit in his eye
Of selfishness and greed;
But did not, for the reason he
Was stronger than I be.

I told him: "Tis our human fate,
For better or for worse,
That man and maid should love and mate,
And little children nurse.
Of course, if you are less than man
You can't do what we can.

'So many loving maids would wed,
And wondrous mothers be.'
'I'll buy the love I want,' he said,
'No squally brats for me.'
. . . I hope the devil stoketh well
For him a special hell.

Robert William Service

A Busy Man

This crowded life of God's good giving
No man has relished more than I;
I've been so goldarned busy living
I've never had the time to die.
So busy fishing, hunting, roving,
Up on my toes and fighting fit;
So busy singing, laughing, loving,
I've never had the time to quit.

I've never been one for thinking
I've always been the action guy;
I've done my share of feasting, drinking,
And lots of wenching on the sly.
What all the blasted cosmic show meant,
I've never tried to understand;
I've always lived just for the moment,
And done the thing that came to hand.

And now I'll toddle to the garden
And light a good old Henry Clay.
I'm ninety odd, so Lord, please pardon
My frequent lapses by the way.
I'm getting tired; the sunset lingers;
The evening star serenues the sky;
The damn cigar burns to my fingers . . .
I guess . . . I'll take . . . time off . . . to die.

Robert William Service

A Cabbage Patch

Folk ask if I'm alive,
 Most think I'm not;
Yet gaily I contrive
 To till my plot.
The world its way can go,
 I little heed,
So long as I can grow
 The grub I need.

For though long overdue,
 The years to me,
Have taught a lesson true,
 --Humility.
Such better men than I
 I've seen pass on;
Their pay-off when they die;
 --Oblivion.

And so I mock at fame,
 With books unread;
No monument I claim
 When I am dead;
Contented as I see
 My cottage thatch
That my last goal should be
 --A cabbage patch.

Robert William Service

A Canvas For A Crust

Aye, Montecelli, that's the name.
You may have heard of him perhaps.
Yet though he never savoured fame,
Of those impressionistic chaps,
Monet and Manet and Renoir
 He was the avatar.

He festered in a Marseilles slum,
A starving genius, god-inspired.
You'd take him for a lousy bum,
Tho' poetry of paint he lyred,
In dreamy pastels each a gem: . . .
 How people laughed at them!

He peddled paint from bar to bar;
From sordid rags a jewel shone,
A glow of joy and colour far
From filth of fortune woe-begone.
'Just twenty francs,' he shyly said,
 'To take me drunk to bed.'

Of Van Gogh and Cezanne a peer;
In dreams of ecstasy enskied,
A genius and a pioneer,
Poor, paralysed and mad he died:
Yet by all who hold Beauty dear
 May he be glorified!

Robert William Service

A Casualty

That boy I took in the car last night,
With the body that awfully sagged away,
And the lips blood-crisped, and the eyes flame-bright,
And the poor hands folded and cold as clay --
Oh, I've thought and I've thought of him all the day.

For the weary old doctor says to me:
"He'll only last for an hour or so.
Both of his legs below the knee
Blown off by a bomb. . . . So, lad, go slow,

And please remember, he doesn't know."
So I tried to drive with never a jar;
And there was I cursing the road like mad,
When I hears a ghost of a voice from the car:
"Tell me, old chap, have I `copped it' bad?"
So I answers "No," and he says, "I'm glad."

"Glad," says he, "for at twenty-two
Life's so splendid, I hate to go.
There's so much good that a chap might do,
And I've fought from the start and I've suffered so.
'Twould be hard to get knocked out now, you know."

"Forget it," says I; then I drove awhile,
And I passed him a cheery word or two;
But he didn't answer for many a mile,
So just as the hospital hove in view,
Says I: "Is there nothing that I can do?"

Then he opens his eyes and he smiles at me;
And he takes my hand in his trembling hold;
"Thank you -- you're far too kind," says he:
"I'm awfully comfy -- stay . . . let's see:
I fancy my blanket's come unrolled --
My feet, please wrap 'em -- they're cold . . . they're cold."

Robert William Service

A Character

How often do I wish I were
What people call a character;
A ripe and cherubic old chappie
Who lives to make his fellows happy;
With in his eyes a merry twinkle,
And round his lips a laughing wrinkle;
Who radiating hope and cheer
Grows kindlier with every year.
For this ideal let me strive,
And keep the lad in me alive;
Nor argument nor anger know,
But my own way serenly go;
The woes of men to understand,
Yet walk with humour hand in hand;
To love each day and wonder why
Folks are not so jocund as I.

So be you simple, decent, kind,
With gentle heart and quiet mind;
And if to righteous anger stung,
Restrain your temper and your toungue.
Let thought for others be your guide,
And patience triumph over pride . . .
With charity for those who err,
Live life so folks may say you were--
God bless your heart!--A Character.

Robert William Service

A Domestic Tragedy

Clorinda met me on the way
As I came from the train;
Her face was anything but gay,
In fact, suggested pain.
"Oh hubby, hubby dear!" she cried,
"I've awful news to tell. . . ."
"What is it, darling?" I replied;
"Your mother -- is she well?"

"Oh no! oh no! it is not that,
It's something else," she wailed,
My heart was beating pit-a-pat,
My ruddy visage paled.
Like lightning flash in heaven's dome
The fear within me woke:
"Don't say," I cried, "our little home
Has all gone up in smoke!"

She shook her head. Oh, swift I clasped
And held her to my breast;
"The children! Tell me quick," I gasped,
"Believe me, it is best."
Then, then she spoke; 'mid sobs I caught
These words of woe divine:
"It's coo-coo-cook has gone and bought
A new hat just like mine."

Robert William Service

A Grain Of Sand

If starry space no limit knows
 And sun succeeds to sun,
There is no reason to suppose
 Our earth the only one.
'Mid countless constellations cast
 A million worlds may be,
With each a God to bless or blast
 And steer to destiny.

Just think! A million gods or so
 To guide each vital stream,
With over all to boss the show
 A Deity supreme.
Such magnitudes oppress my mind;
 From cosmic space it swings;
So ultimately glad to find
 Relief in little things.

For look! Within my hollow hand,
 While round the earth careens,
I hold a single grain of sand
 And wonder what it means.
Ah! If I had the eyes to see,
 And brain to understand,
I think Life's mystery might be
 Solved in this grain of sand.

Robert William Service

A Hero

Three times I had the lust to kill,
To clutch a throat so young and fair,
And squeeze with all my might until
No breath of being lingered there.
Three times I drove the demon out,
Though on my brow was evil sweat. . . .
And yet I know beyond a doubt
He'll get me yet, he'll get me yet.

I know I'm mad, I ought to tell
The doctors, let them care for me,
Confine me in a padded cell
And never, never set me free;
But Oh how cruel that would be!
For I am young - and comely too . . .
Yet dim my demon I can see,
And there is but one thing to do.

Three times I beat the foul fiend back;
The fourth, I know he will prevail,
And so I'll seek the railway track
And lay my head upon the rail,
And sight the dark and distant train,
And hear its thunder louder roll,
Coming to crush my cursed brain . . .
Oh God, have mercy on my soul!

Robert William Service

A Little Prayer

Let us be thankful, Lord, for little things -
The song of birds, the rapture of the rose;
Cloud-dappled skies, the laugh of limpid springs,
Drowned sunbeams and the perfume April blows;
Bronze wheat a-shimmer, purple shade of trees -
Let us be thankful, Lord of Life, for these!

Let us be praiseful, Sire, for simple sights; -
The blue smoke curling from a fire of peat;
Keen stars a-frolicking on frosty nights,
Prismatic pigeons strutting in a street;
Daisies dew-diamonded in smiling sward -
For simple sights let us be praiseful, Lord!

Let us be grateful, God, for health serene,
The hope to do a kindly deed each day;
The faith of fellowship, a conscience clean,
The will to worship and the gift to pray;
For all of worth in us, of You a part,
Let us be grateful, God, with humble heart.

Robert William Service

A Lyric Day

I deem that there are lyric days
So ripe with radiance and cheer,
So rich with gratitude and praise
That they enrapture all the year.
And if there is a God b\above,
(As they would tell me in the Kirk,)
How he must look with pride and love
Upon his perfect handiwork!

To-day has been a lyric day
I hope I shall remember long,
Of meadow dance and roundelay,
Of woodland glee, of glow and song.
Such joy I saw in maidens eyes,
In mother gaze such tender bliss . . .
How earth would rival paradise
If every day could be like this!

Why die, say I? Let us live on
In lyric world of song and shine,
With ecstasy from dawn to dawn,
Until we greet the dawn Devine.
For I believe, with star and sun,
With peak and plain, with sea and sod,
Inextricably we are one,
Bound in the Wholeness - God.

Robert William Service

A Mediocre Man

I'm just a mediocre man
Of no high-brow pretence;
A comfortable life I plan
With care and commonsense.
I do the things most people do,
I echo what they say;
And through my morning paper view
The problems of the day.

No doubt you think I'm colourless,
Profoundly commonplace;
And yet I fancy, more or less,
I represent the race.
My name may stand for everyone,
At least for nine in ten,
For all in all the world is run
By mediocre men.

Of course you'll maybe not agree
That you are average,
And unlike ordinary me
You strut your little stage,
Well, you may even own a Bank,
And mighty mergers plan,
But Brother, doff your tile and thank
The Mediocre Man.

Robert William Service

A Plea

Why need we newer arms invent,
 Poor peoples to destroy?
With what we have let's be content
 And perfect their employ.
With weapons that may millions kill,
 Why should we seek for more,
A brighter spate of blood to spill,
 A deeper sea of gore?

The lurid blaze of atom light
 Vast continents will blind,
And steep in centuries of night
 Despairing humankind.
So let's be glad for gun and blade,
 To fight with honest stuff:
Are tank, block-buster, hand-grenade
 And napalm not enough?

Oh to go back a thousand years
 When arrows winged their way,
When foemen fell upon the spears
 And swords were swung to slay!
Behold! Belching in Heaven black
 Mushrooms obscene!
Dear God, the brave days give us back,
 When wars were clean!

Robert William Service

A Pot Of Tea

You make it in your mess-tin by the brazier's rosy gleam;
You watch it cloud, then settle amber clear;
You lift it with your bay'nit, and you sniff the fragrant steam;
The very breath of it is ripe with cheer.
You're awful cold and dirty, and a-cursin' of your lot;
You scoff the blushin' 'alf of it, so rich and rippin' 'ot;
It bucks you up like anythink, just seems to touch the spot:
God bless the man that first discovered Tea!

Since I came out to fight in France, which ain't the other day,
I think I've drunk enough to float a barge;
All kinds of fancy foreign dope, from caffy and doo lay,
To rum they serves you out before a charge.
In back rooms of estaminays I've gurgled pints of cham;
I've swilled down mugs of cider till I've felt a bloomin' dam;
But 'struth! they all ain't in it with the vintage of Assam:
God bless the man that first invented Tea!

I think them lazy lumps o' gods wot kips on asphodel
Swigs nectar that's a flavour of Oolong;
I only wish them sons o' guns a-grillin' down in 'ell
Could 'ave their daily ration of Suchong.
Hurrah! I'm off to battle, which is 'ell and 'eaven too;
And if I don't give some poor bloke a sexton's job to do,
To-night, by Fritz's campfire, won't I 'ave a gorgeous brew
(For fightin' mustn't interfere with Tea).
To-night we'll all be tellin' of the Boches that we slew,
As we drink the giddy victory in Tea.

Robert William Service

A Rolling Stone

There's sunshine in the heart of me,
My blood sings in the breeze;
The mountains are a part of me,
I'm fellow to the trees.
My golden youth I'm squandering,
Sun-libertine am I;
A-wandering, a-wandering,
Until the day I die.

I was once, I declare, a Stone-Age man,
And I roomed in the cool of a cave;
I have known, I will swear, in a new life-span,
The fret and the sweat of a slave:
For far over all that folks hold worth,
There lives and there leaps in me
A love of the lowly things of earth,
And a passion to be free.

To pitch my tent with no prosy plan,
To range and to change at will;
To mock at the mastership of man,
To seek Adventure's thrill.
Carefree to be, as a bird that sings;
To go my own sweet way;
To reckon not at all what may befall,
But to live and to love each day.

To make my body a temple pure
Wherein I dwell serene;
To care for the things that shall endure,
The simple, sweet and clean.
To oust out envy and hate and rage,
To breathe with no alarm;
For Nature shall be my anchorage,
And none shall do me harm.

To shun all lures that debauch the soul,
The orgied rites of the rich;
To eat my crust as a rover must

With the rough-neck down in the ditch.
To trudge by his side whate'er betide;
To share his fire at night;
To call him friend to the long trail-end,
And to read his heart aright.

To scorn all strife, and to view all life
With the curious eyes of a child;
From the plangent sea to the prairie,
From the slum to the heart of the Wild.
From the red-rimmed star to the speck of sand,
From the vast to the greatly small;
For I know that the whole for good is planned,
And I want to see it all.

To see it all, the wide world-way,
From the fig-leaf belt to the Pole;
With never a one to say me nay,
And none to cramp my soul.
In belly-pinch I will pay the price,
But God! let me be free;
For once I know in the long ago,
They made a slave of me.

In a flannel shirt from earth's clean dirt,
Here, pal, is my calloused hand!
Oh, I love each day as a rover may,
Nor seek to understand.
To enjoy is good enough for me;
The gipsy of God am I;
Then here's a hail to each flaring dawn!
And here's a cheer to the night that's gone!
And may I go a-roaming on
Until the day I die!

Then every star shall sing to me
Its song of liberty;
And every morn shall bring to me
Its mandate to be free.
In every throbbing vein of me
I'll feel the vast Earth-call;
O body, heart and brain of me

Praise Him who made it all!

Robert William Service

A Rusty Nail

I ran a nail into my hand,
The wound was hard to heal;
So bitter was the pain to stand
I thought how it would feel,
To have spikes thrust through hands and feet,
Impaled by hammer beat.

Then hoisted on a cross of oak
Against the sullen sky,
With all about the jeering folk
Who joyed to see me die;
Die hardly in insensate heat,
With bleeding hands and feet.

Yet was it not that day of Fate,
Of cruelty insane,
Climaxing centuries of hate
That woke our souls to pain!
And are we not the living seed
Of those who did the deed!

Of course, with thankful heart I know
We are not fiends as then;
And in a thousand years or so
We may be gentle men.
But it has cost a poisoned hand,
And pain beyond a cry,
To make me strangely understand
A Cross against the sky.

Robert William Service

A Snifter

After working hard all day
 In the office,
How much worse on homeward way
 My old cough is!
Barney's Bar is gaily lit,
 Let me stop there;
Just to buck me up a bit
 Have a drop there.

As I stand beside the screen
 Hesitating,
I have thought of how Noreen
 Will be waiting;
Baby Patsy in her lap
 Gay and laughing,
While at Barney's foaming tap
 I am quaffing.

Barney's Bar is mighty bright,
 Looks so cheery.
Wonder what I'll drink tonight?
 Gee! I'm weary.
Will I have Scotch or Rye?
 Bourbon maybe . . .
Then I see with mental eye
 Wife and baby.

So I say 'tis malted milk
 I'll be skoffin';
Sooth my throttle sleek as silk,
 Ease my coughin' . . .
Say, I love them two to death,
 Sure they miss me:
With no whisky on my breath
 How they'll kiss me!

Robert William Service

A Song For Kilts

How grand the human race would be
If every man would wear a kilt,
A flirt of Tartan finery,
Instead of trousers, custom built!
Nay, do not think I speak to joke:
(You know I'm not that kind of man),
I am convinced that all men folk.
Should wear the costume of a Clan.

Imagine how it's braw and clean
As in the wind it flutters free;
And so conducive to hygiene
In its sublime simplicity.
No fool fly-buttons to adjust,--
Wi' shanks and maybe buttocks bare;
Oh chiefs, just take my word on trust,
A bonny kilt's the only wear.

'Twill save a lot of siller too,
(And here a canny Scotsman speaks),
For one good kilt will wear you through
A half-a-dozen pairs of breeks.
And how it's healthy in the breeze!
And how it swings with saucy tilt!
How lassies love athletic knees
Below the waggle of a kilt!

True, I just wear one in my mind,
Since sent to school by Celtic aunts,
When girls would flip it up behind,
Until I begged for lowland pants.
But now none dare do that to me,
And so I sing with lyric lilt,--
How happier the world would be
If every male would wear a kilt!

Robert William Service

A Song Of Sixty-Five

Brave Thackeray has trolled of days when he was twenty-one,
And bounded up five flights of stairs, a gallant garreteer;
And yet again in mellow vein when youth was gaily run,
Has dipped his nose in Gascon wine, and told of Forty Year.
But if I worthy were to sing a richer, rarer time,
I'd tune my pipes before the fire and merrily I'd strive
To praise that age when prose again has given way to rhyme,
The Indian Summer days of life when I'll be Sixty-five;

For then my work will all be done, my voyaging be past,
And I'll have earned the right to rest where folding hills are green;
So in some glassy anchorage I'll make my cable fast, --
Oh, let the seas show all their teeth, I'll sit and smile serene.
The storm may bellow round the roof, I'll bide beside the fire,
And many a scene of sail and trail within the flame I'll see;
For I'll have worn away the spur of passion and desire. . . .
Oh yes, when I am Sixty-five, what peace will come to me.

I'll take my breakfast in my bed, I'll rise at half-past ten,
When all the world is nicely groomed and full of golden song;
I'll smoke a bit and joke a bit, and read the news, and then
I'll potter round my peach-trees till I hear the luncheon gong.
And after that I think I'll doze an hour, well, maybe two,
And then I'll show some kindred soul how well my roses thrive;
I'll do the things I never yet have found the time to do. . . .
Oh, won't I be the busy man when I am Sixty-five.

I'll revel in my library; I'll read De Morgan's books;
I'll grow so garrulous I fear you'll write me down a bore;
I'll watch the ways of ants and bees in quiet sunny nooks,
I'll understand Creation as I never did before.
When gossips round the tea-cups talk I'll listen to it all;
On smiling days some kindly friend will take me for a drive:
I'll own a shaggy collie dog that dashes to my call:
I'll celebrate my second youth when I am Sixty-five.

Ah, though I've twenty years to go, I see myself quite plain,
A wrinkling, twinkling, rosy-cheeked, benevolent old chap;
I think I'll wear a tartan shawl and lean upon a cane.

I hope that I'll have silver hair beneath a velvet cap.
I see my little grandchildren a-romping round my knee;
So gay the scene, I almost wish 'twould hasten to arrive.
Let others sing of Youth and Spring, still will it seem to me
The golden time's the olden time, some time round Sixty-five.

Robert William Service

A Song Of Success

Ho! we were strong, we were swift, we were brave.
Youth was a challenge, and Life was a fight.
All that was best in us gladly we gave,
Sprang from the rally, and leapt for the height.
Smiling is Love in a foam of Spring flowers:
Harden our hearts to him -- on let us press!
Oh, what a triumph and pride shall be ours!
See where it beacons, the star of success!

Cares seem to crowd on us -- so much to do;
New fields to conquer, and time's on the wing.
Grey hairs are showing, a wrinkle or two;
Somehow our footstep is losing its spring.
Pleasure's forsaken us, Love ceased to smile;
Youth has been funeralled; Age travels fast.
Sometimes we wonder: is it worth while?
There! we have gained to the summit at last.

Aye, we have triumphed! Now must we haste,
Revel in victory . . . why! what is wrong?
Life's choicest vintage is flat to the taste --
Are we too late? Have we laboured too long?
Wealth, power, fame we hold . . . ah! but the truth:
Would we not give this vain glory of ours
For one mad, glad year of glorious youth,
Life in the Springtide, and Love in the flowers.

Robert William Service

A Song Of Suicide

Deeming that I were better dead,
"How shall I kill myself?" I said.
Thus mooning by the river Seine
I sought extinction without pain,
When on a bridge I saw a flash
Of lingerie and heard a splash . . .
So as I am a swimmer stout
I plunged and pulled the poor wretch out.

The female that I saved? Ah yes,
To yield the Morgue of one corpse the less,
Apart from all heroic action,
Gave me a moral satisfaction.
was she an old and withered hag,
Too tired of life to long to lag?
Ah no, she was so young and fair
I fell in love with her right there.

And when she took me to her attic
Her gratitude was most emphatic.
A sweet and simple girl she proved,
Distraught because the man she loved
In battle his life-blood had shed . . .
So I, too, told her of my dead,
The girl who in a garret grey
Had coughed and coughed her life away.

Thus as we sought our griefs to smother,
With kisses we consoled each other . . .
And there's the ending of my story;
It wasn't grim, it wasn't gory.
For comforted were hearts forlorn,
And from black sorrow joy was born:
So may our dead dears be forgiving,
And bless the rapture of the living.

Robert William Service

A Song Of The Sandbags

No, Bill, I'm not a-spooning out no patriotic tosh
 (The cove be'ind the sandbags ain't a death-or-glory cuss).
And though I strafes 'em good and 'ard I doesn't 'ate the Boche,
 I guess they're mostly decent, just the same as most of us.
I guess they loves their 'omes and kids as much as you or me;
 And just the same as you or me they'd rather shake than fight;
And if we'd 'appened to be born at Berlin-on-the-Spree,
 We'd be out there with 'Ans and Fritz, dead sure that we was right.

A-standin' up to the sandbags
 It's funny the thoughts wot come;
Starin' into the darkness,
 'Earin' the bullets 'um;
(Zing! Zip! Ping! Rip!
 'ark 'ow the bullets 'um!)

A-leanin' against the sandbags
 Wiv me rifle under me ear,
Oh, I've 'ad more thoughts on a sentry-go
 Than I used to 'ave in a year.

I wonder, Bill, if 'Ans and Fritz is wonderin' like me
 Wot's at the bottom of it all? Wot all the slaughter's for?
'E thinks 'e's right (of course 'e ain't) but this we both agree,
 If them as made it 'ad to fight, there wouldn't be no war.
If them as lies in feather beds while we kips in the mud;
 If them as makes their fortoons while we fights for 'em like 'ell;
If them as slings their pot of ink just 'ad to sling their blood:
 By Crust! I'm thinkin' there 'ud be another tale to tell.

Shiverin' up to the sandbags,
 With a hicicle 'stead of a spine,
Don't it seem funny the things you think
 'Ere in the firin' line:
(Whee! Whut! Ziz! Zut!
 Lord! 'ow the bullets whine!)

Hunkerin' down when a star-shell
 Cracks in a sputter of light,
You can jaw to yer soul by the sandbags
 Most any old time o' night.

They talks o' England's glory and a-'oldin' of our trade,
Of Empire and 'igh destiny until we're fair flim-flammed;
But if it's for the likes o' that that bloody war is made,
Then wot I say is: Empire and 'igh destiny be damned!
There's only one good cause, Bill, for poor blokes like us to fight:
That's self-defence, for 'earth and 'ome, and them that bears our name;
And that's wot I'm a-doin' by the sandbags 'ere to-night. . . .
But Fritz out there will tell you 'e's a-doin' of the same.

Starin' over the sandbags,
Sick of the 'ole damn thing;
Firin' to keep meself awake,
'Earin' the bullets sing.
(Hiss! Twang! Tsing! Pang!
Saucy the bullets sing.)
Dreamin' 'ere by the sandbags
Of a day when war will cease,
When 'Ans and Fritz and Bill and me
Will clink our mugs in fraternity,
And the Brotherhood of Labour will be
The Brotherhood of Peace.

Robert William Service

A Song Of Winter Weather

It isn't the foe that we fear;
It isn't the bullets that whine;
It isn't the business career
Of a shell, or the bust of a mine;
It isn't the snipers who seek
To nip our young hopes in the bud:
No, it isn't the guns,
And it isn't the Huns --
It's the MUD,
MUD,
MUD.

It isn't the melee we mind.
That often is rather good fun.
It isn't the shrapnel we find
Obtrusive when rained by the ton;
It isn't the bounce of the bombs
That gives us a positive pain:
It's the strafing we get
When the weather is wet --
It's the RAIN,
RAIN,
RAIN.

It isn't because we lack grit
We shrink from the horrors of war.
We don't mind the battle a bit;
In fact that is what we are for;
It isn't the rum-jars and things
Make us wish we were back in the fold:
It's the fingers that freeze
In the boreal breeze --
It's the COLD,
COLD,
COLD.

Oh, the rain, the mud, and the cold,
The cold, the mud, and the rain;
With weather at zero it's hard for a hero

From language that's rude to refrain.
With porridgy muck to the knees,
With sky that's a-pouring a flood,
Sure the worst of our foes
Are the pains and the woes
Of the RAIN,
THE COLD,
AND THE MUD.

Robert William Service

A Sourdough Story

Hark to the Sourdough story, told at sixty below,
When the pipes are lit and we smoke and spit
Into the campfire glow.
Rugged are we and hoary, and statin' a general rule,
A genooine Sourdough story
Ain't no yarn for the Sunday School.

A Sourdough came to stake his claim in Heav'n one morning early.
Saint Peter cried: "Who waits outside them gates so bright and pearly?"
"I'm recent dead," the Sourdough said, "and crave to visit Hades,
Where haply pine some pals o' mine, includin' certain ladies."
Said Peter: "Go, you old Sourdough, from life so crooly riven;
And if ye fail to find their trail, we'll have a snoop round Heaven."

He waved, and lo! that old Sourdough dropped down to Hell's red spaces;
But though 'twas hot he couldn't spot them old familiar faces.
The bedrock burned, and so he turned, and climbed with footsteps fleeter,
The stairway straight to Heaven's gate, and there, of course, was Peter.
"I cannot see my mates," sez he, "among those damned forever.
I have a hunch some of the bunch in Heaven I'll discover."
Said Peter: "True; and this I'll do (since Sourdoughs are my failing)
You see them guys in Paradise, lined up against the railing -
As bald as coots, in birthday suits, with beards below the middle . . .
Well, I'll allow you in right now, if you can solve a riddle:
Among that gang of stiffes who hang and dodder round the portals,
Is one whose name is know to Fame - it's Adam, first of mortals.
For quiet's sake he makes a break from Eve, which is his Madame. . . .
Well, there's the gate - To crash it straight, just spy the guy that's Adam."

The old Sourdough went down the row of greybeards ruminatin'
With optics dim they peered at him, and pressed agin the gratin'.
In every face he sought some trace of our ancestral father;
But though he stared, he soon despaired the faintest clue to gather.
Then suddenly he whooped with glee: "Ha! Ha! an inspiration."
And to and fro along the row he ran with animation.
To Peter, bold he cried: "Behold, all told there are eleven.
Suppose I fix on Number Six - say Boy! How's that for Heaven?"

"By gosh! you win," said Pete. "Step in. But tell me how you chose him."

They're like as pins; all might be twins. There's nothing to disclose him."
The Sourdough said: "'Twas hard; my head was seething with commotion.
I felt a dunce; then all at once I had a gorgeous notion.
I stooped and peered beneath each beard that drooped like fleece of mutton.
My search was crowned. . . . That bird I found - ain't got no belly button."

Robert William Service

A Verseman's Apology

Alas! I am only a rhymer,
I don't know the meaning of Art;
But I learned in my little school primer
To love Eugene Field and Bret Harte.
I hailed Hoosier Ryley with pleasure,
To John Hay I took off my hat;
These fellows were right to my measure,
And I've never gone higher than that.

The Classics! Well, most of them bore me,
The Moderns I don't understand;
But I keep Burns, my kinsman before me,
And Kipling, my friend, is at hand.
They taught me my trade as I know it,
Yet though at their feet I have sat,
For God-sake don't call me a poet,
For I've never been guilty of that.

A rhyme-rustler, rugged and shameless,
A Bab Balladeer on the loose;
Of saccharine sonnets I'm blameless,
My model has been - Mother Goose.
And I fancy my grave-digger griping
As he gives my last lodging a pat:
"This guy wrote McGrew;
'Twas the best he could do" . . .
So I'll go to my maker with that.

Robert William Service

A Year Ago

I'm sitting by the fire tonight,
The cat purrs on the rug;
The room's abrim with rosy light,
Suavely soft and snug;
And safe and warm from dark and storm
It's cosiness I hug.

Then petulant the window pane
Quakes in the tempest moan,
And cries: "Forlornly in the rain
There starkly streams a stone,
Where one so dear who shared your cheer
Now lies alone, alone.

Go forth! Go forth into the gale
And pass an hour in prayer;
This night of sorrow do not fail
The one you deemed so fair,
The girl below the bitter snow
Who died your child to bear."

So wails the wind, yet here I sit
Beside the ember's glow;
My grog is hot, my pipe is lit,
And loth am I to go
To her who died a ten-month bride,
Only a year ago.

To-day we weep: each morrow is
A littling of regret;
The saddest part of sorrow is
That we in time forget . . .
Christ! Let me go to graveyard woe,--
Yea, I will sorrow yet.

Robert William Service

Abandoned Dog

They dumped it on the lonely road,
Then like a streak they sped;
And as along the way I strode
I thought that it was dead:
And then I saw that yelping pup
Rise, race to catch them up.

You know how silly wee dogs are.
It thought they were in fun.
Trying to overtake their car
I saw it run and run:
But as they faster, faster went,
It stumbled, sore and spent.

I found it prone upon the way;
Of life was little token.
As limply in the dust it lay
I thought its heart was broken:
Then one dim eye it opened and
It sought to like my hand.

Of course I took it gently up
And brought it to my wife
Who loves all dogs, and now that pup
Shares in our happy life:
Yet how I curse the bastards who
Its good luck never knew!

Robert William Service

Accordion

Some carol of the banjo, to its measure keeping time;
Of viol or of lute some make a song.
My battered old accordion, you're worthy of a rhyme,
You've been my friend and comforter so long.
Round half the world I've trotted you, a dozen years or more;
You've given heaps of people lots of fun;
You've set a host of happy feet a-tapping on the floor . . .
Alas! your dancing days are nearly done.

I've played you from the palm-belt to the suburbs of the Pole;
From the silver-tipped sierras to the sea.
The gay and gilded cabin and the grimy glory-hole
Have echoed to your impish melody.
I've hushed you in the dug-out when the trench was stiff with dead;
I've lulled you by the coral-laced lagoon;
I've packed you on a camel from the dung-fire on the bled,
To the hell-for-breakfast Mountains of the Moon.

I've ground you to the shanty men, a-whooping heel and toe,
And the hula-hula graces in the glade.
I've swung you in the igloo to the lousy Esquimau,
And the Haussa at a hundred in the shade.
The Nigger on the levee, and the Dinka by the Nile
have shuffled to your insolent appeal.
I've rocked with glee the chimpanzee, and mocked the crocodile,
And shocked the pompous penguin and the seal.

I've set the yokels singing in a little Surrey pub,
Apaches swinging in a Belville bar.
I've played an obligato to the tom-tom's rub-a-dub,
And the throb of Andalusian guitar.
From the Horn to Honolulu, from the Cape to Kalamazoo,
From Wick to Wicklow, Samarkand to Spain,
You've roughed it with my kilt-bag like a comrade tried and true. . . .
Old pal! We'll never hit the trail again.

Oh I know you're cheap and vulgar, you're an instrumental crime.
In drawing-rooms you haven't got a show.
You're a musical abortion, you're the voice of grit and grime,

You're the spokesman of the lowly and the low.
You're a democratic devil, you're the darling of the mob;
You're a wheezy, breezy blasted bit of glee.
You're the headache of the high-bow, you're the horror of the snob,
but you're worth your weight in ruddy gold to me.

For you've chided me in weakness and you've cheered me in defeat;
You've been an anodyne in hours of pain;
And when the slugging jolts of life have jarred me off my feet,
You've ragged me back into the ring again.
I'll never go to Heaven, for I know I am not fit,
The golden harps of harmony to swell;
But with asbestos bellows, if the devil will permit,
I'll swing you to the fork-tailed imps of Hell.

Yes, I'll hank you, and I'll spank you,
And I'll everlasting yank you
To the cinder-swinging satellites of Hell.

Robert William Service

Adoption

Because I was a woman lone
 And had of friends so few,
I made two little ones my own,
 Whose parents no one knew;
Unwanted foundlings of the night,
 Left at the convent door,
Whose tiny hands in piteous plight
 Seemed to implore.

By Deed to them I gave my name,
 And never will they know
That from the evil slums they came,
 Two waifs of want and woe;
I fostered them with love and care
 As if they were my own:
Now John, my son, is tall and fair,
 And dark is Joan.

My boy's a member of the Bar,
 My girl a nurse serene;
Yet when I think of what they are
 And what they might have been,
With shuddering I glimpse a hell
 Of black and bitter fruit . . .
Where John might be a criminal,
 And Joan--a prostitute.

Robert William Service

Adventure

Out of the wood my White Knight came:
His eyes were bright with a bitter flame,
As I clung to his stirrup leather;
For I was only a dreaming lad,
Yet oh, what a wonderful faith I had!
And the song in my heart was never so glad,
As we took to the trail together.

"Friends and lovers, good-bye," I said;
Never once did I turn my head,
Though wickedly wild the weather
min were the rover's rags and scars,
And the rover's bed beneath the stars,
But never the shadow of prison bars,
As we ranged the world together.

Dreary and darkling was the trail,
But my Knight was clad in a gleaming mail,
And he plucked from his plume a feather.
And oh how foolishly proud was I!
"I'll wear it," I told him, "till I die;
Freemen we'll be of sea and sky,
To the ends of the earth together."

Yet now I know by my failing breath
I'm ripe for the last adventure, Death,
And I've reached the end of my tether:
But my Knight of the shining mail is there,
And his eyes are bright and he bids me dare:
So into the Dark let's boldly fare,
Into the Dark . . . together.

Robert William Service

Afternoon Tea

As I was saying . . . (No, thank you; I never take cream with my tea;
Cows weren't allowed in the trenches -- got out of the habit, y'see.)
As I was saying, our Colonel leaped up like a youngster of ten:
"Come on, lads!" he shouts, "and we'll show 'em," and he sprang to the head of
the men.
Then some bally thing seemed to trip him, and he fell on his face with a slam. . .
. . .
Oh, he died like a true British soldier, and the last word he uttered was "Damn!"
And hang it! I loved the old fellow, and something just burst in my brain,
And I cared no more for the bullets than I would for a shower of rain.
'Twas an awf'ly funny sensation (I say, this is jolly nice tea);
I felt as if something had broken; by gad! I was suddenly free.
Free for a glorified moment, beyond regulations and laws,
Free just to wallow in slaughter, as the chap of the Stone Age was.

So on I went joyously nursing a Berserker rage of my own,
And though all my chaps were behind me, feeling most frightf'ly alone;
With the bullets and shells ding-donging, and the "krock" and the swish of the
shrap;
And I found myself humming "Ben Bolt" . . . (Will you pass me the sugar, old
chap?
Two lumps, please). . . . What was I saying? Oh yes, the jolly old dash;
We simply ripped through the barrage, and on with a roar and a crash.
My fellows -- Old Nick couldn't stop 'em. On, on they went with a yell,
Till they tripped on the Boches' sand-bags, -- nothing much left to tell:
A trench so tattered and battered that even a rat couldn't live;
Some corpses tangled and mangled, wire you could pass through a sieve.

The jolly old guns had bilked us, cheated us out of our show,
And my fellows were simply yearning for a red mix-up with the foe.
So I shouted to them to follow, and on we went roaring again,
Battle-tuned and exultant, on in the leaden rain.
Then all at once a machine gun barks from a bit of a bank,
And our Major roars in a fury: "We've got to take it on flank."
He was running like fire to lead us, when down like a stone he comes,
As full of "typewriter" bullets as a pudding is full of plums.
So I took his job and we got 'em. . . . By gad! we got 'em like rats;
Down in a deep shell-crater we fought like Kilkenny cats.
'Twas pleasant just for a moment to be sheltered and out of range,

With someone you saw to go for -- it made an agreeable change.

And the Boches that missed my bullets, my chaps gave a bayonet jolt,
And all the time, I remember, I whistled and hummed "Ben Bolt".
Well, that little job was over, so hell for leather we ran,
On to the second line trenches, -- that's where the fun began.
For though we had strafed 'em like fury, there still were some Boches about,
And my fellows, teeth set and eyes glaring, like terriers routed 'em out.
Then I stumbled on one of their dug-outs, and I shouted: "Is anyone there?"
And a voice, "Yes, one; but I'm wounded," came faint up the narrow stair;
And my man was descending before me, when sudden a cry! a shot!
(I say, this cake is delicious. You make it yourself, do you not?)
My man? Oh, they killed the poor devil; for if there was one there was ten;
So after I'd bombed 'em sufficient I went down at the head of my men,
And four tried to sneak from a bunk-hole, but we cornered the rotters all right;
I'd rather not go into details, 'twas messy that bit of the fight.

But all of it's beastly messy; let's talk of pleasanter things:
The skirts that the girls are wearing, ridiculous fluffy things,
So short that they show. . . . Oh, hang it! Well, if I must, I must.
We cleaned out the second trench line, bomb and bayonet thrust;
And on we went to the third one, quite calloused to crumping by now;
And some of our fellows who'd passed us were making a deuce of a row;
And my chaps -- well, I just couldn't hold 'em; (It's strange how it is with gore;
In some ways it's just like whiskey: if you taste it you must have more.)
Their eyes were like beacons of battle; by gad, sir! they COULDN'T be calmed,
So I headed 'em bang for the bomb-belt, racing like billy-be-damned.
Oh, it didn't take long to arrive there, those who arrived at all;
The machine guns were certainly chronic, the shindy enough to appal.
Oh yes, I omitted to tell you, I'd wounds on the chest and the head,
And my shirt was torn to a gun-rag, and my face blood-gummy and red.

I'm thinking I looked like a madman; I fancy I felt one too,
Half naked and swinging a rifle. . . . God! what a glorious "do".
As I sit here in old Piccadilly, sipping my afternoon tea,
I see a blind, bullet-chipped devil, and it's hard to believe that it's me;
I see a wild, war-damaged demon, smashing out left and right,
And humming "Ben Bolt" rather loudly, and hugely enjoying the fight.
And as for my men, may God bless 'em! I've loved 'em ever since then:
They fought like the shining angels; they're the pick o' the land, my men.
And the trench was a reeking shambles, not a Boche to be seen alive --
So I thought; but on rounding a traverse I came on a covey of five;

And four of 'em threw up their flippers, but the fifth chap, a sergeant, was game,
And though I'd a bomb and revolver he came at me just the same.
A sporty thing that, I tell you; I just couldn't blow him to hell,
So I swung to the point of his jaw-bone, and down like a ninepin he fell.
And then when I'd brought him to reason, he wasn't half bad, that Hun;
He bandaged my head and my short-rib as well as the Doc could have done.
So back I went with my Boches, as gay as a two-year-old colt,
And it suddenly struck me as rummy, I still was a-humming "Ben Bolt".
And now, by Jove! how I've bored you. You've just let me babble away;
Let's talk of the things that matter -- your car or the newest play. . . .

Robert William Service

Agnostic

The chapel looms against the sky,
 Above the vine-clad shelves,
And as the peasants pass it by
 They cross themselves.
But I alone, I grieve to state,
 Lack sentiment divine:
A citified sophisticate,
 I make no sign.

Their gesture may a habit be,
 Mechanic in a sense,
Yet somehow it awakes in me
 Strange reverence.
And though from ignorance it stem,
 Somehow I deeply grieve,
And wish down in my heart like them
 I could believe.

Suppose a cottage I should buy,
 And little patch of vine,
With pure and humble spirit I
 Might make the Sign.
Aye, though I godless way I go,
 And sceptic in my trend,
A faith in something I don't know
 Might save me in the end.

Robert William Service

Agnostic Apology

I am a stout materialist;
With abstract terms I can't agree,
And so I've made a little list
Of words that don't make sense to me.
To fool my reason I refuse,
For honest thinking is my goal;
And that is why I rarely use
 Vague words like Soul.

In terms of matter I am sure
This world of ours can be defined;
And so with theories obscure
I will not mystify my mind;
And though I use it more or less,
Describing alcoholic scenes,
I do not know, I must confess,
 What Spirit means.

When I survey this cosmic scene,
The term "Creator" seems absurd;
The Universe has always been,
Creation never has occurred.
But in my Lexicon of Doubt
It strikes me definitely odd,
One word I never dare to flout,
One syllable the mountains shout,
Three letters that the stars spell out:
 GOD.

Robert William Service

Alias Bill

We bore him to his boneyard lot
One afternoon at three;
The clergyman was on the spot
To earn his modest fee.
We sprinkled on his coffin lid
The customary loam,
And so old Bill was snugly slid
 To his last home.

A lonesome celebrate we thought,
For close as clam was he;
We never guessed that he had got
A lawful family,
Till lo! we saw a gorgeous wreath
Reposing on his bier,
With on a scarlet scroll beneath:
 "To Father Dear."

He ordered it hisself, they said,
Before he had to go.
His folks don't know that he is dead -
Maybe they'll never know.
His step was frail, his hair was grey,
But though his sight was dim,
He liked to kid hisself that they
 Still thought of him.

Maybe they did: we never knew,
And he would never tell;
Perhaps their hearts were broken too -
His was, I think . . . Ah well,
We left him in the boneyard lot
With none to shed a tear,
And just a wreath, the one he bought:

"To Father Dear."

Robert William Service

Allouette

Singing larks I saw for sale -
(Ah! the pain of it)
Plucked and ready to impale
On a roasting spit;
Happy larks that summer-long
Stormed the radiant sky,
Adoration in their song . . .
Packed to make a pie.>

Hark! from springs of joy unseen
Spray their jewelled notes.
Tangle them in nets of green,
Twist their lyric throats;
Clip their wings and string them tight,
Stab them with a skewer,
All to tempt the appetite
Of the epicure.

Shade of Shelley! Come not nigh
This accursèd spot,
Where for sixpence one can buy
Skylarks for the pot;
Dante, paint a blacker hell,
Plunge in deeper darks
Wretches who can slay and sell
Sunny-hearted larks.

You who eat, you are the worst:
By internal pains,
May you ever be accurst
Who pluck these poor remains.
But for you wingèd joy would soar
To heaven from the sod:
In ecstasy a lark would pour
Its gratitude to God.

Robert William Service

Alpine Holiday

He took the grade in second - quite a climb,
Dizzy and dangerous, yet how sublime!
The road went up and up; it curved around
The mountain and the gorge grew more profound.
He drove serenely, with no hint of haste;
And then she felt his arm go round her waist.

She shrank: she did not know him very well,
Being like her a guest at the hotel.
Nice, but a Frenchman. On his driving hand
He wore like benedicks a golden band . . .
Well, how could she with grace refuse a drive
So grand it made glad to be alive?

Yet now she heard him whisper in her ear:
"Don't be afraid. With one hand I can steer,
With one arm hold you . . . Oh what perfect bliss!
Darling, please don't refuse me just one kiss.
Here, nigh to Heaven, let us rest awhile . . .
Nay, don't resist - give me your lips, your smile . . ."

So there in that remote and dizzy place
He wrestled with her for a moment's space,
Hearing her cry: "Oh please, please let me go!
Let me get out . . . You brute, release me! No, no,
NO!"
. . . In that ravine was found their burnt-out car -
Their bodies trapped and crisped into a char.

Robert William Service

Amateur Poet

You see that sheaf of slender books
Upon the topmost shelf,
At which no browser ever looks,
Because they're by . . . myself;
They're neatly bound in navy blue,
But no one ever heeds;
Their print is clear and candid too,
Yet no one ever reads.

Poor wistful books! How much they cost
To me in time and gold!
I count them now as labour lost,
For none I ever sold;
No copy could I give away,
For all my friends would shrink,
And look at me as if to say:
"What waste of printer's ink!"

And as I gaze at them on high,
Although my eyes are sad,
I cannot help but breathe a sigh
To think what joy I had -
What ecstasy as I would seek
To make my rhyme come right,
And find at last the phrase unique
Flash fulgent in my sight.

Maybe that rapture was my gain
Far more than cheap success;
So I'll forget my striving vain,
And blot out bitterness.
Oh records of my radiant youth,
No broken heart I'll rue,
For all my best of love and truth
Is there, alive in you.

Robert William Service

Ambition

They brought the mighty chief to town;
They showed him strange, unwonted sights;
Yet as he wandered up and down,
He seemed to scorn their vain delights.
His face was grim, his eye lacked fire,
As one who mourns a glory dead;
And when they sought his heart's desire:
"Me like'um tooth same gold," he said.

A dental place they quickly found.
He neither moaned nor moved his head.
They pulled his teeth so white and sound;
They put in teeth of gold instead.
Oh, never saw I man so gay!
His very being seemed to swell:
"Ha! ha!" he cried, "Now Injun say
Me heap big chief, me look like hell."

Robert William Service

An Epicure

Should you preserve white mice in honey
Don't use imported ones from China,
For though they cost you less in money
You'll find the Japanese ones finer.
But if Chinese, stuff them with spice,
Which certainly improves their savour,
And though the Canton mice are nice,
The Pekinese have finer flavour.

If you should pickle bracken shoots
The way the wily Japanese do,
Be sure to pluck them young - what suits
Our Eastern taste may fail to please you.
And as for nettles, cook them well;
To eat them raw may give you skin-itch;
But if you boil them for a spell
They taste almost as good as spinach.

So Reader, if you chance to be
Of Oriental food a lover,
And care to share a meal with me,
I'll add the addled eggs of plover;
And gaily I will welcome you
To lunch within an arbour sunny,
On nettle broth and bracken stew.
And nice white mice, conserved in honey.

Robert William Service

An Old Story

(Retold in Rhyme)

They threw him in a prison cell;
He moaned upon his bed.
And when he crept from coils of hell:
"Last night you killed," they said.

"last night in drunken rage you slew
A being brave with breath;
A radiant soul, because of you
Lies dark in death."

"last night I killed," he moaned distraught,
"When I was wild with wine;
I slew, and I remember naught . . .
O Mother, Mother mine!

"To what unbridled rage may lead
You taught me at your knee.
Why did I not your warning heed . . .
And now - the gallows tree.

"O Mother, Mother, come to me,
For I am sore distressed,
And I would kneel beside your knee
And weep upon your breast. . . ."

They stared at him; their lips were dumb,
Their eyes tear filled;
Then spoke the Priest: "She cannot come . . .
'Twas she you killed."

Robert William Service

An Olive Fire

An olive fire's a lovely thing;
Somehow it makes me think of Spring
As in my grate it over-spills
With dancing flames like daffodils.
They flirt and frolic, twist and twine,
The brassy fire-irons wink and shine. . . .
Leap gold, you flamelets! Laugh and sing:
An olive fire's a lovely thing.

An olive fire's a household shrine:
A crusty loaf, a jug of wine,
An apple and a chunk of cheese -
Oh I could be content with these.
But if my curse of oil is there,
To fry a fresh-caught fish, I swear
I do not envy any king,
As sitting by my hearth I sing:
An olive fire's a lovely thing.

When old and worn, of life I tire,
I'll sit before an olive fire,
And watch the feather ash like snow
As softly as a rose heart glow;
The tawny roots will loose their hoard
Of sunbeams centuries have stored,
And flames like yellow chicken's cheep,
Till in my heart Peace is so deep:
With hands prayer-clasped I sleep . . . and sleep.

Robert William Service

Annuitant

Oh I am neither rich nor poor,
 No worker I dispoil;
Yet I am glad to be secure
 From servitude and toil.
For with my lifelong savings I
 Have bought annuity;
And so unto the day I die
 I'll have my toast and tea.

When on the hob the kettle sings
 I'll make an amber brew,
And crunch my toast and think of things
 I do not have to do.
In dressing-gown and deep arm-chair
 I'll give the fire a poke;
Then worlds away from cark and care
 I'll smoke and smoke and smoke.

For I believe the very best
 Of Being is the last;
And I will crown with silver zest
 My patience in the past.
Since compensation is the law
 Of life it's up to me
To round the century and draw
 My Life Annuity.

Robert William Service

Ant Hill

Black ants have made a musty mound
My purple pine tree under,
And I am often to be found,
Regarding it with wonder.
Yet as I watch, somehow it;s odd,
Above their busy striving
I feel like an ironic god
Surveying human striving.
Then one day came my serving maid,
And just in time I caught her,
For on each lusty arm she weighed
A pail of boiling water.
She said with glee: "When this I spill,
Of life they'll soon be lacking."
Said I: "If even one you kill,
You bitch! I'll send you packing."

Just think - ten thousand eager lives
In that toil-worn upcasting,
Their homes, their babies and their wives
Destroyed in one fell blasting!
Imagine that swift-scalding hell! . . .
And though, mayhap, it seems a
Fantastic, far-fetched parallel -
Remember . . . Hiroshima.

Robert William Service

Anti-Profanity

I do not swear because I am
A sweet and sober guy;
I cannot vent a single damn
However hard I try.
And in viruperative way,
Though I recall it well,
I never, never, never say
A naughty word like hell.

To rouse my wrath you need not try,
I'm milder than a lamb;
However you may rile me I
Refuse to say: Goddam!
In circumstances fury-fraught
My tongue is always civil,
And though you goad me I will not
Consign you to the divvle.

An no, I never, never swear;
Profanity don't pay;
To cuss won't get you anywhere,
(And neither will to pray.)
And so all blasphemy I stem.
When milk of kindness curds:
But though I never utter them -
Gosh! how I know the words.

Robert William Service

Apollo Belvedere

A-sittin' on a cracker box an' spittin' in the stove,
I took a sudden notion that I'd kindo' like to rove;
An' so I bought a ticket, jest as easy as could be,
From Pumpkinville in Idaho to Rome in Italy;
An' found myself in seven days of mostly atmosphere
A-starin' at a statoo called Appoller Belvydeer.

Now I'm a rum-soaked sinner, an' religion ain't my plan,
Yet, I was flabbergasted by that gol-darned Vattyican;
An' when I seed Saint Peter's dome, all I could do was swear,
The which I reckon after all may be a form o' prayer;
Abut as I sought amid them sights bewildered to steer,
The king-pin was the one they called Appoller Belvydeer.

Say, I ain't got no culture an' I don't know any art,
But that there statoo got me, standin' in its room apart,
In an alcove draped wi' velvet, lookin' everlastin' bright,
Like the vision o' a poet, full o' beauty, grace an' light;
An' though I know them kind o' words sound sissy in the ear,
It's jest how I was struck by that Appoller Belvydeer.

I've gazed at them depictions in the glossy magazines,
Uv modern Art an' darned if I can make out what it means:
Will any jerk to-day outstand a thousand years of test?
Why, them old Pagans make us look like pikers at the best.
An' maybe, too, their minds was jest as luminous and clear
As that immortal statoo o' Appoller Belvydeer.

An' all yer march o' progress an' machinery as' such,
I wonder if, when all is said, they add up to so much?
An' were not these old fellers in their sweet an' simple way
Serener souled an' happier than we poor mugs to-day?
They have us licked, I thought, an' stood wi' mingled gloom an' cheer
Before that starry statoo o' Appoller Belvydeer.

So I'll go back to Pumpkinville an' to my humble home,
An' dream o' all the sights I saw in everlastin' Rome;
But I will never speak a word o' that enchanted land
That taks you bang into the Past - folks wouldn't understand;

An' midmost in my memories I'll cherish close an' dear
That bit o' frozen music, that Appoller Belvydeer.

Robert William Service

Armistice Day (1953)

Don't jeer because we celebrate
 Armistice Day,
Though thirty years of sorry fate
 Have passed away.
Though still we guard the Sacred Flame,
 And fly the Flag,
That World War Two with grief and shame
 Revealed--a rag.

For France cannot defend to-day
 Her native land;
And she is far too proud to pray
 For helping hand.
Aye, though she stands amid the Free,
 In love with life,
No more her soil will shambles be
 In world-war strife.

Still we who tend the deathless Flame
 Of Verdun speak;
It is our glory and our shame,
 For we are weak.
We have too much of blood and blight
 To answer for . . .
No, France will never, never fight
 Another war!

Robert William Service

Artist

He gave a picture exhibition,
Hiring a little empty shop.
Above its window: FREE ADMISSION
Cajoled the passers-by to stop;
Just to admire - no need to purchase,
Although his price might have been low:
But no proud artist ever urges
Potential buyers at his show.

Of course he badly needed money,
But more he needed moral aid.
Some people thought his pictures funny,
Too ultra-modern, I'm afraid.
His painting was experimental,
Which no poor artist can afford-
That is, if he would pay the rental
And guarantee his roof and board.

And so some came and saw and sniggered,
And some a puzzled brow would crease;
And some objected: "Well, I'm jiggered!"
What price Picasso and Matisse?
The artist sensitively quivered,
And stifled many a bitter sigh,
But day by day his hopes were shivered
For no one ever sought to buy.

And then he had a brilliant notion:
Half of his daubs he labeled: SOLD.
And lo! he viewed with queer emotion
A public keen and far from cold.
Then (strange it is beyond the telling),
He saw the people round him press:
His paintings went - they still are selling...
Well, nothing succeeds like success.

Robert William Service

Aspiration

When I was daft (as urchins are),
And full of fairy lore,
I aimed an arrow at a star
And hit - the barnyard door.

I've shot at heaps of stars since then,
but always it's the same -
A barnyard door has mocked me when
Uranus was my aim.

So, I'll shoot starward as of yore,
Though wide my arrows fall;
I'd rather hit a big barn door
Than never aim at all.

Robert William Service

At Eighty Years

As nothingness draws near
 How I can see
Inexorably clear
 My vanity.
My sum of worthiness
 Always so small,
Dwindles from less to less
 To none at all.

As grisly destiny
 Claims me at last,
How grievous seem to me
 Sins of my past!
How keen a conscience edge
 Can come to be!
How pitiless the dredge
 Of memory!

Ye proud ones of the earth
 Who count your gains,
What cherish you of worth
 For all your pains?
E'er death shall slam the door,
 Will you, like me,
Face fate and count the score--
 FUTILITY.

Robert William Service

At San Sebastian

The Countess sprawled beside the sea
As naked as she well could be;
Indeed her only garments were
A "G" string and a brassiere;
Her washerwoman was amazed,
And at the lady gazed and gazed, -
From billowy-bosom swell
To navel like a pink sea shell.

The Countess has of robes three score,
She doffs and leaves them on the floor;
She changes gowns ten times a day,
Her chambermaid puts them away.
"How funny!" thinks the washer-wife;
"I've toiled and toiled throughout my life,
And only have, to hide my skin,
This old rag that I'm standing in."

The Countess never toiled at all;
She begged for coin when she was small,
And later, in the ancient fashion,
In gay resorts she peddled passion.
But now to noble rank arrived,
(Tom wed the old Count she contrived)
Her youthful lover, lounging there,
Is hirsute as a teddy-bear.

The Countess will be honoured when
She dies past three-score years and ten.
The washer-women will wear out
With labour fifty years about . . .
Yet as the two look at each other
The Countess thinks: "So was my mother;
And washer-wife to live and die,
But for God's grace so would be I."

Robert William Service

At The Golden Pig

Where once with lads I scoffed my beer
The landlord's lass I've wed.
Now I am lord and master here;--
Thank God! the old man's dead.
I stand behind a blooming bar
With belly like a tub,
And pals say, seeing my cigar:
 'Bill's wed a pub.'

I wonder now if I did well,
My freedom for to lose;
Knowing my wife is fly as hell
I mind my 'Ps' and 'Qs'.
Oh what a fuss she made because
I tweaked the barmaid's bub:
Alas! a sorry day it was
 I wed a pub.

Fat landlord of the Golden Pig,
They call me 'mister' now;
And many a mug of beer I swig,
Yet don't get gay, somehow.
So farmer fellows, lean and clean
Who sweat to earn your grub,
Although you haven't got a bean:
 Don't wed a pub.

Robert William Service

At The Parade

I cannot flap a flag
Or beat a drum;
Behind the mob I lag
With larynx dumb;
Alas! I fear I'm not
A Patriot.

With acrid eyes I see
The soul of things;
And equal unto me
Are cooks and kings;
I would not cross the street
A duke to meet.

Oh curse me for a fool
To be so proud;
To stand so still and cool
Amid the crowd.
For President or Peer
God, let me cheer!

But no, despite the glee
My heart is cold;
I think that it may be
Because I'm old;
I'm dumb where millions yell . . .
Oh what the hell!

Robert William Service

At Thirty-Five

Three score and ten, the psalmist saith,
And half my course is well-nigh run;
I've had my flout at dusty death,
I've had my whack of feast and fun.
I've mocked at those who prate and preach;
I've laughed with any man alive;
But now with sobered heart I reach
The Great Divide of Thirty-five.

And looking back I must confess
I've little cause to feel elate.
I've played the mummer more or less;
I fumbled fortune, flouted fate.
I've vastly dreamed and little done;
I've idly watched my brothers strive:
Oh, I have loitered in the sun
By primrose paths to Thirty-five!

And those who matched me in the race,
Well, some are out and trampled down;
The others jog with sober pace;
Yet one wins delicate renown.
O midnight feast and famished dawn!
O gay, hard life, with hope alive!
O golden youth, forever gone,
How sweet you seem at Thirty-five!

Each of our lives is just a book
As absolute as Holy Writ;
We humbly read, and may not look
Ahead, nor change one word of it.
And here are joys and here are pains;
And here we fail and here we thrive;
O wondrous volume! what remains
When we reach chapter Thirty-five?

The very best, I dare to hope,
Ere Fate writes Finis to the tome;
A wiser head, a wider scope,

And for the gipsy heart, a home;
A songful home, with loved ones near,
With joy, with sunshine all alive:
Watch me grow younger every year --
Old Age! thy name is Thirty-five!

Robert William Service

Athabaska Dick

When the boys come out from Lac Labiche in the lure of the early Spring,
To take the pay of the "Hudson's Bay", as their fathers did before,
They are all a-glee for the jamboree, and they make the Landing ring
With a whoop and a whirl, and a "Grab your girl", and a rip and a skip and a roar.
For the spree of Spring is a sacred thing, and the boys must have their fun;
Packer and tracker and half-breed Cree, from the boat to the bar they leap;
And then when the long flotilla goes, and the last of their pay is done,
The boys from the banks of Lac Labiche swing to the heavy sweep.
And oh, how they sigh! and their throats are dry, and sorry are they and sick:
Yet there's none so cursed with a lime-kiln thirst as that Athabaska Dick.

He was long and slim and lean of limb, but strong as a stripling bear;
And by the right of his skill and might he guided the Long Brigade.
All water-wise were his laughing eyes, and he steered with a careless care,
And he shunned the shock of foam and rock, till they came to the Big Cascade.
And here they must make the long portage, and the boys sweat in the sun;
And they heft and pack, and they haul and track, and each must do his trick;
But their thoughts are far in the Landing bar, where the founts of nectar run:
And no man thinks of such gorgeous drinks as that Athabaska Dick.

'Twas the close of day and his long boat lay just over the Big Cascade,
When there came to him one Jack-pot Jim, with a wild light in his eye;
And he softly laughed, and he led Dick aft, all eager, yet half afraid,
And snugly stowed in his coat he showed a pilfered flask of "rye".
And in haste he slipped, or in fear he tripped, but -- Dick in warning roared --
And there rang a yell, and it befell that Jim was overboard.

Oh, I heard a splash, and quick as a flash I knew he could not swim.
I saw him whirl in the river swirl, and thresh his arms about.
In a queer, strained way I heard Dick say: "I'm going after him,"
Throw off his coat, leap down the boat -- and then I gave a shout:
"Boys, grab him, quick! You're crazy, Dick! Far better one than two!
Hell, man! You know you've got no show! It's sure and certain death. . . ."
And there we hung, and there we clung, with beef and brawn and thew,
And sinews cracked and joints were racked, and panting came our breath;
And there we swayed and there we prayed, till strength and hope were spent --
Then Dick, he threw us off like rats, and after Jim he went.

With mighty urge amid the surge of river-rage he leapt,

And gripped his mate and desperate he fought to gain the shore;
With teeth a-gleam he bucked the stream, yet swift and sure he swept
To meet the mighty cataract that waited all a-roar.
And there we stood like carven wood, our faces sickly white,
And watched him as he beat the foam, and inch by inch he lost;
And nearer, nearer drew the fall, and fiercer grew the fight,
Till on the very cascade crest a last farewell he tossed.
Then down and down and down they plunged into that pit of dread;
And mad we tore along the shore to claim our bitter dead.

And from that hell of frenzied foam, that crashed and fumed and boiled,
Two little bodies bubbled up, and they were heedless then;
And oh, they lay like senseless clay! and bitter hard we toiled,
Yet never, never gleam of hope, and we were weary men.
And moments mounted into hours, and black was our despair;
And faint were we, and we were fain to give them up as dead,
When suddenly I thrilled with hope: "Back, boys! and give him air;
I feel the flutter of his heart. . . ." And, as the word I said,
Dick gave a sigh, and gazed around, and saw our breathless band;
And saw the sky's blue floor above, all strewn with golden fleece;
And saw his comrade Jack-pot Jim, and touched him with his hand:
And then there came into his eyes a look of perfect peace.
And as there, at his very feet, the thwarted river raved,
I heard him murmur low and deep:
"Thank God! the whiskey's saved."

Robert William Service

Atoll

The woes of men beyond my ken
Mean nothing more to me.
Behold my world, and Eden hurled
From Heaven to the Sea;
A jeweled home, in fending foam
Tempestuously tossed;
A virgin isle none dare defile,
Far-flung, forgotten, lost.

And here I dwell, where none may tell
Me tales of mortal strife;
Let millions die, immune am I,
And radiant with life.
No echo comes of evil drums,
To vex my dawns divine;
Aloof, alone I hold my throne,
And Majesty is mine.

Ghost ships pass by, and glad am I
They make no sign to me.
The green corn springs, the gilt vine clings,
The net is in the sea.
My paradise around me lies,
Remote from wrath and wrong;
My isle is clean, unsought, unseen,
And innocent with song.

Here let me dwell in beauty's spell,
As tranquil as a tree;
Here let me bide, where wind and tide
Bourdon that I am free;
Here let me know from human woe
The rapture of release:
The rich caress of Loveliness,
The plenitude of Peace.

Robert William Service

Aunt Jane

When Aunt Jane died we hunted round,
And money everywhere we found.
How much I do not care to say,
But no death duties will we pay,
And Aunt Jane will be well content
We bilked the bloody Government.

While others spent she loved to save,
But couldn't take it to her grave.
While others save we love to spend;
She hated us but in the end
Because she left no Testament
To us all her possessions went.

That is to say they did not find
A lawyer's Will of any kind.
Yet there was one in her own hand,
A Home for Ailing Cats she planned.
Well, you can understand my ire:
Promptly I put it in the fire.

In misery she chose to die,
Yet we will make her money fly.
And as we mourn for poor Aunt Jane
The thought alleviates our pain:
Perhaps her savings in the end
Gave her more joy than we who spend.

Robert William Service

Awake To Smile

When I blink sunshine in my eyes
 And hail the amber morn,
Before the rosy dew-drop dries
 With sparkle on the thorn;
When boughs with robin rapture ring,
 And bees hum in the may,--
Then call me young, with heart of Spring,
 Though I be grey.

But when no more I know the joy
 And urgency of that hour,
As like a happy-hearted boy
 I leap to land aflower;
When gusto I no longer feel,
 To rouse with glad hooray,--
Then call me old and let me steal
 From men away.

Let me awaken with a smile
 And go to garden glee,
For there is such a little while
 Of living left to me;
But when star-wist I frail away,
 Lord, let the hope beguile
That to Ecstatic Light I may
 Awake to smile.

Robert William Service

Babette

My Lady is dancing so lightly,
The belle of the Embassy Ball;
I lied as I kissed her politely,
And hurried away from it all.
I'm taxiing up to Montmartre,
With never a pang of regret,
To toy for awhile with the garter
Of her whom I know as Babette.

My Lady's an exquisite creature,
As rare as a queen on a throne;
She's faultless in form and in feature,
But oh, she is cold as a stone.
And so from her presence I hurry,
Her iciness quick to forget
In sensuous joy as I bury
My face in the breast of Babette.

She's only a flower of the pavement;
With Paris and Spring in her eyes;
Yet I who foresaw what the grave meant
Of passion behold with surprise,
When she greets me as gay as a linnet,
Afar from life's fever and fret
I'm twenty years younger the minute
I enter the room of Babette.

The poor little supper she offers
Is more than a banquet to me;
A different bif-tik she proffers,
Pommes frit and a morsel of Brie;
We finish with coffee and kisses,
Then sit on the sofa and pet . . .
At the Embassy Mumm never misses,
But pinard's my drink with Babette.

Somehow and somewhere to my thinking,
There's a bit of apache in us all;
In bistros I'd rather be drinking,

Than dance at the Embassy Ball.
How often I feel I would barter
My place in the social set,
To roam in a moonlit Montmartre,
Alone with my little Babette.

I'm no longer young and I'm greying;
I'm tailored, top-hatted, kid-gloved,
And though in dark ways i be straying,
It's heaven to love and beloved;
The passion of youth to re-capture. . . .
My Lady's perfection and yet
When I kiss her I think of the rapture
I find in the charms of Babette -
Entwined in the arms of Babette.

Robert William Service

Baby Sitter

From torrid heat to frigid cold
I've rovered land and sea;
And now, with halting heart I hold
My grandchild on my knee:
Yet while I've eighty years all told,
Of moons she has but three.

She sleeps, that fragile miniature
Of future maidenhood;
She will be wonderful, I'm sure,
As over her I brood;
She is so innocent, so pure,
I know she will be good.

My way I've won from woe to weal,
And hard has been the fight;
Yet in my ingle-nook I feel
A wondrous peace to-night;
And over me serenely steal
Warm waves of love and light.

"What sloppy stuff!" I hear you say.
"Give us a lusty song."
Alas! I'm bent and gnarled and grey,--
My life may not be long:
Yet let its crown of glory be
This child upon me knee.

Robert William Service

Balloon

I bought my little grandchild Ann
 A bright balloon,
And I was such a happy man
 To hear her croon.
She laughed and babbled with delight,
 So gold its glow,
As by a thread she held it tight,
 Then--let it go.

As if it gloried to be free
 It climbed the sky;
But oh how sorrowful was she,
 And sad was I!
And when at eve with sobbing cry
 She saw the moon,
She pleaded to the pensive sky
 For her balloon.

O Little One, I pray that you
 In years to be,
Will hold a tiny baby too,
 And know its glee;
That yours will always be the thrill
 And joy of June,
And that you never, never will
 Cry for the moon.

Robert William Service

Bank Robber

I much admire, I must admit,
 The man who robs a Bank;
It takes a lot of guts and grit,
 For lack of which I thank
The gods: a chap 'twould make of me
 You wouldn't ask to tea.

I do not mean a burglar cove
 Who climbs into a house,
From room to room flash-lit to rove
 As quiet as a mouse;
Ah no, in Crime he cannot rank
 With him who robs a Bank.

Who seemeth not to care a whoop
 For danger at its height;
Who handles what is known as 'soup,'
 And dandles dynamite:
Unto a bloke who can do that
 I doff my bowler hat.

I think he is the kind of stuff
 To be a mighty man
In battlefield,--aye, brave enough
 The Cross Victorian
To win and rise to high command,
 A hero in the land.

What General with all his swank
Has guts enough to rob a Bank!

Robert William Service

Barb-Wire Bill

At dawn of day the white land lay all gruesome-like and grim,
When Bill Mc'Gee he says to me: "We've got to do it, Jim.
We've got to make Fort Liard quick. I know the river's bad,
But, oh! the little woman's sick . . . why! don't you savvy, lad?"
And me! Well, yes, I must confess it wasn't hard to see
Their little family group of two would soon be one of three.
And so I answered, careless-like: "Why, Bill! you don't suppose
I'm scared of that there `babbling brook'? Whatever you say -- goes."

A real live man was Barb-wire Bill, with insides copper-lined;
For "barb-wire" was the brand of "hooch" to which he most inclined.
They knew him far; his igloos are on Kittiegazuit strand.
They knew him well, the tribes who dwell within the Barren Land.
From Koyokuk to Kuskoquim his fame was everywhere;
And he did love, all life above, that little Julie Claire,
The lithe, white slave-girl he had bought for seven hundred skins,
And taken to his wickiup to make his moccasins.

We crawled down to the river bank and feeble folk were we,
That Julie Claire from God-knows-where, and Barb-wire Bill and me.
From shore to shore we heard the roar the heaving ice-floes make,
And loud we laughed, and launched our raft, and followed in their wake.
The river swept and seethed and leapt, and caught us in its stride;
And on we hurled amid a world that crashed on every side.
With sullen din the banks caved in; the shore-ice lanced the stream;
The naked floes like spooks arose, all jiggling and agleam.
Black anchor-ice of strange device shot upward from its bed,
As night and day we cleft our way, and arrow-like we sped.

But "Faster still!" cried Barb-wire Bill, and looked the live-long day
In dull despair at Julie Claire, as white like death she lay.
And sometimes he would seem to pray and sometimes seem to curse,
And bent above, with eyes of love, yet ever she grew worse.
And as we plunged and leapt and lunged, her face was plucked with pain,
And I could feel his nerves of steel a-quiver at the strain.
And in the night he gripped me tight as I lay fast asleep:
"The river's kicking like a steer . . . run out the forward sweep!
That's Hell-gate Canyon right ahead; I know of old its roar,
And . . . I'll be damned! the ice is jammed! We've GOT to make the shore."

With one wild leap I gripped the sweep. The night was black as sin.
The float-ice crashed and ripped and smashed, and stunned us with its din.
And near and near, and clear and clear I heard the canyon boom;
And swift and strong we swept along to meet our awful doom.
And as with dread I glimpsed ahead the death that waited there,
My only thought was of the girl, the little Julie Claire;
And so, like demon mad with fear, I panted at the oar,
And foot by foot, and inch by inch, we worked the raft ashore.

The bank was staked with grinding ice, and as we scraped and crashed,
I only knew one thing to do, and through my mind it flashed:
Yet while I groped to find the rope, I heard Bill's savage cry:
"That's my job, lad! It's me that jumps. I'll snub this raft or die!"
I saw him leap, I saw him creep, I saw him gain the land;
I saw him crawl, I saw him fall, then run with rope in hand.
And then the darkness gulped him up, and down we dashed once more,
And nearer, nearer drew the jam, and thunder-like its roar.

Oh God! all's lost . . . from Julie Claire there came a wail of pain,
And then -- the rope grew sudden taut, and quivered at the strain;
It slacked and slipped, it whined and gripped, and oh, I held my breath!
And there we hung and there we swung right in the jaws of death.

A little strand of hempen rope, and how I watched it there,
With all around a hell of sound, and darkness and despair;
A little strand of hempen rope, I watched it all alone,
And somewhere in the dark behind I heard a woman moan;
And somewhere in the dark ahead I heard a man cry out,
Then silence, silence, silence fell, and mocked my hollow shout.
And yet once more from out the shore I heard that cry of pain,
A moan of mortal agony, then all was still again.

That night was hell with all the frills, and when the dawn broke dim,
I saw a lean and level land, but never sign of him.
I saw a flat and frozen shore of hideous device,
I saw a long-drawn strand of rope that vanished through the ice.
And on that treeless, rockless shore I found my partner -- dead.
No place was there to snub the raft, so -- he had served instead;
And with the rope lashed round his waist, in last defiant fight,
He'd thrown himself beneath the ice, that closed and gripped him tight;
And there he'd held us back from death, as fast in death he lay. . . .

Say, boys! I'm not the pious brand, but -- I just tried to pray.
And then I looked to Julie Claire, and sore abashed was I,
For from the robes that covered her, I - heard - a - baby - cry....

Thus was Love conqueror of death, and life for life was given;
And though no saint on earth, d'ye think -- Bill's squared hisself with Heaven?

Robert William Service

Barcelona

The night before I left Milan
A mob jammed the Cathedral Square,
And high the tide of passion ran
As politics befouled the air.
A seething hell of human strife,
I shrank back from its evil core,
Seeing in this convulsive life
The living seeds of war.

To Barcelona then I came,
And oh the heavenly release!
From conflict and consuming flame
I knew the preciousness of peace.
Such veneration for the law!
How decorous was every one!
And then (significant) I saw
Each copper packed a tommy gun.

Well, maybe it is best that way.
Peace can mean more than liberty:
These people, state-directed, may
Be happier than those more free.
When politics wield evil grip,
And warring factions rise and fall,
Benevolent dictatorship
May be the answer, after all.

Robert William Service

Bastard

The very skies wee black with shame,
As near my moment drew;
The very hour before you cam
I felt I hated you.

But now I see how fair you are,
How divine your eyes,
It seems I step upon a star
To leap to Paradise.

What care I who your father was:
('Twas better no to know);

You're mine and mine alone because
I love and love you so.

What though you only bear my name,
I hold my head on high;
For none shall have a right to claim
A right to you but I.

Because I've borne a human life,
I'm worthier, I know,
Than those who flaunt the name of wife,
And have no seed to show.

I have fulfilled, I think with joy,
My women's destiny;
And glad am I you are a boy,
For you will fight for me.

And maybe there will come a day
You'll bear a famous name,
And men will be ashamed to say:
"He was a child of shame."

A day will dawn, divinely free,
With love in every breast,
When every child will welcome be,

And every mother blest.

When every women, wed or no,
Will deem her highest good
On grateful mankind to bestow
The Gift of Motherhood.

Robert William Service

Beachcomber

When I have come with happy heart to sixty years and ten,
I'll buy a boat and sail away upon a summer sea;
And in a little lonely isle that's far and far from men,
In peace and praise I'll spend the days the Gods allow to me.
For I am weary of a strife so pitiless and vain;
And in a far and fairy isle, bewilderingly bright,
I'll learn to know the leap and glow of rapture once again,
And welcome every living dawn with wonder and delight.

And there I'll build a swan-white house above the singing foam,
With brooding eaves, where joyously rich roses climb and cling;
With crotons in a double row, like wine and honeycomb,
And flame trees dripping golden rain, and palms pavilioning.
And there I'll let the wind and wave do what they will with me;
And I will dwell unto the end with loveliness and joy;
And drink from out the crystal spring, and eat from off the tree,
As simple as a savage is, as careless as a boy.

For I have come to think that Life's a lamentable tale,
And all we break our hearts to win is little worth our while;
For fame and fortune in the end are comfortless and stale,
And it is best to dream and rest upon a radiant isle.
So I'll blot out the bitter years of sufferance and scorn,
And I'll forget the fear and fret, the poverty and pain;
And in a shy and secret isle I'll be a man newborn,
And fashion life to heart's desire, and seek my soul again.

For when I come with happy heart to sixty years and ten,
I fondly hope the best of life will yet remain to me;
And so I'll burn my foolish books and break my futile pen,
And seek a tranced and tranquil isle, that dreams eternally.
I'll turn my back on all the world, I'll bid my friends adieu;
Unto the blink I'll leave behind what gold I have to give;
And in a jewelled solitude I'll mould my life anew,
And nestling close to Nature's heart, I'll learn at last . . . to live.

Robert William Service

Beak-Bashing Boy

But yesterday I banked on fistic fame,
Figgerin' I'd be a champion of the Ring.
Today I've half a mind to quit the Game,
For all them rosy dreams have taken wing,
Since last night a secondary bout
I let a goddam nigger knock me out.

It must have been that T-bone steak I ate;
They might have doped it, them smart gambling guys,
For round my heart I felt a heavy weight,
A stab of pain that should have put me wise.
But oh the cheering of the fans was sweet,
And never once I reckoned on defeat.

I had the nigger licked - twice he went down,
And there was just another round to go.
I played with him, I made him look a clown,
Yet he was game, and traded blow for blow.
And then that piston pain, the dark of doom . . .
Like meat they lugged me to my dressing-room.

So that's the pay-off to my bid for fame.
But yesterday my head was in the sky,
And now I slink and sag in sorry shame,
And hate to look my backers in the eye.
They think I threw the fight; I sorto' feel
The ringworms rate me for a lousy heel.

Oh sure I could go on - but gee! it's rough
To be a pork-and-beaner at the best;
To beg for bouts, yet getting not enough
To keep a decent feed inside my vest;
To go on canvas-kissing till I come
To cadge for drinks just like a Bowery bum.

Hell no! I'll slug my guts out till I die.
I'll be no bouncer in a cheap saloon.
I'll give them swatatorium scribes the lie,
I'll make a come-back, aye and pretty soon.

I'll show them tinhorn sports; I'll train and train,
I'll hear them cheer - oh Christ! the pain, the PAIN . . .

Stable-Boss:

"Poor punk! you're sunk - you'll never scrap again."

Robert William Service

Bed Sitter

He stared at me with sad, hurt eyes,
That drab, untidy man;
And though my clients I despise
I do the best I can
To comfort them with cheerful chat;
(Quite comme il faut, of course)
And furnish evidence so that
Their wives may claim divorce.

But as this chap sobbed out his woes
I thought: How it's a shame!
His wife's a bitch and so he goes
And takes himself the blame.
And me behaving like a heel
To earn a filthy fee . . .
Said I: "You've had a dirty deal."
"What of yourself?" said he.

And so I told him how I was
A widow of the war,
And doing what I did because
Two sons I struggled for.
As I sat knitting through the night
He eyed me from the bed,
And in the rosy morning light
Impulsively he said:

"Through in this sordid game we play,
To cheat the law we plan,
I do believe you when you say
You hold aloof from man;
Unto the dead you have been true,
And on the day I'm free,
To prove how I have faith in you -
Please, will you marry me?"

That's how it was. Now we are wed,
And life's a list of joys.
The old unhappy past is dead;

He's father to my boys.
And I have told him just to-day,
(Though forty, I confess,
A little sister's on the way
To crown our happiness.

Robert William Service

Belated Bard

The songs I made from joy of earth
 In wanton wandering,
Are rapturous with Maytime mirth
 And ecstasy of Spring.
But all the songs I sing today
 Take tediously the ear:
Novemberishly dark are they
 With mortuary fear.

For half a century has gone
 Since first I rang a rhyme;
And that is long to linger on
 The tolerance of Time.
This blue-veined hand with which I write
 Yet answers to my will;
Though four-score years I count to-night
 I am unsilent still.

"Senile old fool!" I hear you say;
 "Beside the dying fire
You huddle and stiff-fingered play
 Your tired and tinny lyre."
Well, though your patience I may try,
 Bear with me yet awhile,
And though you scorn my singing I
 Will thank you with a smile.

For I such soul-delighting joy
 Have found in simple rhyme,
Since first a happy-hearted boy
 I coaxed a word to chime,
That ere I tryst with Mother Earth
 Let from my heart arise
A song of youth and starry mirth . . .
 Then close my eyes.

Robert William Service

Belated Conscience

To buy for school a copy-book
 I asked my Dad for two-pence;
He gave it with a gentle look,
 Although he had but few pence.
'Twas then I proved myself a crook
 And came a moral cropper,
I bought a penny copy-book
 And blued the other copper.

I spent it on a sausage roll
 Gulped down with guilt suggestion,
To the damnation of my soul
 And awful indigestion.
Poor Dad! His job was hard to hold;
 His mouths to feed were many;
Were he alive a millionfold
 I'd pay him for his penny.

Now nigh the grave I think with grief,
 Though other sins are many,
I am a liar and a thief
 'Cause once I stole a penny:
Yet be he pious as a friar
 It is my firm believing,
That every man has been a liar
 And most of us done thieving.

Robert William Service

Benjamin Franklin

Franklin fathered bastards fourteen,
 (So I read in the New Yorker);
If it's true, in terms of courtin'
 Benny must have been a corker.
To be prudent I've aspired,
 And my passions I have mastered;
So that I have never sired
 A single bastard.

One of course can never know;
 But I think that if I had
It would give me quite a glow
 When a kiddie called me 'Dad.'
Watching toddlers at their play,
 Parentage I'd gladly claim,
But their mothers smiling say:
 'You're not to blame.'

Ben founded the Satevepost,
 And for that I much respect him;
But fourteen is quite a host
 Paternally to elect him.
'Fatherhood is not a crime,'
 Deemed fat Ben, 'there could be others . . .
Darlings, I had not the time
 To wed your mothers.'

Robert William Service

Bessie's Boil

Says I to my Missis: "Ba goom, lass! you've something I see, on your mind."

Says she: "You are right, Sam, I've something. It 'appens it's on me be'ind.

A Boil as 'ud make Job jealous. It 'urts me no end when I sit."

Says I: "Go to 'ospittel, Missis. They might 'ave to coot it a bit."

Says she: "I just 'ate to be showin' the part of me person it's at."

Says I: "Don't be fussy; them doctors see sights more 'orrid than that."

So Misses goes off togged up tasty, and there at the 'ospittel door

They tells 'er to see the 'ouse Doctor, 'oose office is Room Thirty-four.

So she 'unts up and down till she finds it, and knocks and a voice says: "Come in,"

And there is a 'andsome young feller, in white from 'is 'eels to 'is chin.

"I've got a big boil," says my Missis. "It 'urts me for fair when I sit,

And Sam (that's me 'usband) 'as asked me to ask you to coot it a bit."

Then blushin' she plucks up her courage, and bravely she shows 'im the place,

And 'e gives it a proper inspection, wi' a 'eap o' surprise on 'is face.

Then 'e says wi' an accent o' Scotland: "Whit ye hae is a bile, Ah can feel,

But ye'd better consult the heid Dockter; they caw him Professor O'Niel.

He's special for biles and carbuncles. Ye'll find him in Room Sixty-three.

No charge, Ma'am. It's been a rare pleasure. Jist tell him ye're comin' from me."

So Misses she thanks 'im politely, and 'unts up and down as before,

Till she comes to a big 'andsome room with "Professor O'Neil" on the door.

Then once more she plucks up her courage, and knocks, and a voice says: "All right."

So she enters, and sees a fat feller wi' whiskers, all togged up in white.

"I've got a big boil," says my Missis, "and if ye will kindly permit,

I'd like for to 'ave you inspect it; it 'urts me like all when I sit."

So blushin' as red as a beet-root she 'astens to show 'im the spot,

And 'e says wi' a look o' amazement: "Sure, Ma'am, it must hurt ye a lot."

Then 'e puts on 'is specs to regard it, and finally says wi' a frown:

"I'll bet it's as sore as the divvle, especially whin ye sit down.

I think it's a case for the Surgeon; ye'd better consult Doctor Hoyle.

I've no hisitation in sayin' yer boil is a hill of a boil."

So Misses she thanks 'im for sayin' her boil is a hill of a boil,

And 'unts all around till she comes on a door that is marked: "Doctor Hoyle."

But by now she 'as fair got the wind up, and trembles in every limb;

But she thinks: "After all, 'e's a Doctor. Ah moosn't be bashful wi' 'im."

She's made o' good stuff is the Missis, so she knocks and a voice says: "Oos there?"

"It's me," says ma Bessie, an' enters a room which is spacious and bare.

And a wise-lookin' old feller greets 'er, and 'e too is togged up in white.

"It's the room where they coot ye," thinks Bessie; and shakes like a jelly wi' fright.

"Ah got a big boil," begins Missis, "and if ye are sure you don't mind, I'd like ye to see it a moment. It 'urts me, because it's be'ind."

So thinkin' she'd best get it over, she 'astens to show 'im the place,

And 'e stares at 'er kindo surprised like, an' gets very red in the face.

But 'e looks at it most conscientious, from every angle of view,

Then 'e says wi' a shrug o' 'is shoulders: "Pore Lydy, I'm sorry for you.

It wants to be cut, but you should 'ave a medical bloke to do that.

Sye, why don't yer go to the 'orsespittel, where all the Doctors is at?

Ye see, Ma'am, this part o' the buildin' is closed on account o' repairs;

Us fellers is only the pynters, a-pyntin' the 'alls and the stairs."

Robert William Service

Bill The Bomber

The poppies gleamed like bloody pools through cotton-woolly mist;
The Captain kept a-lookin' at the watch upon his wrist;
And there we smoked and squatted, as we watched the shrapnel flame;
'Twas wonnerful, I'm tellin' you, how fast them bullets came.
'Twas weary work the waiting, though; I tried to sleep a wink,
For waitin' means a-thinkin', and it doesn't do to think.
So I closed my eyes a little, and I had a niceish dream
Of a-standin' by a dresser with a dish of Devon cream;
But I hadn't time to sample it, for suddenlike I woke:
"Come on, me lads!" the Captain says, 'n I climbed out through the smoke.
We spread out in the open: it was like a bath of lead;
But the boys they cheered and hollered fit to raise the bloody dead,
Till a beastly bullet copped 'em, then they lay without a sound,
And it's odd -- we didn't seem to heed them corpses on the ground.
And I kept on thinkin', thinkin', as the bullets faster flew,
How they picks the werry best men, and they lets the rotters through;
So indiscriminatin' like, they spares a man of sin,
And a rare lad wot's a husband and a father gets done in.
And while havin' these reflections and advancin' on the run,
A bullet biffs me shoulder, and says I: "That's number one."

Well, it downed me for a jiffy, but I didn't lose me calm,
For I knew that I was needed: I'm a bomber, so I am.
I 'ad lost me cap and rifle, but I "carried on" because
I 'ad me bombs and knew that they was needed, so they was.
We didn't 'ave no singin' now, nor many men to cheer;
Maybe the shrapnel drowned 'em, crashin' out so werry near;
And the Maxims got us sideways, and the bullets faster flew,
And I copped one on me flipper, and says I: "That's number two."

I was pleased it was the left one, for I 'ad me bombs, ye see,
And 'twas 'ard if they'd be wasted like, and all along o' me.
And I'd lost me 'at and rifle -- but I told you that before,
So I packed me mit inside me coat and "carried on" once more.
But the rumpus it was wicked, and the men were scarcer yet,
And I felt me ginger goin', but me jaws I kindo set,
And we passed the Boche first trenches, which was 'eapin' 'igh with dead,
And we started for their second, which was fifty feet ahead;
When something like a 'ammer smashed me savage on the knee,

And down I came all muck and blood: Says I: "That's number three."

So there I lay all 'elpless like, and bloody sick at that,
And worryin' like anythink, because I'd lost me 'at;
And thinkin' of me missis, and the partin' words she said:
"If you gets killed, write quick, ol' man, and tell me as you're dead."
And lookin' at me bunch o' bombs -- that was the 'ardest blow,
To think I'd never 'ave the chance to 'url them at the foe.
And there was all our boys in front, a-fightin' there like mad,
And me as could 'ave 'elped 'em wiv the lovely bombs I 'ad.
And so I cussed and cussed, and then I struggled back again,
Into that bit of battered trench, packed solid with its slain.

Now as I lay a-lyin' there and blastin' of me lot,
And wishin' I could just dispose of all them bombs I'd got,
I sees within the doorway of a shy, retirin' dug-out
Six Boches all a-grinnin', and their Captain stuck 'is mug out;
And they 'ad a nice machine gun, and I twigged what they was at;
And they fixed it on a tripod, and I watched 'em like a cat;
And they got it in position, and they seemed so werry glad,
Like they'd got us in a death-trap, which, condemn their souls! they 'ad.
For there our boys was fightin' fifty yards in front, and 'ere
This lousy bunch of Boches they 'ad got us in the rear.

Oh it set me blood a-boilin' and I quite forgot me pain,
So I started crawlin', crawlin' over all them mounds of slain;
And them barstards was so busy-like they 'ad no eyes for me,
And me bleedin' leg was draggin', but me right arm it was free. . . .
And now they 'ave it all in shape, and swingin' sweet and clear;
And now they're all excited like, but -- I am drawin' near;
And now they 'ave it loaded up, and now they're takin' aim. . . .
Rat-tat-tat-tat! Oh here, says I, is where I join the game.
And my right arm it goes swingin', and a bomb it goes a-slingin',
And that "typewriter" goes wingin' in a thunderbolt of flame.

Then these Boches, wot was left of 'em, they tumbled down their 'ole,
And up I climbed a mound of dead, and down on them I stole.
And oh that blessed moment when I heard their frightened yell,
And I laughed down in that dug-out, ere I bombed their souls to hell.
And now I'm in the hospital, surprised that I'm alive;
We started out a thousand men, we came back thirty-five.
And I'm minus of a trotter, but I'm most amazin' gay,

For me bombs they wasn't wasted, though, you might say, "thrown away".

Robert William Service

Bill's Grave

I'm gatherin' flowers by the wayside to lay on the grave of Bill;
I've sneaked away from the billet, 'cause Jim wouldn't understand;
'E'd call me a silly fat'ead, and larf till it made 'im ill,
To see me 'ere in the cornfield, wiv a big bookay in me 'and.

For Jim and me we are rough uns, but Bill was one o' the best;
We 'listed and learned together to larf at the wust wot comes;
Then Bill copped a packet proper, and took 'is departure West,
So sudden 'e 'adn't a minit to say good-bye to 'is chums.

And they took me to where 'e was planted, a sort of a measly mound,
And, thinks I, 'ow Bill would be tickled, bein' so soft and queer,
If I gathered a bunch o' them wild-flowers, and sort of arranged them round
Like a kind of a bloody headpiece . . . and that's the reason I'm 'ere.

But not for the love of glory I wouldn't 'ave Jim to know.
'E'd call me a slobberin' Cissy, and larf till 'is sides was sore;
I'd 'ave larfed at meself too, it isn't so long ago;
But some'ow it changes a feller, 'avin' a taste o' war.

It 'elps a man to be 'elpful, to know wot 'is pals is worth
(Them golden poppies is blazin' like lamps some fairy 'as lit);
I'm fond o' them big white dysies. . . . Now Jim's o' the salt o' the earth;
But 'e 'as got a tongue wot's a terror, and 'e ain't sentimental a bit.

I likes them blue chaps wot's 'idin' so shylike among the corn.
Won't Bill be glad! We was allus thicker 'n thieves, us three.
Why! 'Oo's that singin' so 'earty? JIM! And as sure as I'm born
'E's there in the giddy cornfields, a-gatherin' flowers like me.

Quick! Drop me posy be'ind me. I watches 'im for a while,
Then I says: "Wot 'o, there, Chummy! Wot price the little bookay?"
And 'e starts like a bloke wot's guilty, and 'e says with a sheepish smile:
"She's a bit of orl right, the widder wot keeps the estaminay."

So 'e goes away in a 'urry, and I wishes 'im best o' luck,
And I picks up me bunch o' wild-flowers, and the light's gettin' sorto dim,
When I makes me way to the boneyard, and . . . I stares like a man wot's stuck,
For wot do I see? Bill's grave-mound strewn with the flowers of Jim.

Of course I won't never tell 'im, bein' a tactical lad;
And Jim parley-voos to the widder: "Trez beans, lamoor; compree?"
Oh, 'e'd die of shame if 'e knew I knew; but say! won't Bill be glad
When 'e stares through the bleedin' clods and sees the blossoms of Jim and
me?

Robert William Service

Bill's Prayer

I never thought that Bill could say
A proper prayer;
'Twas more in his hard-bitten way
To cuss and swear;
Yet came the night when Baby Ted
Was bitter ill,
I tip-toed to his tiny bed,
And there was Bill.

Aye, down upon his bended knees
I heard him cry:
"O God, don't take my kiddy, please!
Don't let him die!"
Then softly so he would not see,
I shrank away:
He would have been so shamed for me
To see him pray.

Men-folk are queer: Bill acts up tough,
Yet how it's odd,
When things are looking downright rough
He tunes to God.
"The Parson and the Priest be darned!"
I've heard him say:
Yet when his baby is concerned
He's quick to pray.

Maybe it's gentle parent-hood
That gives us grace,
And in its sacrificial mood
Uplifts the race.
Of sentiment, all self above,
That goodness sums
I think the saving best is Love
For little ones.

Robert William Service

Bindle Stiff

When I was brash and gallant-gay
Just fifty years ago,
I hit the ties and beat my way
From Maine to Mexico;
For though to Glasgow gutter bred
A hobo heart had I,
And followed where adventure led,
Beneath a brazen sky.

And as I tramped the railway track
I owned a single shirt;
Like canny Scot I bought it black
So's not to show the dirt;
A handkerchief held all my gear,
My razor and my comb;
I was a freckless lad, I fear,
With all the world for home.

Yet oh I thought the life was grand
And loved my liberty!
Romance was my bed-fellow and
The stars my company.
And I would think, each diamond dawn,
"How I have forged my fate!
Where are the Gorbals and the Tron,
And where the Gallowgate?"

Oh daft was I to wander wild,
And seek the Trouble Trail,
As weakly as a wayward child,
And darkly doomed to fail . . .
Aye, bindle-stiff I hit the track
Just fifty years ago . . .
Yet now . . . I drive my Cadillac
From Maine to Mexico.

Robert William Service

Bingo

The daughter of the village Maire
Is very fresh and very fair,
 A dazzling eyeful;
She throws upon me such a spell
That though my love I dare not tell,
 My heart is sighful.
She has the cutest brown caniche,
The French for "poodle" on a leash,
 While I have Bingo;
A dog of doubtful pedigree,
Part pug or pom or chow maybe,
 But full of stingo.

The daughter of the village Maire
Would like to speak with me, I'll swear,
 In her sweet lingo;
But parlez-vous I find a bore,
For I am British to the core,
 And so is Bingo
Yet just to-day as we passed by,
Our two dogs halted eye to eye,
 In friendly poses;
Oh, how I hope to-morrow they
Will wag their tails in merry play,
 And rub their noses.

* * * * *

The daughter of the village Maire
Today gave me a frigid stare,
 My hopes are blighted.
I'll tell you how it came to pass . . .
Last evening in the Square, alas!
 My sweet I sighted;
And as she sauntered with her pet,
Her dainty, her adored Frolette,
 I cried: "By Jingo!"
Well, call it chance or call it fate,
I made a dash . . . Too late, too late!

Oh, naughty Bingo!

The daughter of the village Maire
That you'll forgive me, is my prayer
And also Bingo.

You should have shielded your caniche:
You saw my dog strain on his leash
And like a spring go.

They say that Love will find a way -
It definitely did, that day . . .

Oh, canine noodles!

Now it is only left to me
To wonder - will your offspring be
Poms, pugs or poodles?

Robert William Service

Bird Sanctuary

Between the cliff-rise and the beach
A slip of emerald I own;
With fig and olive, almond, peach,
cherry and plum-tree overgrown;
Glad-watered by a crystal spring
That carols through the silver night,
And populous with birds who sing
Gay madrigals for my delight.

Some merchants fain would buy my land
To build a stately pleasure dome.
Poor fools! they cannot understand
how pricelessly it is my home!
So luminous with living wings,
So musical with feathered joy . . .
Not for all pleasure fortune brings,
Would I such ecstasy destroy.

A thousand birds are in my grove,
Melodious from morn to night;
My fruit trees are their treasure trove,
Their happiness is my delight.
And through the sweet and shining days
They know their lover and their friend;
So I will shield in peace and praise
My innocents unto the end.

Robert William Service

Bird Watcher

In Wall Street once a potent power,
And now a multi-millionaire
Alone within a shady bower
In clothes his valet would not wear,
He watches bird wings bright the air.

The man who mighty mergers planned,
And oil and coal kinglike controlled,
With field-glasses in failing hand
Spies downy nestlings five days old,
With joy he could not buy for gold.

Aye, even childlike is his glee;
But how he crisps with hate and dread
And shakes a clawlike fist to see
A kestrel hover overhead:
Though he would never shoot it dead.

Although his cook afar doth forage
For food to woo his appetite,
The old man lives on milk and porridge
And now it is his last delight
At eve if one lone linnets lingers
To pick crushed almonds from his fingers.

Robert William Service

Birds Of A Feather

Of bosom friends I've had but seven,
 Despite my years are ripe;
I hope they're now enjoying Heaven,
 Although they're not the type;
Nor, candidly, no more am I,
 Though overdue to die.

For looking back I see that they
 Were weak and wasteful men;
They loved a sultry jest always,
 And women now and then.
They smoked and gambled, soused and swore,
 --Yet no one was a bore.

'Tis strange I took to lads like these,
 On whom the good should frown;
Yet all with poetry would please
 To wash his wassail down;
Their temples touched the starry way,
 But O what feet of clay!

Well, all are dust, of fame bereft;
 They bore a cruel cross,
And I, the canny one, am left,--
 Yet as I grieve their loss,
I deem, because they loved me well,
 They'll welcome me in Hell.

Robert William Service

Birthday

(16th January 1949)

I thank whatever gods may be
For all the happiness that's mine;
That I am festive, fit and free
To savour women, wit and wine;
That I may game of golf enjoy,
And have a formidable drive:
In short, that I'm a gay old boy
Though I be

Seventy-and-five.

My daughter thinks. because I'm old
(I'm not a crock, when all is said),
I mustn't let my feet get cold,
And should wear woollen socks in bed;
A worsted night-cap too, forsooth!
To humour her I won't contrive:
A man is in his second youth
When he is

Seventy-and-five.

At four-score years old age begins,
And not till then, I warn my wife;
At eighty I'll recant my sins,
And live a staid and sober life.
But meantime let me whoop it up,
And tell the world that I'm alive:
Fill to the brim the bubbly cup -
Here's health to

Seventy-and-five!

Robert William Service

Birthdays

Let us have birthdays every day,
(I had the thought while I was shaving)
Because a birthday should be gay,
And full of grace and good behaving.
We can't have cakes and candles bright,
And presents are beyond our giving,
But let us cherish with delight
The birthday way of lovely living.

For I have passed three-score and ten
And I can count upon my fingers
The years I hope to bide with men,
(Though by God's grace one often lingers.)
So in the summers left to me,
Because I'm blest beyond my merit,
I hope with gratitude and glee
To sparkle with the birthday spirit.

Let me inform myself each day
Who's proudest on the natal roster;
If Washington or Henry Clay,
Or Eugene Field or Stephen Foster.
Oh lots of famous folks I'll find
Who more than measure to my rating,
And so thanksgivingly inclined
Their birthdays I'll be celebrating.

For Oh I know the cheery glow |
Of Anniversary rejoicing;
Let me reflect its radiance so
My daily gladness I'll be voicing.
And though I'm stooped and silver-haired,
Let me with laughter make the hearth gay,
So by the gods I may be spared
Each year to hear: "Pop, Happy Birthday."

Robert William Service

Black Moran

The mule-skinner was Bill Jerome, the passengers were three;
Two tin horns from the dives of Nome, and Father Tim McGee.
And as for sunny Southland bound, through weary woods they sped,
The solitude that ringed them round was silent as the dead.

Then when the trail crooked crazily, the frost-rimed horses reared,
And from behind a fallen tree a grim galoot appeared;
He wore a parki white as snow, a mask as black as soot,
And carelesslike weaved to and fro a gun as if to shoot.

"Stick up yer mitts an' freeze 'em there!" his raucous voice outrang,
And shaving them by just a hair a blazing rod went bang.
The sleigh jerked to a sharp stand-still: "Okay," drawled Bill Jerome,
"Could be, this guy who aims to kill is Black Moran from Nome."

"You lousy crooks," the bandit cried; "You're slickly heeled I know;
Come, make it snappy, dump outside your booty in the snow."
The gambling pair went putty pale; they crimped as if with cold.
And heaved upon the icy trail two hefty pokes of gold.

Then softly stepping from the sleigh came Father Tim McGee,
And speaking in his gentle way: "Accept my Cross," said he.
"For other treasures have I none, their guilty gold to swell . . .
Please take this crucifix, my son, and may it serve you well."

The bandit whispered in his ear: "Jeez-crize, you got me wrong.
I wouldn't rob you Father dear - to your Church I belong."
Then swiftly striding to the sleigh he dumped the gold back in,
And hollered: "On your knees and pray, you lousy sons of sin!"

"Praise God," said Father Tim McGee, "he made you restitution,
And if he ever kneels to me I'll give him absolution."
"I'll have you guys to understand," said Driver Bill Jerome,
"The squarest gunman in the land is Black Moran from Nome."

Robert William Service

Bonehead Bill

I wonder 'oo and wot 'e was,
That 'Un I got so slick.
I couldn't see 'is face because
The night was 'ideous thick.
I just made out among the black
A blinkin' wedge o' white;
Then biff! I guess I got 'im crack --
The man I killed last night.

I wonder if account o' me
Some wench will go unwed,
And 'eaps o' lives will never be,
Because 'e's stark and dead?
Or if 'is missis damns the war,
And by some candle light,
Tow-headed kids are prayin' for
The Fritz I copped last night.

I wonder, 'struth, I wonder why
I 'ad that 'orful dream?
I saw up in the giddy sky
The gates o' God agleam;
I saw the gates o' 'eaven shine
Wiv everlastin' light:
And then . . . I knew that I'd got mine,
As 'e got 'is last night.

Aye, bang beyond the broodin' mists
Where spawn the mother stars,
I 'ammered wiv me bloody fists
Upon them golden bars;
I 'ammered till a devil's doubt
Fair froze me wiv affright:
To fink wot God would say about
The bloke I corpsed last night.

I 'ushed; I wilted wiv despair,
When, like a rosy flame,
I sees a angel standin' there

'Oo calls me by me name.
'E 'ad such soft, such shiny eyes;
'E 'eld 'is 'and and smiled;
And through the gates o' Paradise
'E led me like a child.

'E led me by them golden palms
Wot 'ems that jeweled street;
And seraphs was a-singin' psalms,
You've no ideer 'ow sweet;
Wiv cheroobs crowdin' closer round
Than peas is in a pod,
'E led me to a shiny mound
Where beams the throne o' God.

And then I 'ears God's werry voice:
"Bill 'agan, 'ave no fear.
Stand up and glory and rejoice
For 'im 'oo led you 'ere."
And in a nip I seemed to see:
Aye, like a flash o' light,
My angel pal I knew to be
The chap I plugged last night.

Now, I don't claim to understand --
They calls me Bonehead Bill;
They shoves a rifle in me 'and,
And show me 'ow to kill.
Me job's to risk me life and limb,
But . . . be it wrong or right,
This cross I'm makin', it's for 'im,
The cove I croaked last night.

Robert William Service

Book Borrower

I am a mild man, you'll agree,
 But red my rage is,
When folks who borrow books from me
 Turn down their pages.

Or when a chap a book I lend,
 And find he's loaned it
Without permission to a friend -
 As if he owned it.

But worst of all I hate those crooks
 (May hell-fires burn them!)
Who beg the loan of cherished books
 And don't return them.

My books are tendrils of myself
 No shears can sever . . .
May he who rapes one from its shelf
 Be damned forever.

Robert William Service

Book Lover

I keep collecting books I know
I'll never, never read;
My wife and daughter tell me so,
And yet I never head.
"Please make me," says some wistful tome,
"A wee bit of yourself."
And so I take my treasure home,
And tuck it in a shelf.

And now my very shelves complain;
They jam and over-spill.
They say: "Why don't you ease our strain?"
"some day," I say, "I will."
So book by book they plead and sigh;
I pick and dip and scan;
Then put them back, distressed that I
Am such a busy man.

Now, there's my Boswell and my Sterne,
my Gibbon and Defoe;
To savour Swift I'll never learn,
Montaigne I may not know.
On Bacon I will never sup,
For Shakespeare I've no time;
Because I'm busy making up
These jingly bits of rhyme.

Chekov is caviare to me,
While Stendhal makes me snore;
Poor Proust is not my cup of tea,
And Balzac is a bore.
I have their books, I love their names,
And yet alas! they head,
With Lawrence, Joyce and Henry James,
My Roster of Unread.

I think it would be very well
If I commit a crime,
And get put in a prison cell

And not allowed to rhyme;
Yet given all these worthy books
According to my need,
I now caress with loving looks,
But never, never read.

Robert William Service

Bookshelf

I like to think that when I fall,
A rain-drop in Death's shoreless sea,
This shelf of books along the wall,
Beside my bed, will mourn for me.

Regard it. . . . Aye, my taste is queer.
Some of my bards you may disdain.
Shakespeare and Milton are not here;
Shelly and Keats you seek in vain.
Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning too,
Remarkably are not in view.

Who are they? Omar first you see,
With Vine and Rose and Nightingale,
Voicing my pet philosophy
Of Wine and Song. . . . Then Reading Gaol,
Where Fate a gruesome pattern makes,
And dawn-light shudders as it wakes.

The Ancient Mariner is next,
With eerie and terrific text;
The Burns, with pawky human touch -
Poor devil! I have loved him much.
And now a gay quartette behold:
Bret Harte and Eugene Field are here;
And Henly, chanting brave and bold,
And Chesteron, in praise of Beer.

Lastly come valiant Singers three;
To whom this strident Day belongs:
Kipling, to whom I bow the knee,
Masefield, with rugged sailor songs. . . .
And to my lyric troupe I add
With greatful heart - The Shropshire Lad.

Behold my minstrels, just eleven.
For half my life I've loved them well.
And though I have no hope of Heaven,
And more than Highland fear of Hell,

May I be damned if on this shelf
ye find a rhyme I made myself.

Robert William Service

Boon Soul

Behold! I'm old; my hair is white;
My eighty years are in the offing,
And sitting by the fire to-night
I sip a grog to ease my coughing.
It's true I'm raucous as a rook,
But feeling bibulously "bardy,"
These lines I'm scribbling in a book:
The verse complete of Thomas Hardy.

Although to-day he's read by few,
Him have I loved beyond all measure;
So here to-night I riffle through
His pages with the oldtime pleasure;
And with this book upon my knee,
(To-day so woefully neglected)
I muse and think how soon I'll be
Myself among the Great Rejected.

Yet as these lines with zest I write,
Although the hour for me is tardy,
I think: "Of all the world to-night
'Tis I alone am reading Hardy";
And now to me he seems so nigh
I feel I commune with his spirit,
And as none love him more than I,
Thereby I gain a modest merit.

Oh Brother Thomas, glad I'll be,
Though all the world may pass unheeding,
If some greybeard con over me,
As I to-night your rhymes are reading;
Saying: "Old Bastard, you and I
By sin are knit in mind and body. . . ."
So ere to hit the hay I hie
Your ghost I'll toast in midnight toddy.

Robert William Service

Boxer's Wife

She phoned them when the Round was Eight:

'How is my Joe?' they heard her say.

They answered: 'Gee! He's going great,
Your guy's Okay.'

She phoned them when the Round was Nine:

'How is my hero in the fray?'

They yelled: 'He leads; he's doing fine,--
Joe's sure Okay.'

She phoned them when the Round was Ten:

'Is it still Okay with my Joe?'

Reluctant came the answer then,--
No Ma'am, KAYO.

Robert William Service

Brave Coward

Elisabeth imagines I've
 A yellow streak
She deems I have no dash and drive,
 Jest dogoned weak.
'A man should be a man,' says Liz
 'Trade blow for blow.'
Poor kid! What my position is
 She jest don't know.

She jest don't know my old man killed,
 Yea, slew and slew.
As steamy blood he sweetly spilled,
 So could I too.
And though no wrath of heart I show
 When I see red,
I fear no S. O. B. but oh
 Myself I dread.

Though fellers reckon me a dope
 And trigger-shy,
'Tain't nice to dangle on a rope,
 And like Pa die.
So as I belly to the bar
 Meek is my breath . . .
No guts! --Don't needle me too far,
 Elizabeth!

Robert William Service

Brave New World

One spoke: "Come, let us gaily go
With laughter, love and lust,
Since in a century or so
We'll all be boneyard dust.
When unborn shadows hold the screen,
(Our betters, I'll allow)
'Twill be as if we'd never been,
A hundred years from now.

When we have played life's lively game
Right royally we'll rot,
And not a soul will care a damn
The why or how we fought;
To grub for gold or grab for fame
Or raise a holy row,
It will be all the bloody same
A hundred years from now."

Said I: "Look! I have built a tower
Upon you lonely hill,
Designed to be a daughter's dower,
Yet when my heart is still,
The stone I set with horny hand
And salty sweat of brow,
A record of my strength will sand
A hundred years from now.

"There's nothing lost and nothing vain
In all this world so wide;
The ocean hoards each drop of rain
To swell its sweeping tide;
The desert seeks each grain of sand
It's empire to endow,
And we a bright brave world have planned
A hundred years from now.

And all we are and all we do
Will bring that world to be;
Our strain and pain let us not rue,

Though other eyes shall see;
For other hearts will bravely beat
And lips will sing of how
We strove to make life sane and sweet
A hundred years from now.

Robert William Service

Breakfast

Of all the meals that glad my day
My morning one's the best;
Purveyed me on a silver tray,
Immaculately dressed.
I rouse me when the dawn is bright;
I leap into the sea,
Returning with a rare delight
To honey, toast and tea.

My appetite was razor edged
When I was in my prime;
To eggs and bacon I was pledged . . .
Ala! the March of Time;
For now a genial old gent
With journal on my knee,
I sip and take with vast content
My honey, toast and tea.

So set me up for my delight
The harvest of the bee;
Brown, crispy toast with butter bright,
Ceylon - two cups or three.
Let others lunch or dinner praise,
But I regale with glee,
As I regard with grateful gaze
Just honey, toast and tea.

Robert William Service

Breath Is Enough

I draw sweet air
Deeply and long,
As pure as prayer,
As sweet as song.
Where lilies glow
And roses wreath,
Heart-joy I know
Is just to breathe.

Aye, so I think
By shore or sea,
As deep I drink
Of purity.
This brave machine,
Bare to the buff,
I keep ice-clean,
Breath is enough.

From mountain stream
To covert cool
The world, I deem,
Is wonderful;
The great, the small,
The smooth, the rough,
I love it all,--
Breath is enough.

Robert William Service

Breton Wife

A Wintertide we had been wed
When Jan went off to sea;
And now the laurel rose is red
And I wait on the quay.
His berthing boat I watch with dread,
For where, oh where is he?

"Weep not, brave lass," the Skipper said;
"Return to you he will;
In hospital he lies abed
In Rio in Brazil;
But though I know he is not dead,
I do not know his ill."

The Seaman's Hospital I wrote,
And soon there came reply.
The nurse's very words I quote:
"Your husband will not die;
But you must wait a weary boat -
I cannot tell you why."

The months of sun went snailing by.
I wrote by every mail,
Yet ever came the same reply:
"Your patience must not fail.
But though your good lad will not die,
We cannot tell his ail."

* * * * *

Ten months have gone - he's back again,
But aged by years a score,
And tells me with a look of pain
He'll never voyage more;
And at the tide, with longing vain,
He stares from out the door.

And in his sleep he turns from me
And moans with bitter blame

Of Spanish jades beyond the sea
Who wrought him evil shame,
So ever in him bleak will be
The Ill That Has No Name.

Robert William Service

Brother Jim

My brother Jim's a millionaire,
while I have scarce a penny;
His face is creased with lines of care,
While my mug hasn't any.
With inwardness his eyes are dim,
While mine laugh out in glee,
And though I ought to envy him,
I think he envies me.

He has a chateau, I a shack,
And humble I should be
To see his stately Cadillac
Beside my jalopy.
With chain of gold his belly's girt,
His beard is barber trim;
Yet bristle-chinned with ragged shirt,
I do not envy Jim.

My brother is a man of weight;
For every civic plum
He grabs within one pie of state,
While I am just a bum.
Last Winter he was near to croak
With gastric ulcers grim. . . .
And no! although I'm stony broke
I will not envy Jim

He gets the work, I get the fun;
He has no tie for play;
Whereas with paddle, rod and gun
My life's a holiday.
As over crabbed script he pores
I can the sky's blue rim. . . .
Oh boy! While I have God's outdoors
I'll never envy Jim.

Robert William Service

Café; Comedy

She

I'm waiting for the man I hope to wed.
I've never seen him - that's the funny part.
I promised I would wear a rose of red,
Pinned on my coat above my fluttered heart,
So that he'd know me - a precaution wise,
Because I wrote him I was twenty-three,
And Oh such heaps and heaps of silly lies. . .
So when we meet what will he think of me?

It's funny, but it has its sorry side;
I put an advert. in the evening Press:
"A lonely maiden fain would be a bride."
Oh it was shameless of me, I confess.
But I am thirty-nine and in despair,
Wanting a home and children ere too late,
And I forget I'm no more young and fair -
I'll hide my rose and run...No, no, I'll wait.

An hour has passed and I am waiting still.
I ought to feel relieved, but I'm so sad.
I would have liked to see him, just to thrill,
And sigh and say: "There goes my lovely lad!
My one romance!" Ah, Life's malign mishap!
"Garçon, a café; creme." I'll stay till nine. . .
The café;'s empty, just an oldish chap
Who's sitting at the table next to mine. . .

He

I'm waiting for the girl I mean to wed.
She was to come at eight and now it's nine.
She'd pin upon her coat a rose of red,
And I would wear a marguerite in mine.
No sign of her I see...It's true my eyes
Need stronger glasses than the ones I wear,
But Oh I feel my heart would recognize
Her face without the rose - she is so fair.

Ah! what deceivers are we aging men!
What vanity keeps youthful hope aglow!
Poor girl! I sent a photo taken when
I was a student, twenty years ago.
(Hers is so Springlike, Oh so blossom sweet!)
How she will shudder when she sees me now!
I think I'd better hide that marguerite -
How can I age and ugliness avow?

She does not come. It's after nine o'clock.
What fools we fogeys are! I'll try to laugh;
(Garcon, you might bring me another bock)
Falling in love, just from a photograph.
Well, that's the end. I'll go home and forget,
Then realizing I am over ripe
I'll throw away this silly cigarette
And philosophically light my pipe.

* * * * *

The waiter brought the coffee and the beer,
And there they sat, so woe-begone a pair,
And seemed to think: "Why do we linger here?"
When suddenly they turned, to start and stare.
She spied a marguerite, he glimpsed a rose;
Their eyes were joined and in a flash they knew. . .
The sleepy waiter saw, when time to close,
The sweet romance of those deceiving two,
Whose lips were joined, their hearts, their future too.

Robert William Service

Canine Conversation

If dogs could speak, O Mademoiselle,
What funny stories they could tell!
For instance, take your little "peke,"
How awkward if the dear could speak!
How sad for you and all of us,
Who round you flutter, flirt and fuss;
Folks think you modest, mild and meek . . .
But would they - if Fi-Fi could speak?

If dogs could tell, Ah Madame Rose,
What secrets could they not disclose!
If your pet poodle Angeline
Could hint at half of what she's seen,
Your reputation would, I fear,
As absolutely disappear
As would a snowball dropped in hell . . .
If Angeline could only tell.

If dogs could speak, how dangerous
It would be for a lot of us!
At what they see and what they hear
They wink an eye and wag an ear.
How fortunate for old and young
The darlings have a silent tongue!
We love them, but it's just as well
For all of us that - dogs can't tell.

Robert William Service

Captivity

O meadow lark, so wild and free,
It cannot be, it cannot be,
That men to merchandise your spell
Do close you in a wicker hell!

O hedgerow thrush so mad with glee,
it cannot be, it cannot be,
They rape you from your hawthorn foam
To make a cell of steel your home!

O blackbird in the orchard tree,
In cannot be, it cannot be,
That devils in a narrow cage
Would prison your melodic rage!

O you who live for liberty,
Can you believe that it can be,
That we of freedom's faith destroy
In dungeons, innocence and joy?

O decent folk who read this page,
If you should own a bird in cage,
Throw wide the door, - God gave it wings:
Then hear how in your heart it sings!

Robert William Service

Cardiac

A mattock high he swung;
I watched him at his toil;
With never gulp of lung
He gashed the ruddy soil.
Thought I, I'd give my wealth
 To have his health.

With fortune I would part,
And privilege resign,
Could I but have his heart,
And he have mine . . .
Then suddenly I knew
 My wish was true.

Like him I swung: with awe
He marked my steady breath.
Then suddenly I saw
That he was sick to death.
My heart in him was frail
 And seemed to fail.

Said I: 'Take back your heart
And I will bear with mine.
Poor lad! All wealth apart
'Tis murder I design,
Not all a Nabob's wealth
 Is worth your health.'

Robert William Service

Careers

I knew three sisters,--all were sweet;
 Wishful to wed was I,
And wondered which would mostly meet
 The matrimonial tie.

I asked the first what fate would she
 Wish joy of life to bring to her.
She answered: 'I would like to be
 A concert singer.'

I asked the second, for my mind
 Was set on nuptial noosing,
Unto what lot was she inclined
 If she could have the choosing?
Said she: 'For woman I can see
 No fortune finer,
Than to go in for Art and be
 A dress designer.'

With heavy heart I asked the third
 What was her life ambition;
A maiden she in look and word
 Of modest disposition.
'Alas, I dearly wish,' said she,
 'My aims were deeper:
My highest hope it is to be
 A good house-keeper.'

Which did I choose? Look at my home,--
 The answer's there;
As neat and sweet as honeycomb,
 With children fair.
And so it humbly seems to me,
 In common life,
A woman's glory is to be
 A good house-wife.

Robert William Service

Carry On

It's easy to fight when everything's right,
And you're mad with the thrill and the glory;
It's easy to cheer when victory's near,
And wallow in fields that are gory.
It's a different song when everything's wrong,
When you're feeling infernally mortal;
When it's ten against one, and hope there is none,
Buck up, little soldier, and chortle:

Carry on! Carry on!
There isn't much punch in your blow.
You're glaring and staring and hitting out blind;
You're muddy and bloody, but never you mind.
Carry on! Carry on!
You haven't the ghost of a show.
It's looking like death, but while you've a breath,
Carry on, my son! Carry on!

And so in the strife of the battle of life
It's easy to fight when you're winning;
It's easy to slave, and starve and be brave,
When the dawn of success is beginning.
But the man who can meet despair and defeat
With a cheer, there's the man of God's choosing;
The man who can fight to Heaven's own height
Is the man who can fight when he's losing.

Carry on! Carry on!
Things never were looming so black.
But show that you haven't a cowardly streak,
And though you're unlucky you never are weak.
Carry on! Carry on!
Brace up for another attack.
It's looking like hell, but -- you never can tell:
Carry on, old man! Carry on!

There are some who drift out in the deserts of doubt,
And some who in brutishness wallow;
There are others, I know, who in piety go

Because of a Heaven to follow.
But to labour with zest, and to give of your best,
For the sweetness and joy of the giving;
To help folks along with a hand and a song;
Why, there's the real sunshine of living.

Carry on! Carry on!
Fight the good fight and true;
Believe in your mission, greet life with a cheer;
There's big work to do, and that's why you are here.
Carry on! Carry on!
Let the world be the better for you;
And at last when you die, let this be your cry:
Carry on, my soul! Carry on!

Robert William Service

Causation

Said darling daughter unto me:
"oh Dad, how funny it would be
If you had gone to Mexico
A score or so of years ago.
Had not some whimsey changed your plan
I might have been a Mexican.
With lissome form and raven hair,
Instead of being fat and fair.

"Or if you'd sailed the Southern Seas
And mated with a Japanese
I might have been a squatty girl
With never golden locks to curl,
Who flirted with a painted fan,
And tinkled on a samisan,
And maybe slept upon a mat -
I'm very glad I don't do that.

"When I consider the romance
Of all your youth of change and chance
I might, I fancy, just as well
Have bloomed a bold Tahitian belle,
Or have been born . . . but there - ah no!
I draw the line - and Esquimeaux.
It scares me stiff to think of what
I might have been - thank God! I'm not."

Said I: "my dear, don't be absurd,
Since everything that has occurred,
Through seeming fickle in your eyes,
Could not a jot be otherwise.
For in this casual cosmic biz
The world can be but what it is;
And nobody can dare deny
Part of this world is you and I.

Or call it fate or destiny
No other issue could there be.
Though half the world I've wandered through

Cause and effect have linked us two.
Aye, all the aeons of the past
Conspired to bring us here at last,
And all I ever chanced to do
Inevitably led to you.

To you, to make you what you are,
A maiden in a Morris car,
IN Harris tweeds, an airedale too,
But Anglo-Saxon through and through.
And all the good and ill I've done
In every land beneath the sun
Magnificently led to this -
A country cottage and - your kiss."

Robert William Service

Celebrates

They must not wed the Doctor said,
For they were far from strong,
And children of their marriage bed
Might not live overlong.
And yet each eve I saw them pass
With rapt and eager air,
As fit a seeming lad and lass
As ought to pair.

For twenty years I went away
And scoured the China Sea,
Then homing came and found that they
Were still sweet company.
The Doctor and the Priest had banned
Three times their wedding ties,
Yet they were walking hand in hand,
Love in their eyes.

And then I went away again
For years another score,
And sailed all the Spanish Main
Ere I returned once more;
And now I see them pass my gate,
So slow and stooped and grey,
And when I asked them: "Why not mate?"
"We do," they say.

"No priest and village bells we need,
No Doctor to approve;
The Lord has wedded us indeed
With everlasting love.
How wonderful to understand
The working of His will!
Lo! We are walking hand in hand,
And sweethearts still."

Robert William Service

Charity

The Princess was of ancient line,
Of royal race was she;
Like cameo her face was fine,
With sad serenity:
Yet bent she toiled with dimming eye,
Her rice and milk to buy.

With lacework that for pity plead,
So out of date it seemed,
She sought to make her daily bread,
As of her past she dreamed:
And though sometimes I heard her sigh,
I never knew her cry.

Her patient heart was full of hope,
For health she gave God thanks,
Till one day in an envelope
I sealed a thousand francs,
And 'neath her door for her to see
I slipped it secretly.

'Twas long after, I came to know
My gift she never spent,
But gave to one of greater woe,
And wearily she went . . .
To be of charity a part,--
That stabbed her to the heart.

For one dark day we found her dead:
Oh she was sweet to see!
Exalted in her garret bed
With face like ivory . . .
Aye, though from lack of food she died,
Unflawed she flagged her pride.

Robert William Service

Cheer

It's a mighty good world, so it is, dear lass,
When even the worst is said.

There's a smile and a tear, a sigh and a cheer,
But better be living than dead;

A joy and a pain, a loss and a gain;

There's honey and may be some gall:

Yet still I declare, foul weather or fair,

It's a mighty good world after all.

For look, lass! at night when I break from the fight,

My Kingdom's awaiting for me;

There's comfort and rest, and the warmth of your breast,

And little ones climbing my knee.

There's fire-light and song -- Oh, the world may be wrong!

Its empires may topple and fall:

My home is my care -- if gladness be there,

It's a mighty good world after all.

O heart of pure gold! I have made you a fold,

It's sheltered, sun-fondled and warm.

O little ones, rest! I have fashioned a nest;

Sleep on! you are safe from the storm.

For there's no foe like fear, and there's no friend like cheer,

And sunshine will flash at our call;

So crown Love as King, and let us all sing --

"It's a mighty good world after all."

Robert William Service

Child Lover

Drunk or sober Uncle Jim
 Played the boy;
Never glum or sour or grim,
 Oozin' joy.
Most folks thought he was no good,
 Blamin' him;
But where kiddies were, you could
 Bank on Jim.

Sure he allus hated work,
 Lovin' play.
"Jest a good fer nuthin' jerk,"
 Lots would say.
Yet how the children fell for him,
 Whooped with glee:
Guys so popular as Jim
 Seldom be.

How old songs, sweet as a bell,
 He would sing!
What grand stories he would tell,
 Gesturin'!
Elders reckoned him a sot,
 Sighin' sad;
But with tiny toddlers what
 Sport he had!

Might have had a brood, they said,
 Of his own;
Lost his wife in childbirth bed,
 Left him lone . . .
Well, now he is cold an' still,
 Here's to him:
Kids an' mothers always will
 Bless old Jim.

Robert William Service

Cinderella

Cinderella in the street
In a ragged gown,
Sloven slippers on her feet,
Shames our tidy town;
Harsh her locks of ashen grey,
Vapour vague her stare,
By the curb this bitter day
Selling papers there.

Cinderella once was sweet,
Fine and lily fair,
Silver slippers on her feet,
Ribands in her hair;
Solid men besought her hand,
Tart was she as quince,
Living in a fairy land,
Waiting for a Prince.

Days went by and years went by,
Wistful wan was she;
Heedless of a mother's sigh,
Of a lover's plea;
On her lips a carol gay,
In her heart a dream -
Soon the Prince would come her way,
Gallant and agleam.

Then at last she learned the truth,
How her hope was vain;
Gone her beauty, gone her youth,
Leaving want and pain.
See! she's waiting all alone;
Hark! you hear her cry
Papers by the cold curb-stone,
Begging you to buy.

Winter winds are waxing chill,
Clouds rack overhead;
Cinderella will be ill,

Bye and bye be dead.
Yet she kept her vision clear,
To Romance was true,
Holding him forever dear
Whom she never knew.

* * * * *

Cinderellas of to-day
Take no chance of loss;
When a good guy comes your way,
Nail him to the cross.
Let some ordinary cuss
Your coy heart convince;
Never miss the nuptial bus
Waiting for a Prince.

Robert William Service

Clancy Of The Mounted Police

In the little Crimson Manual it's written plain and clear
That who would wear the scarlet coat shall say good-bye to fear;
Shall be a guardian of the right, a sleuth-hound of the trail--
In the little Crimson Manual there's no such word as "fail"--
Shall follow on though heavens fall, or hell's top-turrets freeze,
Half round the world, if need there be, on bleeding hands and knees.
It's duty, duty, first and last, the Crimson Manual saith;
The Scarlet Rider makes reply: "It's duty--to the death."
And so they sweep the solitudes, free men from all the earth;
And so they sentinel the woods, the wilds that know their worth;
And so they scour the startled plains and mock at hurt and pain,
And read their Crimson Manual, and find their duty plain.
Knights of the lists of unrenown, born of the frontier's need,
Disdainful of the spoken word, exultant in the deed;
Unconscious heroes of the waste, proud players of the game,
Props of the power behind the throne, upholders of the name:
For thus the Great White Chief hath said, "In all my lands be peace",
And to maintain his word he gave his West the Scarlet Police.

Livid-lipped was the valley, still as the grave of God;
Misty shadows of mountain thinned into mists of cloud;
Corpselike and stark was the land, with a quiet that crushed and awed,
And the stars of the weird sub-arctic glimmered over its shroud.

Deep in the trench of the valley two men stationed the Post,
Seymour and Clancy the reckless, fresh from the long patrol;
Seymour, the sergeant, and Clancy--Clancy who made his boast
He could cinch like a bronco the Northland, and cling to the prongs of the
Pole.

Two lone men on detachment, standing for law on the trail;
Undismayed in the vastness, wise with the wisdom of old--
Out of the night hailed a half-breed telling a pitiful tale,
"White man starving and crazy on the banks of the Nordenscold."

Up sprang the red-haired Clancy, lean and eager of eye;
Loaded the long toboggan, strapped each dog at its post;
Whirled his lash at the leader; then, with a whoop and a cry,
Into the Great White Silence faded away like a ghost.

The clouds were a misty shadow, the hills were a shadowy mist;
 Sunless, voiceless and pulseless, the day was a dream of woe;
Through the ice-rifts the river smoked and bubbled and hissed;
 Behind was a trail fresh broken, in front the untrodden snow.

Ahead of the dogs ploughed Clancy, haloed by steaming breath;
 Through peril of open water, through ache of insensate cold;
Up rivers wantonly winding in a land affianced to death,
 Till he came to a cowering cabin on the banks of the Nordenscold.

Then Clancy loosed his revolver, and he strode through the open door;
 And there was the man he sought for, crouching beside the fire;
The hair of his beard was singeing, the frost on his back was hoar,
 And ever he crooned and chanted as if he never would tire:--

"I panned and I panned in the shiny sand, and I sniped on the river bar;
But I know, I know, that it's down below that the golden treasures are;
So I'll wait and wait till the floods abate, and I'll sink a shaft once more,
And I'd like to bet that I'll go home yet with a brass band playing before."

He was nigh as thin as a sliver, and he whined like a Moose-hide cur;
 So Clancy clothed him and nursed him as a mother nurses a child;
Lifted him on the toboggan, wrapped him in robes of fur,
 Then with the dogs sore straining started to face the Wild.

Said the Wild, "I will crush this Clancy, so fearless and insolent;
 For him will I loose my fury, and blind and buffet and beat;
Pile up my snows to stay him; then when his strength is spent,
 Leap on him from my ambush and crush him under my feet.

"Him will I ring with my silence, compass him with my cold;
 Closer and closer clutch him unto mine icy breast;
Buffet him with my blizzards, deep in my snows enfold,
 Claiming his life as my tribute, giving my wolves the rest."

Clancy crawled through the vastness; o'er him the hate of the Wild;
 Full on his face fell the blizzard; cheering his huskies he ran;
Fighting, fierce-hearted and tireless, snows that drifted and piled,
 With ever and ever behind him singing the crazy man.

"Sing hey, sing ho, for the ice and snow,

And a heart that's ever merry;
Let us trim and square with a lover's care
(For why should a man be sorry?)
A grave deep, deep, with the moon a-peep,
A grave in the frozen mould.
Sing hey, sing ho, for the winds that blow,
And a grave deep down in the ice and snow,
A grave in the land of gold."

Day after day of darkness, the whirl of the seething snows;
Day after day of blindness, the swoop of the stinging blast;
On through a blur of fury the swing of staggering blows;
On through a world of turmoil, empty, inane and vast.
Night with its writhing storm-whirl, night despairingly black;
Night with its hours of terror, numb and endlessly long;
Night with its weary waiting, fighting the shadows back,
And ever the crouching madman singing his crazy song.

Cold with its creeping terror, cold with its sudden clinch;
Cold so utter you wonder if 'twill ever again be warm;
Clancy grinned as he shuddered, "Surely it isn't a cinch
Being wet-nurse to a looney in the teeth of an arctic storm.

"The blizzard passed and the dawn broke, knife-edged and crystal clear;
The sky was a blue-domed iceberg, sunshine outlawed away;
Ever by snowslide and ice-rip haunted and hovered the Fear;
Ever the Wild malignant poised and panted to slay.

The lead-dog freezes in harness--cut him out of the team!
The lung of the wheel-dog's bleeding--shoot him and let him lie!
On and on with the others--lash them until they scream!
"Pull for your lives, you devils! On! To halt is to die."

There in the frozen vastness Clancy fought with his foes;
The ache of the stiffened fingers, the cut of the snowshoe thong;
Cheeks black-raw through the hood-flap, eyes that tingled and closed,
And ever to urge and cheer him quavered the madman's song.

Colder it grew and colder, till the last heat left the earth,
And there in the great stark stillness the bale fires glinted and gleamed,
And the Wild all around exulted and shook with a devilish mirth,
And life was far and forgotten, the ghost of a joy once dreamed.

Death! And one who defied it, a man of the Mounted Police;
Fought it there to a standstill long after hope was gone;
Grinned through his bitter anguish, fought without let or cease,
Suffering, straining, striving, stumbling, struggling on.

Till the dogs lay down in their traces, and rose and staggered and fell;
Till the eyes of him dimmed with shadows, and the trail was so hard to see;
Till the Wild howled out triumphant, and the world was a frozen hell--
Then said Constable Clancy: "I guess that it's up to me."

Far down the trail they saw him, and his hands they were blanched like bone;
His face was a blackened horror, from his eyelids the salt rheum ran;
His feet he was lifting strangely, as if they were made of stone,
But safe in his arms and sleeping he carried the crazy man.

So Clancy got into Barracks, and the boys made rather a scene;
And the O. C. called him a hero, and was nice as a man could be;
But Clancy gazed down his trousers at the place where his toes had been,
And then he howled like a husky, and sang in a shaky key:

"When I go back to the old love that's true to the finger-tips,
I'll say: 'Here's bushels of gold, love,' and I'll kiss my girl on the lips;
It's yours to have and to hold, love.' It's the proud, proud boy I'll be,
When I go back to the old love that's waited so long for me."

Robert William Service

Class-Mates

Bob Briggs went in for Government,
And helps to run the State;
Some day they say he'll represent
His party in debate:
But with punk politics his job,
I do not envy Bob.

Jim Jones went in for writing books,
Best sellers were his aim;
He's ten years younger than he looks,
And licks the heels of Fame:
Though shop-girls make a fuss of him
I do not envy Jim.

Joe Giles went in for grabbing gold,
And grovelled in the dirt;
He, too, looks prematurely old,
His gastric ulcers hurt:
Although he has a heap of dough.
I do not envy Joe.

I've neither fame nor power nor wealth,
I fish and hunt for food;
But I have heaps of rugged health,
And life seems mighty good.
So when my class-mates come to spend
A week-end in my shack,
With lake and wood at journey's end
--They envy Jack.

Robert William Service

Clemenceau

His frown brought terror to his foes,
 But now in twilight of his days
The pure perfection of a rose
 Can kindle rapture in his gaze.
Where once he swung the sword of wrath
 And peoples trembled at his word,
With hoe he trims a pansied path
 And listens to a bird.

His large of life was lived with noise,
 With war and strife and crash of kings:
But now he hungers for the joys
 Of peace, and hush of homely things.
His old dog nuzzles by his knee,
 And seems to say: 'Oh Master dear,
Please do not ever part from me!
 We are so happy here.'

His ancient maid, as sky draws dim,
 Calls to him that the soup grows cold.
She tyrannises over him
 Who once held armies in his hold.
With slippers, old skull-cap and shawl
 He dreams and dozes by the fire,
Sighing: 'Behold the end of all,
 Sweet rest my sole desire.

'My task is done, my pen is still;
 My Book is there for all to see,--
The final triumph of my will,
 Ineffably, my victory.
A Tiger once, but now a lamb,
 With frailing hand my gate I close.
How hushed my heart! My life how calm!
 --Its crown a Rose.'

Robert William Service

Cocotte

When a girl's sixteen, and as poor as she's pretty,
And she hasn't a friend and she hasn't a home,
Heigh-ho! She's as safe in Paris city
As a lamb night-strayed where the wild wolves roam;
And that was I; oh, it's seven years now
(Some water's run down the Seine since then),
And I've almost forgotten the pangs and the tears now,
And I've almost taken the measure of men.

Oh, I found me a lover who loved me only,
Artist and poet, and almost a boy.
And my heart was bruised, and my life was lonely,
And him I adored with a wonderful joy.
If he'd come to me with his pockets empty,
How we'd have laughed in a garret gay!
But he was rich, and in radiant plenty
We lived in a villa at Viroflay.

Then came the War, and of bliss bereft me;
Then came the call, and he went away;
All that he had in the world he left me,
With the rose-wreathed villa at Viroflay.
Then came the news and the tragic story:
My hero, my splendid lover was dead,
Sword in hand on the field of glory,
And he died with my name on his lips, they said.

So here am I in my widow's mourning,
The weeds I've really no right to wear;
And women fix me with eyes of scorning,
Call me "cocotte", but I do not care.
And men look at me with eyes that borrow
The brightness of love, but I turn away;
Alone, say I, I will live with Sorrow,
In my little villa at Viroflay.

And lo! I'm living alone with Pity,
And they say that pity from love's not far;
Let me tell you all: last week in the city

I took the metro at Saint Lazare;
And the carriage was crowded to overflowing,
And when there entered at Chateaudun
Two wounded poilus with medals showing,
I eagerly gave my seat to one.

You should have seen them: they'd slipped death's clutches,
But sadder a sight you will rarely find;
One had a leg off and walked on crutches,
The other, a bit of a boy, was blind.
And they both sat down, and the lad was trying
To grope his way as a blind man tries;
And half of the women around were crying,
And some of the men had tears in their eyes.

How he stirred me, this blind boy, clinging
Just like a child to his crippled chum.
But I did not cry. Oh no; a singing
Came to my heart for a year so dumb,
Then I knew that at three-and-twenty
There is wonderful work to be done,
Comfort and kindness and joy in plenty,
Peace and light and love to be won.

Oh, thought I, could mine eyes be given
To one who will live in the dark alway!
To love and to serve -- 'twould make life Heaven
Here in my villa at Viroflay.
So I left my poilus: and now you wonder
Why to-day I am so elate. . . .
Look! In the glory of sunshine yonder
They're bringing my blind boy in at the gate.

Robert William Service

Comfort

Say! You've struck a heap of trouble --
 Bust in business, lost your wife;
No one cares a cent about you,
 You don't care a cent for life;
Hard luck has of hope bereft you,
 Health is failing, wish you'd die --
Why, you've still the sunshine left you
 And the big, blue sky.

Sky so blue it makes you wonder
 If it's heaven shining through;
Earth so smiling 'way out yonder,
 Sun so bright it dazzles you;
Birds a-singing, flowers a-flinging
 All their fragrance on the breeze;
Dancing shadows, green, still meadows --
 Don't you mope, you've still got these.

These, and none can take them from you;
 These, and none can weigh their worth.
What! you're tired and broke and beaten? --
 Why, you're rich -- you've got the earth!
Yes, if you're a tramp in tatters,
 While the blue sky bends above
You've got nearly all that matters --
 You've got God, and God is love.

Robert William Service

Compassion

A beggar in the street I saw,
Who held a hand like withered claw,
 As cold as clay;
But as I had no silver groat
To give, I buttoned up my coat
 And turned away.

And then I watched a working wife
Who bore the bitter load of life
 With lagging limb;
A penny from her purse she took,
And with sweet pity in her look
 Gave it to him.

Anon I spied a shabby dame
Who fed six sparrows as they came
 In famished flight;
She was so poor and frail and old,
Yet crumbs of her last crust she doled
 With pure delight.

Then sudden in my heart was born
For my sleek self a savage scorn,--
 Urge to atone;
So when a starving cur I saw
I bandaged up its bleeding paw
 And bought a bone.

For God knows it is good to give;
We may not have so long to live,
 So if we can,
Let's do each day a kindly deed,
And stretch a hand to those in need,
 Bird, beast or man.

Robert William Service

Compensation Pete

He used to say: There ain't a doubt
Misfortune is a bitter pill,
But if you only pry it out
You'll find there's good in every ill.
There's comfort in the worst of woe,
There's consolation in defeat . . .
Oh what a solace-seeker! So
We called him Compensation Pete.

He lost his wealth - but was he pipped?
Why no - "That's fine," he used to say.
"I've got the government plumb gypped -
No more damn income tax to pay.
From cares of property set free,
And with no pesky social ties,
Why, even poverty may be
A benediction in disguise."

He lost his health: "Okay," he said;
"I'm getting on, may be the best.
I've always loved to lie abed,
And now I have the right to rest.
Such heaps o' things I want to do,
I'll have no time to fret or brood.
I'll read the dam ol' Bible through:
Guess it'll do me plenty good."

He has that line of sunny shine
That makes a blessing of a curse,
And he would say: "Don't let's repine,
Though things are bad they might be worse."
And so he cherished to the end
Philosophy so sane and sweet
That everybody was his friend . . .
With optimism hard to beat -
God bless old Compensation Pete.

Robert William Service

Comrades

Three Holies sat in sacred place
 And quaffed celestial wine,
As they discussed the human race
 With dignity divine.
Said they: 'Although in doctrine we
 May differ more or less,
In spirit stoutly we agree
 Religion's a success.'

Said One: 'I praise the pride of war,
 The Faith that mocks at fear;
Desire of death in battle for
 It bringeth Heaven near.'
The Second said: 'Tis Peace I preach,
 And hate of human strife;
The sufferance of pain I teach,
 The sanctity of life.'

Then said the Third: 'Love I proclaim
 The goal of human good . . .
Yet are we not all three the same
 In holy brotherhood?'
And so they went forth hand in hand,
 Wending a starry way,--
Mohamet, gentle Buddha and
 He of Gethsemenè.

Robert William Service

Confetti In The Wind

He wrote a letter in his mind
 To answer one a maid had sent;
He sought the fitting word to find,
 As on by hill and rill he went.
By bluebell wood and hawthorn lane,
 The cadence sweet and silken phrase
He incubated in his brain
 For days and days.

He wrote his letter on a page
 Of paper with a satin grain;
It did not ring, so in a rage
 He tore it up and tried again.
Time after time he drafted it;
 He polished it all through the night;
He tuned and pruned till bit by bit
 He got it right.

He took his letter to the post,
 Yet long he held it in his hand.
Strangely his mood had veered, almost
 Reversed,--he could not understand.
The girl was vague, the words were vain;
 April romance had come to grief . . .
He tore his letter up again,--
 Oh blest relief!

Robert William Service

Conqueror

Though I defy the howling horde
As bloody-browed I smite,
Back to the wall with shattered sword
When darkly dooms the night;
Though hoarse they cheer as I go down
Before their bitter odds,
'Tis I who win the victor's crown,
The guerdon of the gods.

For all who fall in fearless fight
Alight a deathless flame,
That glorifies the godless night
And fills the foe with shame.
'Tis they who triumph heaven-high,
And so in hell's despite,
Be mine the dauntless will to die
In battle for the right.

The rant and cant of futile folk
Break brittle in my ears;
Let me cast off the cursed yoke
And fall upon the spears.
Aye, though they mock my broken blade,
And stamp and spit on me,
Mine is the Shining Accolade,
The Star of Victory.

Robert William Service

Contentment

An Ancient gaffer once I knew,
Who puffed a pipe and tossed a tankard;
He claimed a hundred years or two,
And for a dozen more he hankered;
So o'er a pint I asked how he
Had kept his timbers tight together;
He grinned and answered: "It maun be
Because I likes all kinds o' weather.

"Fore every morn when I get up
I lights my clay pipe wi' a cinder,
And as me mug o' tea I sup
I looks from out the cottage winder;
And if it's shade or if it's shine
Or wind or snow befit to freeze me,
I always say: 'Well, now that's fine...
It's just the sort o' day to please me.'

"For I have found it wise in life
To take the luck the way it's coming;
A wake, a worry or a wife -
Just carry on and keep a-humming.
And so I lights me pipe o' clay,
And through the morn on blizzard borders,
I chuckle in me guts and say:
'It's just the day the doctor orders.'"

A mighty good philosophy
Thought I, and leads to longer living,
To make the best of things that be,
And take the weather of God's giving;
So though the sky be ashen grey,
And winds be edged and sleet be slanting,
Heap faggots on the fire and say:
"It's just the kind of day I'm wanting."

Robert William Service

Contrast

"Carry your suitcase, Sir?" he said.
I turned away to hide a grin,
For he was shorter by a head
Than I and pitiably thin.
I could have made a pair of him,
So with my load I stoutly legged;
But his tenacity was grim:
"Please let me help you, sir," he begged.

I could not shake the fellow off,
So let him shoulder my valise;
He tottered with a racking cough
That did not give him any peace.
He lagged so limply in my wake
I made him put the burden down,
Saying: "A taxi I will take,"
And grimly gave him half-a-crown.

Poor devil! I am sure he had
Not eaten anything that day;
His eyes so hungrily were glad,
Although his lips were ashen grey.
He vanished in the callous crowd,
Then when he was no more around,
I lugged my bag and thought aloud:
"I wish I'd given him a pound."

And strangely I felt sore ashamed,
As if somehow I had lost face;
And not only myself I blamed
But all the blasted human race;
And all this life of battle where
The poor are beaten to their knees,
And while the weak the burdens bear,
Fat fools like me can stroll at ease.

Robert William Service

Convicts Love Canaries

Dick's dead! It was the Polack guard
Put powdered glass into his cage
When I was tramping round the yard,--
I could have killed him in my rage.
I slugged him with that wrench I stole:
That's why I'm rotting in the Hole.

Dick's dead! Sure I wish I was too.
His honey breast, his lacy claws
I kissed and cried, for well I knew
They murdered him. I cursed because
He was my only chum on earth . . .
Oh how he cheered me with his mirth!

Dick's dead! I know he cared for me.
Being I'm Irish I love song,
And there was heaven in his glee;
I'd bless his heart the dour day long.
I'd let him flutter round the cell;
He'd light upon my hand . . . Oh hell!

Dick's dead! They've thrown me in the Hole.
To break our spirits how they try!
My bed a plank, blind as a mole,
Sure I'll be nuts before I die . . .
Here in the night, dark as the Pit
I'm seeing sunny wings afloat.
Here in the silence, hark his song!
--Poor Dick! Oh Christ, how long, how long!

Robert William Service

Courage

Today I opened wide my eyes,
And stared with wonder and surprise,
To see beneath November skies
An apple blossom peer;
Upon a branch as bleak as night
It gleamed exultant on my sight,
A fairy beacon burning bright
Of hope and cheer.

'Alas! ' said I, 'poor foolish thing,
Have you mistaken this for Spring?
Behold, the thrush has taken wing,
And Winter's near.'
Serene it seemed to lift its head:
'The Winter's wrath I do not dread,
Because I am,' it proudly said,
'A Pioneer.

'Some apple blossom must be first,
With beauty's urgency to burst
Into a world for joy athirst,
And so I dare;
And I shall see what none shall see -
December skies gloom over me,
And mock them with my April glee,
And fearless fare.

'And I shall hear what none shall hear -
The hardy robin piping clear,
The Storm King gallop dark and drear
Across the sky;
And I shall know what none shall know -
The silent kisses of the snow,
The Christmas candles' silver glow,
Before I die.

'Then from your frost-gemmed window pane
One morning you will look in vain,
My smile of delicate disdain

No more to see;
But though I pass before my time,
And perish in the gale and grime,
Maybe you'll have a little rhyme
To spare for me.'

Robert William Service

Courage 2

Ten little brown chicks scattered and scuffled,
Under the blue-berries hiding in fear;
Mother-grouse cackling, feathers all ruffled,
Dashed to defend them as we drew near.
Heart of a heroine, how I admired her!
Of such devotion great poets have sung;
Homes have been blest by the love that inspired her,
Risking her life for the sake of her young.

Ten little chicks on her valour reliant,
Peered with bright eyes from the bilberry spray;
Fiercely she faced us, dismayed but defiant,
Rushed at us bravely to scare us away.
Then my companion, a crazy young devil
(After, he told me he'd done it for fun)
Pretended to tremble, and raised his arm level,
And ere I could check him he blazed with his gun.

Headless she lay, from her neck the blood spouted,
And dappled her plumage, the poor, pretty thing!
Ten little chicks - oh, I know for I counted,
Came out and they tried to creep under her wing.
Sickened I said: 'Here's an end to my killing;
I swear, nevermore bird or beast will I slay;
Starving I may be, but no more blood-spilling . . .'
That oath I have kept, and I keep it to-day.

Robert William Service

Courage 3

In the shadow of the grave
I will be brave;
I'll smile,- I know I will
E'er I be still;
Because I will not smile
So long a while.

But I'll be sad, I fear,
And shed a tear,
For those I love and leave
My loss to grieve:
'Tis just their grief I'll grieve,
Believe, believe.

Not for myself I care
As forth I fare;
But for those left behind
Wae is my mind
Knowing how they will miss
My careless kiss.

Oh I'll be brave when I
Shall come to die;
With courage I will quaff
The Cup and laugh,
Aye, even mock at Death
With failing breath.

It is not those who go
Who suffer woe;
But stricken ones who bide
By cold bedside:
God comfort you who keep
Watch by my sleep!

Robert William Service

Cowardice

Although you deem it far from nice,
 And it perchance may hurt you,
Let me suggest that cowardice
 Can masquerade as virtue;
And many a maid remains a maid
 Because she is afraid.

And many a man is chaste because
 He fears the house of sin;
And though before the door he pause,
 He dare not enter in:
So worse than being dissolute
 At home he plays the flute.

And many an old cove such as I
 Is troubled with the jitters,
And being as he's scared to die
 Gives up his gin and bitters;
While dreading stomach ulcers he
 Chucks dinner for high tea.

Well, we are wise. When life begins
 To look so dour and dark
'Tis good to jettison our sins
 And keep afloat the bark:
But don't let us claim lack of vice
 For what's plumb cowardice!

Robert William Service

Cows

I love to watch my seven cows
In meads of buttercups abrowse,
 With gilded knees;
But even more I love to see
Them chew the cud so tranquilly
 In twilight ease.

Each is the image of content
From fragrant hours in clover spent,
 'Mid leaf and bud;
As up and down without a pause
Mechanically move their jaws
 To chew the cud.

Friend, there's a hope for me and you:
Let us resolve to chew and chew
 With molars strong;
The man who learns to masticate
With patience may control his fate,
 His life prolong.

In salivation is salvation:
So if some silly little nation
 Should bathe in blood,
Let's take a lesson from the cow,
And learn in life's long gloaming how
 To chew the cud.

Robert William Service

Dance-Hall Girls

Where are the dames I used to know
In Dawson in the days of yore?
Alas, it's fifty years ago,
And most, I guess, have "gone before."
The swinging scythe is swift to mow
Alike the gallant and the fair;
And even I, with gouty toe,
Am glad to fill a rocking chair.

Ah me, I fear each gaysome girl
Who in champagne I used to toast,
or cozen in the waltz's whirl,
In now alas, a wistful ghost.
Oh where is Touch The Button Nell?
Or Minnie Dale or Rosa Lee,
Or Lorna Doone or Daisy Bell?
And where is Montreal Maree?

Fair ladies of my lusty youth,
I fear that you are dead and gone:
Where's Gertie of the Diamond Tooth,
And where the Mare of Oregon?
What's come of Violet de Vere,
Claw-fingered Kate and Gumboot Sue?
They've crossed the Great Divide, I fear;
Remembered now by just a few.

A few who like myself can see
Through half a century of haze
A heap of goodness in their glee
And kindness in their wanton ways.
Alas, my sourdough days are dead,
Yet let me toss a tankard down . . .
Here's hoping that you wed and bred,
And lives of circumspection led,
Gay dance-hall girls o Dawson Town!

Robert William Service

Dark Glasses

Sweet maiden, why disguise
The beauty of your eyes
 With glasses black?
Although I'm well aware
That you are more than fair,
 Allure you lack.
For as I stare at you
I ask if brown or blue
 Your optics are?
But though I cannot see,
I'm sure that each must be
 Bright as a star.

That may be green or grey,
'Tis very hard to say,
 Or violet;
The lovelight in their glow
Alas, I'll never know,
 To my regret.
In some rhyme-book I've read,
A lady bard has said,
 And deemed it true,
Men will not bite the necks
Of sweeties who wear specs,--
 Young man, would you?

But though they balk romance,
Columbus took a chance,
 And so would I;
Even with orbs unseen
I'd fain make you my queen
 And you en-sky.
Alas I see you go,
And I will never know
 Your pupils tint;
So o'er a lonely drink
I force myself to think:
 Damsel, you squint!

Dark Trinity

Said I to Pain: "You would not dare
Do ill to me."

Said Pain: "Poor fool! Why should I care
Whom you may be?

To clown and king alike I bring
My meed of bane;

Why should you shirk my chastening?"
Said Pain.

Said I to Grief: "No tears have I,
Go on your way."

Said Grief: "Why should I pass you by,
While others pay?

All men must know the way of woe,
From saint to thief,

And tears were meant to overflow,"
Said Grief.

Said I to Death: "From ail and fret
Grant me relief."

Said Death: "I know you are beset
By Pain and Grief.

But my good will you must await
Since human breath

To suffering is consecrate,"
Said Death.

Said I to God: "Pale Sister Grief,
Bleak Brother Pain,

Bedevil me beyond belief,
And Death's unfain . . ."

Said God: "Curse not that blessed Three,
Poor human clod!

Have faith! Believe the One with Me,"
Said God.

Robert William Service

Dark Truth

Birds have no consciousness of doom:
Yon thrush that serenades me daily
From scented snow of hawthorn bloom
Would not trill out his glee so gaily,
Could he foretell his songful breath
Would sadly soon be stilled in death.

Yon lambs that frolic on the lea
And incarnate the joy of life,
Would scarce disport them could they see
The shadow of the butcher's knife:
Oh Nature, with your loving ruth,
You spare them knowledge of Dark Truth.

To sad humanity alone,
(Creation's triumph ultimate)
The grimness of the grave is known,
The dusty destiny await
Oh bird and beast, with joy, elance
Effulgently your ingorance!
Oh man, previsioning the hearse,
With fortitude accept your curse!

Robert William Service

Days

I am a Day . . .
My sky is grey,
My wind is wild,
My sea high-piled:
In year of days the first
In misery . . .
Oh pity me!
I am a Day
 Accurst.

"Sweet Day, not curst but blest:
Behold upon my breast
My baby born
Your early morn.
Safe in my arms always . . .
Oh precious Day,
let tempest be,
You are to me
In heart of mine
 Divine."

* * * * *

I am a Day . . .
From dawn's pure ray
Like to a peerless gem
In summer's diadem,
My sky so softly dreams,
my breeze is bland:
My sea is blue and creams
Upon the sand,
Behold! Of days the Queen
 I reign serene.

"Oh Day, not blest but curst!
Let savage storm-rack burst,
i will not care . . .
For Lo! I bear
My baby's coffin to the height.

Ah! Would it were the foulest night
To match my mood's
Ingratitude.
I cannot not pray . . .
Go your fell way,
 Accursed Day!"

Robert William Service

Death And Life

'Twas in the grave-yard's gruesome gloom
That May and I were mated;
We sneaked inside and on a tomb
Our love was consummated.
It's quite all right, no doubt we'll wed,
Our sin will go unchidden . . .
Ah! sweeter than the nuptial bed
Are ecstasies forbidden.

And as I held my sweetheart close,
And she was softly sighing,
I could not help but think of those
In peace below us lying.
Poor folks! No disrespect we meant,
And beg you'll be forgiving;
We hopes the dead will not resent
The rapture of the living.

And when in death I, too, shall lie,
And lost to those who love me,
I wish two sweethearts roving by
Will plight their troth above me.
Oh do not think that I will grieve
To hear the vows they're voicing,
And if their love new life conceive,
'Tis I will be rejoicing.

Robert William Service

Death In The Arctic

I

I took the clock down from the shelf;
"At eight," said I, "I shoot myself."
It lacked a minute of the hour,
And as I waited all a-cower,
A skinful of black, boding pain,
Bits of my life came back again. . . .

"Mother, there's nothing more to eat --
Why don't you go out on the street?
Always you sit and cry and cry;
Here at my play I wonder why.
Mother, when you dress up at night,
Red are your cheeks, your eyes are bright;
Twining a ribband in your hair,
Kissing good-bye you go down-stair.
Then I'm as lonely as can be.
Oh, how I wish you were with me!
Yet when you go out on the street,
Mother, there's always lots to eat. . . ."

II

For days the igloo has been dark;
But now the rag wick sends a spark
That glitters in the icy air,
And wakes frost sapphires everywhere;
Bright, bitter flames, that adder-like
Dart here and there, yet fear to strike
The gruesome gloom wherein they lie,
My comrades, oh, so keen to die!
And I, the last -- well, here I wait
The clock to strike the hour of eight. . . .

"Boy, it is bitter to be hurled
Nameless and naked on the world;
Frozen by night and starved by day,
Curses and kicks and clouts your pay.

But you must fight! Boy, look on me!
Anarch of all earth-misery;
Beggar and tramp and shameless sot;
Emblem of ill, in rags that rot.
Would you be foul and base as I?
Oh, it is better far to die!
Swear to me now you'll fight and fight,
Boy, or I'll kill you here to-night. . . ."

III

Curse this silence soft and black!
Sting, little light, the shadows back!
Dance, little flame, with freakish glee!
Twinkle with brilliant mockery!
Glitter on ice-robed roof and floor!
Jewel the bear-skin of the door!
Gleam in my beard, illumine my breath,
Blanch the clock face that times my death!
But do not pierce that murk so deep,
Where in their sleeping-bags they sleep!
But do not linger where they lie,
They who had all the luck to die! . . .

"There is nothing more to say;
Let us part and go our way.
Since it seems we can't agree,
I will go across the sea.
Proud of heart and strong am I;
Not for woman will I sigh;
Hold my head up gay and glad:
You can find another lad. . . ."

IV

Above the igloo piteous flies
Our frayed flag to the frozen skies.
Oh, would you know how earth can be
A hell -- go north of Eighty-three!
Go, scan the snows day after day,
And hope for help, and pray and pray;
Have seal-hide and sea-lice to eat;

Melt water with your body's heat;
Sleep all the fell, black winter through
Beside the dear, dead men you knew.
(The walrus blubber flares and gleams --
O God! how long a minute seems!) . . .

"Mary, many a day has passed,
Since that morn of hot-head youth.
Come I back at last, at last,
Crushed with knowing of the truth;
How through bitter, barren years
You loved me, and me alone;
Waited, wearied, wept your tears --
Oh, could I atone, atone,
I would pay a million-fold!
Pay you for the love you gave.
Mary, look down as of old --
I am kneeling by your grave." . . .

V

Olaf, the Blonde, was first to go;
Bitten his eyes were by the snow;
Sightless and sealed his eyes of blue,
So that he died before I knew.
Here in those poor weak arms he died:
"Wolves will not get you, lad," I lied;
"For I will watch till Spring come round;
Slumber you shall beneath the ground."
Oh, how I lied! I scarce can wait:
Strike, little clock, the hour of eight! . . .

"Comrade, can you blame me quite?
The horror of the long, long night
Is on me, and I've borne with pain
So long, and hoped for help in vain.
So frail am I, and blind and dazed;
With scurvy sick, with silence crazed.
Beneath the Arctic's heel of hate,
Avid for Death I wait, I wait.
Oh if I falter, fail to fight,
Can you, dear comrade, blame me quite?" . . .

VI

Big Eric gave up months ago.
But seldom do men suffer so.
His feet sloughed off, his fingers died,
His hands shrunk up and mummified.
I had to feed him like a child;
Yet he was valiant, joked and smiled,
Talked of his wife and little one
(Thanks be to God that I have none),
Passed in the night without a moan,
Passed, and I'm here, alone, alone. . . .

"I've got to kill you, Dick.
Your life for mine, you know.
Better to do it quick,
A swift and sudden blow.
See! here's my hand to lick;
A hug before you go --
God! but it makes me sick:
Old dog, I love you so.
Forgive, forgive me, Dick --
A swift and sudden blow. . . ."

VII

Often I start up in the dark,
Thinking the sound of bells to hear.
Often I wake from sleep: "Oh, hark!
Help . . . it is coming . . . near and near."
Blindly I reel toward the door;
There the snow billows bleak and bare;
Blindly I seek my den once more,
Silence and darkness and despair.
Oh, it is all a dreadful dream!
Scurvy and cold and death and dearth;
I will awake to warmth and gleam,
Silvery seas and greening earth.
Life is a dream, its wakening,
Death, gentle shadow of God's wing. . . .

"Tick, little clock, my life away!
Even a second seems a day.
Even a minute seems a year,
Peopled with ghosts, that press and peer
Into my face so charnel white,
Lit by the devilish, dancing light.
Tick, little clock! mete out my fate:
Tortured and tense I wait, I wait. . . ."

VIII

Oh, I have sworn! the hour is nigh:
When it strikes eight, I die, I die.
Raise up the gun -- it stings my brow --
When it strikes eight . . . all ready . . . now --

* * * * *

Down from my hand the weapon dropped;
Wildly I stared. . . .

THE CLOCK HAD STOPPED.

IX

Phantoms and fears and ghosts have gone.
Peace seems to nestle in my brain.
Lo! the clock stopped, I'm living on;
Heart-sick I was, and less than sane.
Yet do I scorn the thing I planned,
Hearing a voice: "O coward, fight!"
Then the clock stopped . . . whose was the hand?
Maybe 'twas God's -- ah well, all's right.
Heap on me darkness, fold on fold!
Pain! wrench and rack me! What care I?
Leap on me, hunger, thirst and cold!
I will await my time to die;
Looking to Heaven that shines above;
Looking to God, and love . . . and love.

X

Hark! what is that? Bells, dogs again!

Is it a dream? I sob and cry.
See! the door opens, fur-clad men
Rush to my rescue; frail am I;
Feeble and dying, dazed and glad.
There is the pistol where it dropped.
"Boys, it was hard -- but I'm not mad. . . .
Look at the clock -- it stopped, it stopped.
Carry me out. The heavens smile.
See! there's an arch of gold above.
Now, let me rest a little while --
Looking to God and Love . . .and Love . . ."

Robert William Service

Death Of A Cockroach

I opened wide the bath-room door,
And all at once switched on the light,
When moving swift across the floor
I saw a streak of ebon bright:
Then quick, with slipper in my hand,
Before it could escape,--I slammed.
I missed it once, I missed it twice,
But got it ere it gained its lair.
I fear my words were far from nice,
Though d----s with me are rather rare:
Then lo! I thought that dying roach
Regarded me with some reproach.

Said I: "Don't think I grudge you breath;
I hate to spill your greenish gore,
But why did you invite your death
By straying on my bath-room floor?"
"It is because," said he (or she),
"Adventure is my destiny.

"By evolution I was planned,
And marvellously made as you;
And I am led to understand
The selfsame God conceived us two:
Sire, though the coup de grâce you give,
Even a roach has right to live."

Said I: "Of course you have a right,--
But not to blot my bath-room floor.
Yet though with slipper I may smite,
Your doom I morally deplore . . .
From cellar gloom to stellar space
Let bards and beetles have their place.

Robert William Service

Death's Way

Old Man Death's a lousy heel who will not play the game:
Let Graveyard yawn and doom down crash, he'll sneer and turn away.
But when the sky with rapture rings and joy is like a flame,
Then Old Man Death grins evilly, and swings around to slay.

Jack Duval was my chosen pal in the ranks of the Reckless Men.
Thick as thieves they used to say, and it may be that we were:
Where the price of life is a naked knife and dammed are nine in ten,
It doesn't do to be curious in the Legion Etrange;re.

So when it came to a hidden shame our mugs were zippered tight;
He never asked me what I'd done, and he would never tell;
But though like men we revelled, when it came to bloody fight
I knew that I could bank on him clear to the hubs of hell.

They still tell how we held the Fort back on the blasted bled,
And blazed from out the shambles till the fagged relief arrived.
"The garrison are slaughtered all," the Captain grimly said:
Piped Jack: "Give us a slug of hooch and say that TWO survived."

Then was that time we were lost, canteen and carcase dry,
As on we staggered with the thought: "Here's where our story ends."
Ten desert days delirious, when black against the sky,
We saw a line of camels, and the Arabs were our friends.

And last of all, the lurid night we crashed the gates of hell
And stemmed the Teuton torrent as it roared on every side;
And we were left in blood and mud to rot on the Moselle -
Two lacerated Legionaires, whom all supposed had died.

Three times death thought to take us and three times he stayed his hand;
But when we left the Legion what a happy pair we were,
Then reckless roving up and down the sunny land,
I found Jack eating bouillabaisse back on the Cannebi;re.

"Next week I wed," he gaily said, "the sweetest girl on earth.
I wonder why did Death pass by just then and turn to gloat?
"Oh I'm so happy! You must come and join us in our mirth."...
Death struck ... Jack gasped and choked and - died:

A fishbone in his throat.

Robert William Service

Decadence

Before the florid portico
I watched the gamblers come and go,
While by me on a bench there sat
A female in a faded hat;
A shabby, shrinking, crumpled creature,
Of waxy casino-ward with eyes
Of lost soul seeking paradise.

Then from the Caf^{acute}; de la Paix
There shambled forth a waiter fellow,
Clad dingily, down-stooped and grey,
With hollow face, careworn and yellow.
With furtive feet before our seat
He came to a respectful stand,
And bowed, my sorry crone to greet,
Saying: "Princess, I kiss your hand."

She gave him such a gracious smile,
And bade him linger by her side;
So there they talked a little while
Of kingly pomp and country pride;
Of Marquis This and Prince von That,
Of Old Vienna, glamour gay. . . .
Then sad he rose and raised his hat:
Saying: "My tables I must lay."

"Yea, you must go, dear Count," she said,
"For luncheon tables must be laid."
He sighed: from his alpaca jacket
He pressed into her hand a packet,
"Sorry, to-day it's all I'm rich in -
A chicken sandwich from the kitchen."
Then bowed and left her after she
Had thanked him with sweet dignity.

She pushed the package out of sight,
Within her bag and closed it tight;
But by and bye I saw her go
To where thick laurel bushes grow,

And there behind that leafy screen,
Thinking herself by all unseen,
That sandwich! How I saw her grab it,
And gulp it like a starving rabbit!

Thinks I: Is all that talk a bluff -
Their dukes and kings and courtly stuff:
The way she ate, why one would say
She hadn't broken fast all day.

Robert William Service

Decorations

My only medals are the scars
I've won in weary, peacetime wars,
A-fighting for my little brood,
To win them shelter, shoon and food;
But most of all to give them faith
In God's good mercy unto death.

My sons have medals gleaming bright,
Proud trophies won in foreign fight;
But though their crosses bravely shine,
My boys can show no wounds like mine -
Grim gashes dolorously healed,
And inner ailings unrevealed.

Life-lasting has my battle been,
My enemy a fierce machine;
And I am marked by many a blow
In conflict with a tireless foe,
Till warped and bent beneath the beat
Of life's unruth I own defeat.

Yet strip me bare and you will see
A worthy warrior I be;
Although no uniform I've worn,
By wounds of labour I am torn;
Leave the their ribbands and their stars . . .
Behold! I proudly prize my scars.

Robert William Service

Dedication

In youth I longed to paint
The loveliness I saw;
And yet by dire constraint
I had to study Law.
But now all that is past,
And I have no regret,
For I am free at last
Law to forget.

To beauty newly born
With brush and tube I play;
And though my daubs you scorn,
I'll learn to paint some day.
When I am eighty old,
Maybe I'll better them,
And you may yet behold
A gem.

Old Renoir used to paint,
Brush strapped to palsied hand;
His fervour of a saint
How I can understand.
My joy is my reward,
And though you gently smile,
Grant me to fumble, Lord,
A little while!

Robert William Service

Dedication To Providence

I loved to toy with tuneful rhyme,
My fancies into verse to weave;
For as I walked my words would chime
So bell-like I could scarce believe;
My rhymes rippled like a brook,
My stanzas bloomed like blossoms gay:
And that is why I dream this book
 A verseman's holiday.

The palm-blades brindle in the blaze
Of sunsets splendouring the sea;
The Gloaming is a lilac haze
That impish stars stab eagerly. . . .
O Land of Song! Oh golden clime!
O happy me, whose work is play!
Please take this tribute of my rhymes:
 A verseman's holiday.

Robert William Service

Design

Said Seeker of the skies to me:
"Behold yon starry host ashine!
When Heaven's harmony you see
How can you doubt control divine,
 Law, order and design?"

"Nay, Sire," said I, "I do not doubt
The spheres in cosmic pattern spin;
But what I try to puzzle out
Is that--if Law and Order win
 Where does mere man come in?"

"If to the millionth of a hair
Cause and Effect are welded true,
Then there's no leeway anywhere,
And all we do we have to do,
 And sun and atom too."

O Stars, sing in your harmony!
O Constellations raptly shine!
Flout me because I am not free,
Mock me because no choice is mine!
O Beauty, it so hurts to see!
 --O damnable Design!

Robert William Service

Detachment

As I go forth from fair to mart
With racket ringing,
Who would divine that in my heart
Mad larks are singing.
As I sweet sympathy express,
Lest I should pain them,
The money-mongers cannot guess
How I disdain them.

As I sit at some silly tea
And flirt and flatter
How I abhor society
And female chatter.
As I with wonderment survey
Their peacock dresses,
My mind is wafted far away
To wildernesses.

As I sit in some raucous pub,
Taboo to women,
And treat myself to greasy grub
I feel quite human.
Yet there I dream, despite the din,
Of God's green spaces,
And sweetly dwell the peace within
Of sylvan graces.

And so I wear my daily mask
Of pleasant seeming,
And nobody takes me to task
For distant dreaming;
A happy hypocrite am I
Of ambience inner,
Who smiling make the same reply
To saint and sinner.

Robert William Service

Distracted Druggist

'A shilling's worth of quinine, please,'
The customer demanded.
The druggist went down on his knees
And from a cupboard handed
The waiting man a tiny flask:
'Here, Sir, is what you ask.'

The buyer paid and went away,
The druggist rubbed his glasses,
Then sudden shouted in dismay:
'Of all the silly asses!'
And out into the street he ran
To catch the speeding man.

Cried he: 'That quinine that you bought,
(Since all may errors make),
I find was definitely not,--
I sold you strychnine by mistake.
Two shillings is its price, and so
Another bob you owe.'

Robert William Service

Divine Detachment

One day the Great Designer sought
His Clerk of Birth and Death.
Said he: "Two souls are in my thought,
to whom I gave life-breath.
I deemed my work was fitly done,
But yester-eve I saw
That in the finished brain of one
There was a tiny flaw.

"It worried me, and I would know,
Since I am all to blame,
What happened to them down below,
Of honour or of shame;
For if the later did befall,
My sorrow will be grave . . ."
Then numbers astronomical
unto the Clerk he gave.

The Keeper of the Rolls replied:
"Of them I've little trace;
But one he was a Prince of pride
And one of lowly race.
One was a Holy Saint proclaimed;
For one no hell sufficed
Let's see - the last was Nero named,
The other . . . Jesus Christ."

Robert William Service

Divine Device

Would it be loss or gain
To hapless human-kind
If we could feel no pain
Of body or of mind?
Would it be for our good
If we were calloused so,
And God in mercy should
End all our woe?

I wonder and I doubt:
It is my bright belief
We should be poor without
The gift of grief.
For suffering may be
A blessing, not a bane,
And though we sorrow we
Should praise for Pain.

Aye, it's my brave belief
That grateful we should be,
Since in the heart of grief
Is love and sympathy,
We do not weep in vain,
So let us kiss the rod,
And see in purging Pain
The Grace of God.

Robert William Service

Dolls

She said: "I am too old to play
With dolls," and put them all away,
Into a box, one rainy day.

I think she must have felt some pain,
She looked so long into the rain,
Then sighed: "I'll bring you out again;

"For I'll have little children too,
With sunny hair and eyes of blue
And they will play and play with you.

"And now good-bye, my pretty dears;
There in the dark for years and years,
Dream of your little mother's tears."

Eglantine, Pierrot and Marie Claire,
Topsy and Tiny and Teddy Bear,
Side by side in the coffer there.

Time went by; one day she kneeled
By a wooden Cross in Flanders Field,
And wept for the One the earth concealed;

And made a vow she would never wed,
But always be true to the deathless dead,
Until the span of her life be sped.

 * * *
* * * * *
* * *

More years went on and they made her wise
By sickness and pain and sacrifice,
With greying tresses and tired eyes.

And then one evening of weary rain,
She opened the old oak box again,
And her heart was clutched with an ancient pain

For there in the quiet dark they lay,
Just as they were when she put them away...
O but it seemed like yesterday!

Topsy and Tiny and Teddy Bear,
Eglantine, Pierrot and Marie Claire,
Ever so hopefully waiting there.

But she looked at them through her blinding tears,
And she said: "You've been patient, my pretty dears;
You've waited and waited all these years.

"I've broken a promise I made so true;
But my heart, my darlings, is broken too:
No little Mothers have I for you.

"My hands are withered, my hair is grey;
Yet just for a moment I'll try to play
With you as I did that long dead day...

"Ah no, I cannot. I try in vain . . .
I stare and I stare into the rain . . .
I'll put you back in your box again.

"Bless you, darlings, perhaps one day,
Some little Mother will find you and play,
And once again you'll be glad and gay.

"But when in the friendly dark I lie,
No one will ever love you as I
My little children . . . good-bye . . . good-bye."

Robert William Service

Domestic Scene

The meal was o'er, the lamp was lit,
The family sat in its glow;
The Mother never ceased to knit,
The Daughter never slacked to sew;
The Father read his evening news,
The Son was playing solitaire:
If peace a happy home could choose
I'm sure you'd swear that it was there.

BUT

The Mother:

"Ah me! this hard lump in my breast . . .
Old Doctor Brown I went to see;
Because it don't give me no rest,
He fears it may malignant be.
To operate it might be well,
And keep the evil of awhile;
But oh the folks I dare not tell,
And so I sit and knit and smile."

The Father:

"The mortgage on the house is due,
My bank account is overdrawn;
I'm at my wits end what to do -
I've plunged, but now my hope is gone.
For coverage my brokers call,
But I'm so deeply in the red . . .
If ever I should lose my all,
I'll put a bullet in my head."

The Daughter:

"To smile I do the best I can,
But it's so hard to act up gay.
My lover is a married man,
And now his child is on the way."

My plight I cannot long conceal,
And though I bear their bitter blame,
Unto my dears I must reveal
My sin, my sorrow and my shame."

The Son:

"Being a teller in a Bank
I'd no right in a blackjack game.
But for my ruin I must thank
My folly for a floozie dame.
To face the Manager I quail;
If he should check my cash I'm sunk . . .
Before they throw me into gaol
I guess I'd better do a bunk."

So sat they in the Winter eve
In sweet serenity becalmed,
So peaceful you could scarce believe
They shared the torments of the damned . . .
Yet there the Mother smiles and knits;
The Daughter sews white underwear;
The Father reads and smokes and spits,
While Sonny Boy plays solitaire.

Robert William Service

Don'T Cheer

Don't cheer, damn you! Don't cheer!
Silence! Your bitterest tear
Is fulsomely sweet to-day. . . .
Down on your knees and pray.

See, they sing as they go,
Marching row upon row.
Who will be spared to return,
Sombre and starkly stern?
Chaps whom we knew - s0 strange,
Distant and dark with change;
Silent as those they slew,
Something in them dead too.
Who will return this way,
To sing as they sing to-day.

Send to the glut of the guns
Bravest and best of you sons.
Hurl a million to slaughter,
Blood flowing like Thames water;
Pile up pyramid high
Your dead to the anguished sky;
A monument down all time
Of hate and horror and crime.
Weep, rage, pity, curse, fear -
Anything, but . . . don't cheer.

Sow to the ploughing guns
Seed of your splendid sons.
Let your heroic slain
Richly manure the plain.
What will the harvest be?
Unborn of Unborn will see. . . .

Dark is the sky and drear. . . .
For the pity of God don't cheer.
Dark and dread is their way.
Who sing as they march to-day. . . .
Humble your hearts and pray.

Robert William Service

Dram-Shop Ditty

I drink my fill of foamy ale
I sing a song, I tell a tale,
I play the fiddle;
My throat is chronically dry,
Yet savant of a sort am I,
And Life's my riddle.

For look! I raise my arm to drink-
A voluntary act, you think
(Nay, Sir, you're grinning)>
You're wrong: this stein of beer I've drained
to emptiness was pre-ordained
Since Time's beginning.

But stay! 'Tis I who err, because
Time has no birth; it always was,
It will be ever;
And trivial though my act appears,
Its repercussion down the years
Will perish never.

It will condition ages hence,
but its most urgent consequence,
You'll not deny, Sir,
Is that it should be filled again
To goad my philosophic brain,
If you will buy, Sir.

There is no great, there is no small;
Fate makes a tapestry of all,
each stitch is needed . . .
The gods be praised! that barman chap
Manipulates his frothing tap -
My plea is heeded.

Two foaming tankards over-spill,
And soon, ah! not too soon, they will
Our thirst be slaking.
Stout lad! he does not dream that he

A page of history maybe
Is blandly making.

For Sir, it was ordained that you
Buy me a drink (or maybe two)
Since ages hoary;
And doubtless it is predestined
our meeting shall affect in kind
Earth's Cosmic Story.

The fathomless, eternal Past,
The Future infinitely vast,
We two are linking;
So let us fitly celebrate
This moment of immortal Fate
In drinking, drinking.

But though I toss a hearty pot,
Kind stranger, do not think I'm not
For Truth a groper . . .
Another? Thanks, I won't refuse,
I am a tippler, if you choose,
But not a toper.

A nice distinction! . . . Well, life's good;
Just give me beer, rich greasy food,
And let me fiddle;
Enough of dull philosophy;
To-night we'll merry, merry be . . .
Hi-diddle-diddle.

Robert William Service

Dreams

I had a dream, a dream of dread:
I thought that horror held the house;
A burglar bent above my bed,
He moved as quiet as a mouse.
With hairy hand and naked knife
He poised to plunge a bloody stroke,
Until despairful of my life
I shrieked with terror - and awoke.

I had a dream of weary woes:
In weather that was fit to freeze,
I thought that I had lost my cloths,
And only wore a short chemise.
The wind was wild; so catch a train
I ran, but no advance did make;
My legs were pistoning in vain -
How I was happy to awake!

I had a dream: Upon the stair
I met a maid who kissed my lips;
A nightie was her only wear,
We almost came to loving grips.
And then she opened wide a door,
And pointed to a bonny bed...
Oh blast! I wakened up before
I could discover - were we wed?

Alas! Those dreams of broken bliss,
Of wakenings too sadly soon!
With memories of sticky kiss,
And limbs so languidly a-swoon!
Alas those nightmares devil driven!
Those pantless prowlings in Pall Mall!
Oh why should some dreams be like heaven
And others so resemble hell?

Robert William Service

Dreams Are Best

I just think that dreams are best,
Just to sit and fancy things;
Give your gold no acid test,
Try not how your silver rings;
Fancy women pure and good,
Fancy men upright and true:
Fortressed in your solitude,
Let Life be a dream to you.

For I think that Thought is all;
Truth's a minion of the mind;
Love's ideal comes at call;
As ye seek so shall ye find.
But ye must not seek too far;
Things are never what they seem:
Let a star be just a star,
And a woman - just a dream.

O you Dreamers, proud and pure,
You have gleaned the sweet of life!
Golden truths that shall endure
Over pain and doubt and strife.
I would rather be a fool
Living in my Paradise,
Than the leader of a school,
Sadly sane and weary wise.

O you Cynics with your sneers,
Fallen brains and hearts of brass,
Tweak me by my foolish ears,
Write me down a simple ass!
I'll believe the real 'you'
Is the 'you' without a taint;
I'll believe each woman too,
But a slightly damaged saint.

Yes, I'll smoke my cigarette,
Vestured in my garb of dreams,
And I'll borrow no regret;

All is gold that golden gleams.
So I'll charm my solitude
 With the faith that Life is blest,
 Brave and noble, bright and good,...
 Oh, I think that dreams are best!

Robert William Service

Drifter

God gave you guts: don't let Him down;
Brace up, be worthy of His giving.
The road's a rut, the sky's a frown;
I know you're plumb fed up with living.
Fate birches you, and wry the rod . . .
Snap out, you fool! Don't let down God.

Oh, yes, you're on misfortune's shift,
And weary is the row your hoeing;
You have no home, you drift and drift,
Seems folks don't care the way you're going . . .
Well, make them care - you're not afraid:
Step on the gas - you'll make the grade.

Believe that God has faith in you,
In you His loving light is shining;
All of you that is fine and true
Is part of Him, so quit your whining . . .
buck up, son, for your Maker's sake:
Don't let Him down - give God a break.

Robert William Service

Duello

A Frenchman and an Englishman
Resolved to fight a duel,
And hit upon a savage plan,
Because their hate was cruel.
They each would fire a single shot
In room of darkness pitchy,
And who was killed and who was not
Would hang on fingers twitchy.

The room was bare and dark as death,
And each ferocious fighter
Could hear his fierce opponent's breath
And clutched his pistol tighter.
The Gaston fired - the bullet hissed
On its destructive mission . . .
"Thank God!" said John Bull. "He has missed."
The Frenchman cried: "Perdition!"

Then silence followed like a spell,
And as the Briton sought to
Reply he wondered where the hell
His Gallic foe had got to.

And then he thought: "I'll mercy show,
Since Hades is a dire place
To send a fellow to - and so
I'll blase up through the fireplace."

So up the chimney he let fly,
Of grace a gallant henchman;
When lo! a sudden cry,
And down there crashed the Frenchman . . .
But if this yard in France you tell,
Although its vein be skittish,
I think it might be just as well
To make your Frenchman - British.

Robert William Service

Dumb Swede

With barbwire hooch they filled him full,
Till he was drunker than all hell,
And then they peddled him the bull
About a claim they had to sell.
A thousand bucks they made him pay,
Knowing that he had nothing more,
And when he begged it back next day,
And wept! - they kicked him from the door.

They reckoned they were mighty slick,
Them two tin horns from Idaho;
That poor dumb Swede could swing a pick,
but that was all he'd ever know.
So sitting in a poker game,
They lost the price for which they sold
To that bonehead a poor dud claim
That didn't have a speck of gold.

My story's true as gospel creed
Of these bright boys from Idaho;
They made a sucker of that Swede
And laughed to see the poor boob go,
And work like nigger on his ground,
Bucked by the courage of despair . . .
Till lo! A rich pay-streak he found,
That made him twice a millionaire.

So two smart Alecs, mighty sick,
Begged jobs at fifteen bucks a day.
Then said the Swede: "Give each a pick
And let them sweat to make their pay."
And though he don't know what it means,
Folks call that Swede "magnanimous"
- But picking nuggets big as beans,
you oughta' hear them fellers cuss!

Robert William Service

Dunce

At school I never gained a prize,
Proving myself the model ass;
Yet how I watched the wistful eyes,
And cheered my mates who topped the class.
No envy in my heart I found,
Yet bone was worthier to own
Those precious books in vellum bound,
Than I, a dreamer and a drone.

No prize at school I ever gained
(Shirking my studies, I suppose):
Yes, I remember being caned
For lack of love of Latin prose.
For algebra I won no praise,
In grammar I was far from bright:
Yet, oh, how Poetry would raise
In me a rapture of delight!

I never gained a prize at school;
The dullard's cap adorned my head;
My masters wrote me down a fool,
And yet - I'm sorry they are dead.
I'd like to go to them and say:
"Yours is indeed a tricky trade.
My honoured classmates, where are they?
Yet I, the dunce, brave books have made."

Oh, I am old and worn and grey,
And maybe have not long to live;
Yet 'tis my hope at some Prize Day
At my old school the Head will give
A tome or two of mine to crown
Some pupil's well-deserved success -
Proving a scapegrace and a clown
May win at last to worthiness.

Robert William Service

Dylan

And is it not a gesture grand
 To drink oneself to death?
Oh sure 'tis I can understand,
 Being of sober breath.
And so I do not sing success,
 But dirge the damned who fall,
And who contempt for life express
 Through alcohol.

Of Stephen Foster and of Poe,
 Of Burns and Wilde I think;
And weary men who dared to go
 The wanton way of drink.
Strange mortals blind to bitter blame,
 And deaf to loud delight,
Who from the shades of sin and shame
 Enstar our night.

Among those dupes of destiny
 Add D.T. to my list,
Although his verse you may agree
 Leaves one in mental mist . . .
Oh ye mad poets, loth of life,
 Who peace in death divine,
Pass not by pistol, poison, knife,--
 Drown, drown in wine!

Robert William Service

Dyspeptic Clerk

I think I'll buy a little field,
Though scant am I of pelf,
And hold the hope that it may yield
A living for myself;
For I have toiled ten thousand days
With ledger and with pen,
And I am sick of city ways
And soured with city men.

So I will plant my little plot
With lettuce, beans and peas;
Potatoes too - oh quite a lot,
An pear and apple trees.
My carrots will be coral pink,
My turnips ivory;
And I'll forget my pen and ink,
And office slavery.

My hut shall have a single room
Monastically bare;
A faggot fire for the winter gloom,
A table and a chair.
A Frugalist I call myself,
My needs are oh so small;
My luxury a classic shelf
Of poets on the wall.

Here as I dream, how grey and cold
The City seems to me;
Another world of green and gold
Incessantly I see.
So I will fling my pen away,
And learn a how to wield;
A cashbook and a stool today . . .
Soon, soon a Little Field.

Robert William Service

Each Day A Life

I count each day a little life,
 With birth and death complete;
I cloister it from care and strife
 And keep it sane and sweet.

With eager eyes I greet the morn,
 Exultant as a boy,
Knowing that I am newly born
 To wonder and to joy.

And when the sunset splendours wane
 And ripe for rest am I,
Knowing that I will live again,
 Exultantly I die.

O that all Life were but a Day
 Sunny and sweet and sane!
And that at Even I might say:
 "I sleep to wake again."

Robert William Service

Eighty Not Out

In the gay, gleamy morn I adore to go walking,
And oh what sweet people I meet on my way!
I hail them with joy for I love to be talking,
Although I have nothing important to say.
I cheer the old grannies whose needles are plying;
I watch the wee kiddies awhoop at their play:
When sunny the sky is, you'll not be denying
The morning's the bonniest bit of the day.
With hair that is silver the look should be smiling,
And lips that are ageful should surely be wise;
And so I go gaily with gentle beguiling,
Abidding for cheer in the bright of your eyes.
I look at the vines and the blossoms with loving;
I listen with glee to the thrush on the spray:
And so with a song in my heart I am proving
That life is more beautiful every day.

For I think that old age is the rapture of living,
And though I've had many a birthday of cheer,
Of all the delectable days of God's giving,
The best of the bunch is my eightieth year.
So I will go gay in the beam of the morning
Another decade,--Oh I haven't a doubt!
Adoring the world of the Lord's glad adorning,
And sing to the glory of Ninety-not-Out.

Robert William Service

Einstein

A little mousey man he was
With board, and chalk in hand;
And millions were awestruck because
They couldn't understand.
Said he: 'E equals Mc2:
I'll prove it true.'

No doubt you can, your marvel man,
But will it serve our good?
Will it prolong our living span
And multiply our food?
Will it bring peace between the nations
To make equations?

Our thanks are due no doubt to you
For truth beyond our ken;
But after all what did you do
To ease the lot of men?
How can a thousand 'yous' be priced
Beside a Christ?

Robert William Service

Elementalist

Could Fate ordain a lot for me
 Beyond all human ills,
I think that I would choose to be
 A shephard of the hills;
With shaggy cloak and cape where skies
 Eternally are blue
How I would stare with quiet eyes
 At passing you!

And you would stare at static me,
 Beside my patient flock;
And I would watch you silently,
 A one with time and rock.
Then foreign farings you would chart,
 And fly with fearsome wings,
While I would bide to be a part
 Of elemental things.

Yet strangely I would have it so,
 Since I am kin to these,--
To heather heath and bloom ablow,
 And peaks and piney trees.
As diamond star at evenfall,
 And pearly morning mist
Sing in my veins, myself I call
 An Elementalist.

So as in city dirt and din
 I push a grubby pen,
And toil, my bed and board to win,
 I hate the haunts of men.
Beyond brick wall I seem to see
 Fern dells and rocky rills . . .
O crazy dream! O God, to be
 A shephard of the hills!

Robert William Service

Enemy Conscript

What are we fighting for,
We fellows who go to war?
fighting for Freedom's sake!
(You give me the belly-ache.)
Freedom to starve or slave!
Freedom! aye, in the grave.
Fighting for "hearth and home,"
Who haven't an inch of loam?
Hearth? Why even a byre
Can only be ours for hire.
Dying for future peace?
Killing that killing cease?
To hell with such tripe, I say.
"Sufficient unto the day."

It isn't much fun being dead.
Better to lie in bed,
Cuddle up to the wife,
Making, not taking life.
To the corpse that stinks in the clay,
Does it matter who wins the day?
What odds if tyrants reign?
They can't put irons on the brain.
One always can eat one's grub,
Smoke and drink in a pub.
There's happiness in a glass,
A pipe and the kiss of a lass.
It's the best we get anyhow,
In the life we are living now.

Who's wanting a hero's fate?
To the dead cheers come too late.
Flesh is softer than steel;
Wounds are weary to heal.
In the maniac hell of the fray
Who is there dares to say?
"Hate will be vanquished by Love;
God's in His Heaven above."

When those who govern us lead
The lads they command to bleed;
When rulers march at the head,
And statesmen fall with the dead;
When Kings leap into the fray,
Fight in the old-time way,
Perish beside their men,
Maybe, O maybe then
War will be part of the past,
Peace will triumph at last.

Meantime such lads as I,
Who wouldn't have harmed a fly,
Have got to get out and kill
Lads whom we bear no ill;
As simple as we, no doubt,
Who seek what it's all about;
Who die in defence of - what?
Homes that they haven't got;
Who perish when all they ask
is to finish the daily task;
Make bread for the little ones,
Not feed the greed of the guns,
When fields of battle are red,
And diplomats die in bed.

Robert William Service

Epitaph

No matter how he toil and strive
The fate of every man alive
With luck will be to lie alone,
His empty name cut in a stone.

Grim time the fairest fame will flout,
But though his name be blotted out,
And he forgotten with his peers,
His stone may wear a year of years.

No matter how we sow and reap
The end of all is endless sleep;
From strife a merciful release,
From life the crowning prize of Peace.

Robert William Service

Equality

The Elders of the Tribe were grouped
And squatted in the Council Cave;
They seemed to be extremely pooped,
And some were grim, but all were grave:
The subject of their big To-do
Was axe-man Chow, the son of Choo.

Then up spoke Tribal Wiseman Waw:
"Brothers, today I talk to grieve:
As an upholder of the Law
You know how deeply we believe
In Liberty, Fraternity,
And likewise Equality.

"A chipper of the flint am I;
I make the weapons that you use,
And though to hunt I never try,
To bow to hunters I refuse:
But stalwart Chow, the son of Choo
Is equal to us any two.

"He is the warrior supreme,
The Super-caveman, one might say;
The pride of youth, the maiden's dream,
And in the chase the first to slay.
Where we are stunted he is tall:
In short, a menace to us all.

"He struts with throwing stone and spear;
And is he not the first to wear
Around his waist with bully leer
The pelt of wolf and baby bear!
Admitting that he made the kill
Why should he so exploit his skill?

"Comrades, grave counsel we must take,
And as he struts with jest and jibe,
Let us act swiftly lest he make
Himself Dictator of our Tribe:

The Gods have built him on their plan:
Let us reduce him to a man."

And so they seized him in the night,
And on the sacrificial stone
The axe-men of the Tribe did smite,
Until one limb he ceased to own.
There! They had equalized the odds,
Foiling unfairness of the Gods.

So Chow has lost his throwing arm,
And goes around like every one;
No longer does he threaten harm,
And tribal justice has been done.
For men are equal, let us seek
To grade the Strong down to the weak.

Robert William Service

Erico

Oh darling Eric, why did you
For my fond affection sue,
And then with surgeons artful aid
Transform yourself into a maid?
So now in petticoats you go
And people call you Erico.

Sometimes I wonder if they can
Change me in turn into a man;
Then after all we might get wed
And frolic on a feather bed:
Although I do not see how we
Could ever have a family.

Oh dear! Oh dear! It's so complex.
Why must they meddle with our sex.
My Eric was a handsome 'he,'
But now he--oh excuse me--she
Informs me that I must forget
I was his blond Elizabet.

Alas! These scientists of Sweden
I curse, who've robbed me of my Eden;
Who with their weird hormones inhuman
Can make a man into a woman.
Alas, poor Eric! . . . Erico
I wish you were in Jerico.

Robert William Service

Ernie Pyle

I wish I had a simple style
 In writing verse,
As in his prose had Ernie Pyle,
 So true and terse;
Springing so forthright from the heart
 With guileless art.

I wish I could put back a dram
 As Ernie could;
I wish that I could cuss and damn
 As soldier should;
And fain with every verse would I
 Ernie outvie.

Alas! I cannot claim his high
 Humanity;
Nor emulate his pungent, dry
 Profanity;
Nor share his love of common folk
 Who bear life's yolk.

Oh Ernie, who on earth I knew
 In war and wine,
Though frail of fame, in soul how you
 Were pure and fine!
I'm proud that once when we were plastered
 You called me 'bastard.'

Robert William Service

Escape

Tell me, Tramp, where I may go
To be free from human woe;
Say where I may hope to find
Ease of heart and peace of mind;
Is thee not some isle you know
Where I may leave Care behind?

So spoke one in sore distress,
And I answered softly: "Yes,
There's an isle so sweet and kind
So to clemency inclined,
So serene in loveliness
That the blind may lead the blind.

"Where there is no shade of fear,
For the sun shines all the year,
And there hangs on every tree
Fruit and food for you and me:
With each dawn so crystal clear
How like heaven earth can be!

"Where in mild and friendly clime
You will lose all count of time,
See the seasons blend in one,
Under sovereignty of sun;
Day with day resolve in rhyme,
Reveries and nothing done.

"You will mock the ocean roar,
Knowing you will evermore
Bide beside a lorn lagoon,
Listen to the ripples croon
On the muteness of the shore,
Silver-shattered in the moon.

"Come, let's quit this sorry strife,
Seek a sweeter, saner life,
Go so far, so very far
It just seems another star.

Go where joy and love are rife,
Go where peace and plenty are."

But he answered: "Brother, no,
To your isle I'll never go,
For the pity in my heart
Will not let me live apart
From God's world of want and woe:
I will stay and play my part,
Strive and suffer . . . Be it so."

Robert William Service

Euthansia

A sea-gull with a broken wing,
I found upon the kelp-strewn shore.
It sprawled and gasped; I sighed: "Poor thing!
I fear your flying days are o'er;
Sad victim of a savage gun,
So ends your soaring in the sun."

I only wanted to be kind;
Its icy legs I gently caught,
Thinking its fracture I might bind,
But fiercely in its fear it fought;
Till guessing that I meant no ill,
It glared and gaped, but lay quite still.

I took it home and gave it food,
And nursed its wing day after day.
Alas for my solicitude,
It would not eat, but pined away.
And so at last with tender hands
I took it to its native sands.
"I'll leave it where its kindred are,"
I thought, "And maybe they will cheer
And comfort it": I watched afar,
I saw them wheeling swiftly near. . . .
Awhile they hovered overhead,
Then darted down and - stabbed it dead.

When agonized is human breath,
And there's of living not a chance,
Could it not be that gentle death
Might mean divine deliverance?
Might it not seep into our skulls
To be as merciful as gulls?

Robert William Service

Evenfall

When day is done I steal away
 To fold my hands in rest,
And of my hours this moment grey
 I love the best;
So quietly I sit alone
 And wait for evenfall,
When in the dusk doves sweetly moan
 And crickets call.

With heart of humble gratitude
 How it is good to bide,
And know the joy of solitude
 In eventide!
When one is slow and slips a bit,
 And life begins to pall,
How sweet it is in peace to sit
 At evenfall!

I play upon a simple lute,
 My notes are faint and few,
But ere my melodies be mute,
 Pray one be true.
Lord, let the theme be thankfulness!
 And as I wait my call,
More than noon rapture let me bless
 Life's evenfall!

Robert William Service

Expectation

My flask of wine was ruby red
And swift I ran my sweet to see;
With eyes that snapped delight I said:
"How mad with love a lad can be!"
The moon was laughing overhead;
I danced as nimbly as a flea.

Thought I: In two weeks time we'll wed;
No more a lonesome widow she;
For I have bought a double bed
And I will father children three.
So singing like a lark I sped
To her who ne'er expected me.

And then I went with wary tread,
Her sweet surprise to greet with glee;
To where her lamplit lattice shed
A rosy radiance on the lea:
. . . And then my heart sank low like lead,
Two shadows on the blind to see.

A man was sitting on the bed,
And she was nudely on his knee. . . .
I saw her face drain white with dread,
I saw her lover madly flee. . . .
Oh how her blood is ruby red,
And I await the gallows tree

Robert William Service

Externalism

The Greatest Writer of to-day
(With Maupassant I almost set him)
Said to me in a weary way,
The last occasion that I met him:
"Old chap, this world is more and more
Becoming bourgeois, blasé, blousy:
Thank God I've lived so long before
It got so definitely lousy."

Said I: "Old chap, I don't agree.
Why should one so dispraise the present?
For gainful guys like you and me,
It still can be extremely pleasant.
Have we not Women, Wine and Song -
A gleeful trio to my thinking;
So blithely we can get along
With laughing, loving, eating, drinking."

Said he: "Dear Boy, it may be so,
But I'm fed up with war and worry;
I would escape this world of woe,
Of wrath and wrong, of hate and hurry.
I fain would gain the peace of mind
Of Lamas on Thibetan highlands,
Or maybe sanctuary find
With beach-combers on coral islands."

Said I: "Dear Boy, don't go so far:
Just live a life of simple being;
Forgetting all the ills that are,
Be satisfied with hearing, seeing.
The sense of smell and taste and touch
Can bring you bliss in ample measure:
If only you don't think too much,
Your programme can be packed with pleasure.

"But do not try to probe below
This fairy film of Nature's screening;
Look on it as a surface show,

Without a purpose of a meaning.
Take no account of social strife,
And dread no coming cataclysm:
Let your philosophy of life
Be what I call: EXTERNALISM.

The moon shines down with borrowed light,
So savants say - I do not doubt it.
Suffice its silver trance my sight,
That's all I want to know about it.
A fig for science - 'how' and 'why'
Distract me in my happy dreaming:
Through line and form and colour I
Am all content with outward seeming. . . ."

The Greatest Writer of to-day
(I would have loved to call him Willie),
looked wry at me and went his way -
I think he thought me rather silly.
Maybe I am, but I insist
My point of view will take some beating:
Don't mock this old Externalist -
The pudding's proof is in the eating.

Robert William Service

Eyrie

Between the mountain and the sea
 I've made a happy landing;
And here a peace has come to me
 That passeth understanding;
A shining faith and purity
 Beyond demanding.

With palm below and pine above,
 Where wings of gulls are gleaming;
By orange tree and olive grove,
 From walls of airy seeming,
My roses beg me not to rove,
 But linger dreaming.

So I'm in love with life again,
 And would with joy dissever
My days from ways of worldly men,
 And mingle with them never:
Let silken roses to my ken
 Whisper forever.

Robert William Service

Facility

So easy 'tis to make a rhyme,
That did the world but know it,
Your coachman might Parnassus climb,
Your butler be a poet.

Then, oh, how charming it would be
If, when in haste hysteric
You called the page, you learned that he
Was grappling with a lyric.

Or else what rapture it would yield,
When cook sent up the salad,
To find within its depths concealed
A touching little ballad.

Or if for tea and toast you yearned,
What joy to find upon it
The chambermaid had coyly laid
A palpitating sonnet.

Your baker could the fashion set;
Your butcher might respond well;
With every tart a triolet,
With every chop a rondel.

Your tailor's bill . . . well, I'll be blown!
Dear chap! I never knowed him . . .
He's gone and written me an ode,
Instead of what I owed him.

So easy 'tis to rhyme . . . yet stay!
Oh, terrible misgiving!
Please do not give the game away . . .
I've got to make my living.

Robert William Service

Failure

He wrote a play; by day and night
He strove with passion and delight;
Yet knew, long ere the curtain drop,
His drama was a sorry flop.

In Parliament he sought a seat;
Election Day brought dire defeat;
Yet he had wooed with word and pen
Prodigiously his fellow men.

And then he wrote a lighter play
That made him famous in a day.
He won a seat in Parliament,
And starry was the way he went.

Yet as he neared the door of death
They heard him say with broken breath:
'For all I've spoken, planned and penned,
I'm just a wash-out in the end.'

So are we all; our triumphs won
Are mean by what we might have done.
Our victories that men applaud
Are sordid in the sight of God.

Robert William Service

Faith

Since all that is was ever bound to be;
 Since grim, eternal laws our Being bind;
 And both the riddle and the answer find,
And both the carnage and the calm decree;
Since plain within the Book of Destiny
 Is written all the journey of mankind
 Inexorably to the end; since blind
And mortal puppets playing parts are we:

Then let's have faith; good cometh out of ill;
 The power that shaped the strife shall end the strife;
Then let's bow down before the Unknown Will;
 Fight on, believing all is well with life;
Seeing within the worst of War's red rage
The gleam, the glory of the Golden Age.

Robert William Service

Fallen Leaves

Why should I be the first to fall
Of all the leaves on this old tree?
Though sadly soon I know that all
Will lose their hold and follow me.
While my birth-brothers bravely blow,
Why should I be first to go?

Why should I be the last to cling
Of all the leaves on this bleak bough?
I've fluttered since the fire of Spring
And I am worn and withered now.
I would escape the Winter gale
And sleep soft-silvered by a snail.

When swoop the legions of the snow
To pitch their tents in roaring weather
We fallen leaves will lie below
And rot rejoicingly together;
And from our rich and dark decay
Will laugh our brothers of the May.

Robert William Service

Familiarity

Familiarity some claim

Can breed contempt,

So from it let it be your aim

To be exempt.

Let no one exercise his brawn

To slap your back,

Lest he forget your name is John,

And call you Jack.

To those who crash your private pew

Be sour as krout;

Don't let them see the real 'you,'

And bawl you out.

Don't call your Cousin William--Bill,

But formal be.

Have care! Beware and shun famil--

Iarity.

I'm quite polite. My hat I doff

But little say.

I give the crowd the big brush-off,

And go my way.

To common folk I do not freeze,

I am no snob:

But though my name is Robert, please

Don't call me BOB.

Robert William Service

Farewell To Verse

In youth when oft my muse was dumb,
 My fancy nighly dead,
To make my inspiration come
 I stood upon my head;
And thus I let the blood down flow
 Into my cerebellum,
And published every Spring or so
 Slim tomes in vellum.

Alas! I am rheumatic now,
 Grey is my crown;
I can no more with brooding brow
 Stand upside-down.
I fear I might in such a pose
 Burst brain blood-vessel;
And that would be a woeful close
 To my rhyme wrestle.

If to write verse I must reverse
 I fear I'm stymied;
In ink of prose I must immerse
 A pen de-rhymèd.
No more to spank the lyric lyre
 Like Keats or Browning,
May I inspire the Sacred Fire
 My Upside-downing.

Robert William Service

Fear

I know how father's strap would feel,
If ever I were caught,
So mother's jam I did not steal,
Though theft was in my thought.
Then turned fourteen and full of pitch,
Of love I was afraid,
And did not dare to dally with
Our pretty parlour maid.

And so it is and always was,
The path of rectitude
I've followed all my life because
The Parson said I should.
The dread of hell-fire held me straight
When I was wont to stray,
And though my guts I often hate,
I walk the narrow way.

I might have been a bandit or
A Casanovish blade,
But always I have prospered for
I've always been afraid;
Ay, fear's behind the best of us
And schools us for success,
And that is why I'm virtuous,
And happy - more or less.

So let me hail that mighty power
That goads me to be good,
And makes me cannily to cower
Amid foolhardihood;
Though I be criminal in gain,
My virtue a veneer,
I thank the God who keeps me sane,
And shields me from distress and pain,
And thrifts me on to golden gain,
Almighty Fear.

Fidelity

Being a shorty, as you see,
 A bare five footer,
The why my wife is true to me
 Is my six-shooter.
For every time a guy goes by
 Who looks like a lover,
I polish it to catch his eye,
 And spin it over.

He notes its notches as I say:
 'Believe me, Brother,
If Junie ever goes astray,
 They'll be another.'
A husband has to have a gun
 And guts to pull it:
Few fellows think a bit of fun
 Is worth a bullet.

For June would sit on any knee
 If it wore pants,
Yet she is faithful unto me,
 As gossip grants.
And though I know some six-foot guy
 Would better suit her,
Her virtue triumphs, thanks to my
 Six shooter.

Robert William Service

Fi-Fi In Bed

Up into the sky I stare;
All the little stars I see;
And I know that God is there
O, how lonely He must be!

Me, I laugh and leap all day,
Till my head begins to nod;
He's so great, He cannot play:
I am glad I am not God.

Poor kind God upon His throne,
Up there in the sky so blue,
Always, always all alone . . .
"Please, dear God, I pity You."

Robert William Service

Finale

Here is this vale of sweet abiding,
My ultimate and dulcet home,
That gently dreams above the chiding
of restless and impatient foam;
Beyond the hazards of hell weather,
The harceling of wind and sea,
With timbers morticed tight together
My old hulk havens happily.

The dawn exultantly discloses
My lawn lit with mimosa gold;
The joy of January roses
Is with me when rich lands are cold;
Serene with bells of beauty chiming,
This dream domain to be belongs,
By sweet conspiracy of rhyming,
And virtue of some idle songs.

I thank the gracious Lord of Living
Who gave me power and will to write:
May I be worthy of His giving
And win to merit in His sight. . . .
O merciful and mighty Master,
Though I have faltered in the past,
Your scribe I be. . . . Despite disaster
Let me be faithful to the last.

Robert William Service

Finality

When I am dead I will not care
How future generations fare,
For I will be so unaware.

Though fields their slain has carpeted,
And seas be salt with tears they shed,
Not one I'll waste, for I'll be dead.

Though atom bombs in ashes lay
Their skyey cities of to-day,
With carrion lips I cannot pray.

Though ruin reigns and madness raves,
And cowering men creep back in caves,
I cannot help to dig their graves.

Though fools for knowledge delve too deep,
And wake dark demons from their sleep,
I will not have the eyes to weep.

I will not care, I cannot care,
For I will be no longer there
To share their sorrow and despair.

And nevermore my heart will bleed
When on my brain the blind-worms feed,
For I'll be dead, dead, DEAD indeed.

And when I rot and cease to be,
It matters not a jot to me
What may be man's dark destiny.

Ah! there you have the hell of it,
As in the face of Fate I spit
I know she doesn't mind a bit.

A thousand millions clot this earth,
And billions more await their birth -
For what? . . . Ye gods, enjoy your mirth!

Robert William Service

Finistere

Hurrah! I'm off to Finistere, to Finistere, to Finistere;
My satchel's swinging on my back, my staff is in my hand;
I've twenty louis in my purse, I know the sun and sea are there,
And so I'm starting out to-day to tramp the golden land.
I'll go alone and glorying, with on my lips a song of joy;
I'll leave behind the city with its canker and its care;
I'll swing along so sturdily -- oh, won't I be the happy boy!
A-singing on the rocky roads, the roads of Finistere.

Oh, have you been to Finistere, and do you know a whin-gray town
That echoes to the clatter of a thousand wooden shoes?
And have you seen the fisher-girls go gallivantin' up and down,
And watched the tawny boats go out, and heard the roaring crews?
Oh, would you sit with pipe and bowl, and dream upon some sunny quay,
Or would you walk the windy heath and drink the cooler air;
Oh, would you seek a cradled cove and tussle with the topaz sea! --
Pack up your kit to-morrow, lad, and haste to Finistere.

Oh, I will go to Finistere, there's nothing that can hold me back.
I'll laugh with Yves and Le/on, and I'll chaff with Rose and Jeanne;
I'll seek the little, quaint buvette that's kept by Mother Merdrinac,
Who wears a cap of many frills, and swears just like a man.
I'll yarn with hearty, hairy chaps who dance and leap and crack their heels;
Who swallow cupfuls of cognac and never turn a hair;
I'll watch the nut-brown boats come in with mullet, plaice and conger eels,
The jeweled harvest of the sea they reap in Finistere.

Yes, I'll come back from Finistere with memories of shining days,
Of scaly nets and salty men in overalls of brown;
Of ancient women knitting as they watch the tethered cattle graze
By little nestling beaches where the gorse goes blazing down;
Of headlands silvering the sea, of Calvarys against the sky,
Of scorn of angry sunsets, and of Carnac grim and bare;
Oh, won't I have the leaping veins, and tawny cheek and sparkling eye,
When I come back to Montparnasse and dream of Finistere.

Robert William Service

Finnigan's Finish

They thought I'd be a champion;
They boasted loud of me.
A dozen victories I'd won,
The Press was proud of me.
I saw myself with glory crowned,
And would, beyond a doubt,
Till last night in the second round
A Dago knocked me out.

It must have been an accident;
I cannot understand.
For I was so damn confident
I'd lick him with one hand.
I bounded in the ring to cheers;
I panted for the fray:
Ten minutes more with hoots and jeers
They bore me limp away.

I will not have the nerve to face
The sporting mob today;
The doll I fell for--my disgrace
Will feel and fade away.
Last night upon the brink of fame
No favour did I lack:
Tomorrow from the sink of shame
I'll beg my old job back.

Robert William Service

Fisherfolk

I like to look at fishermen
And oftentimes I wish
One would be lucky now and then
And catch a little fish.
I watch them statuesquely stand,
And at the water look;
But if they pull their float to land
It's just to bait a hook.

I ponder the psychology
That roots them in their place;
And wonder at the calm I see
In ever angler's face.
There is such patience in their eyes,
Beside the river's brink;
And waiting for a bite or rise
I do not think they think.

Or else they are just gentle men,
Who love--they know not why,
Green grace of trees or water when
It wimples to the sky . . .
Sweet simple souls! As vain I watch
My heart to you is kind:
Most precious prize of all you catch,
--Just Peace of Mind.

Robert William Service

Five-Per-Cent

Because I have ten thousand pounds I sit upon my stern,
And leave my living tranquilly for other folks to earn.
For in some procreative way that isn't very clear,
Ten thousand pounds will breed, they say, five hundred every year.
So as I have a healthy hate of economic strife,
I mean to stand aloof from it the balance of my life.
And yet with sympathy I see the grimy son of toil,
And heartily congratulate the tiller of the soil.
I like the miner in the mine, the sailor on the sea,
Because up to five hundred pounds they sail and mine for me.
For me their toil is taxed unto that annual extent,
According to the holy shibboleth of Five-per-Cent.

So get ten thousand pounds, my friend, in any way you can.
And leave your future welfare to the noble Working Man.
He'll buy you suits of Harris tweed, an Airedale and a car;
Your golf clubs and your morning Times, your whisky and cigar.
He'll cosily install you in a cottage by a stream,
With every modern comfort, and a garden that's a dream>
Or if your tastes be urban, he'll provide you with a flat,
Secluded from the clamour of the proletariat.
With pictures, music, easy chairs, a table of good cheer,
A chap can manage nicely on five hundred pounds a year.
And though around you painful signs of industry you view,
Why should you work when you can make your money work for you?

So I'll get down upon my knees and bless the Working Man,
Who offers me a life of ease through all my mortal span;
Whose loins are lean to make me fat, who slaves to keep me free,
Who dies before his prime to let me round the century;
Whose wife and children toil in urn until their strength is spent,
That I may live in idleness upon my five-per-cent.
And if at times they curse me, why should I feel any blame?
For in my place I know that they would do the very same.
Aye, though hey hoist a flag that's red on Sunday afternoon,
Just offer them ten thousand pounds and see them change their tune.
So I'll enjoy my dividends and live my life with zest,
And bless the mighty men who first - invented Interest.

Fleurette

(The Wounded Canadian Speaks)

My leg? It's off at the knee.
Do I miss it? Well, some. You see
 I've had it since I was born;
 And lately a devilish corn.
(I rather chuckle with glee
 To think how I've fooled that corn.)

But I'll hobble around all right.
 It isn't that, it's my face.
Oh I know I'm a hideous sight,
 Hardly a thing in place;
Sort of gargoyle, you'd say.
 Nurse won't give me a glass,
 But I see the folks as they pass
Shudder and turn away;
 Turn away in distress . . .
 Mirror enough, I guess.

I'm gay! You bet I AM gay;
 But I wasn't a while ago.
If you'd seen me even to-day,
 The darndest picture of woe,
With this Caliban mug of mine,
 So ravaged and raw and red,
Turned to the wall -- in fine,
 Wishing that I was dead. . . .
What has happened since then,
 Since I lay with my face to the wall,
The most despairing of men?
 Listen! I'll tell you all.

That poilu across the way,
 With the shrapnel wound in his head,
Has a sister: she came to-day
 To sit awhile by his bed.
All morning I heard him fret:
 "Oh, when will she come, Fleurette?"

Then sudden, a joyous cry;
The tripping of little feet,
The softest, tenderest sigh,
A voice so fresh and sweet;
Clear as a silver bell,
Fresh as the morning dews:
"C'est toi, c'est toi, Marcel!
Mon frère, comme je suis heureuse!"

So over the blanket's rim
I raised my terrible face,
And I saw -- how I envied him!
A girl of such delicate grace;
Sixteen, all laughter and love;
As gay as a linnet, and yet
As tenderly sweet as a dove;
Half woman, half child -- Fleurette.

Then I turned to the wall again.
(I was awfully blue, you see),
And I thought with a bitter pain:
"Such visions are not for me."
So there like a log I lay,
All hidden, I thought, from view,
When sudden I heard her say:
"Ah! Who is that malheureux?"
Then briefly I heard him tell
(However he came to know)
How I'd smothered a bomb that fell
Into the trench, and so
None of my men were hit,
Though it busted me up a bit.

Well, I didn't quiver an eye,
And he chattered and there she sat;
And I fancied I heard her sigh --
But I wouldn't just swear to that.
And maybe she wasn't so bright,
Though she talked in a merry strain,
And I closed my eyes ever so tight,
Yet I saw her ever so plain:

Her dear little tilted nose,
Her delicate, dimpled chin,
Her mouth like a budding rose,
And the glistening pearls within;
Her eyes like the violet:
Such a rare little queen -- Fleurette.

And at last when she rose to go,
The light was a little dim,
And I ventured to peep, and so
I saw her, graceful and slim,
And she kissed him and kissed him, and oh
How I envied and envied him!

So when she was gone I said
In rather a dreary voice
To him of the opposite bed:
"Ah, friend, how you must rejoice!
But me, I'm a thing of dread.
For me nevermore the bliss,
The thrill of a woman's kiss."

Then I stopped, for lo! she was there,
And a great light shone in her eyes;
And me! I could only stare,
I was taken so by surprise,
When gently she bent her head:
"May I kiss you, Sergeant?" she said.

Then she kissed my burning lips
With her mouth like a scented flower,
And I thrilled to the finger-tips,
And I hadn't even the power
To say: "God bless you, dear!"
And I felt such a precious tear
Fall on my withered cheek,
And darn it! I couldn't speak.

And so she went sadly away,
And I knew that my eyes were wet.
Ah, not to my dying day
Will I forget, forget!

Can you wonder now I am gay?
God bless her, that little Fleurette!

Robert William Service

Flies

I never kill a fly because
I think that what we have of laws
To regulate and civilize
Our daily life - we owe to flies.

Apropos, I'll tell you of Choo, the spouse
Of the head of the hunters, Wung;
Such a beautiful cave they had for a house,
And a brood of a dozen young.
And Wung would start by the dawn's red light
On the trailing of bird or beast,
And crawl back tired on the brink of night
With food for another feast.

Then the young would dance in their naked glee,
And Choo would fuel the fire;
Fur and feather, how good to see,
And to gorge to heart's desire!
Flesh of rabbit and goose and deer,
With fang-like teeth they tore,
And laughed with faces a bloody smear,
And flung their bones on the floor.

But with morning bright the flies would come,
Clouding into the cave;
You could hardly hear for their noisy hum,
They were big and black and brave.
Darkling the day with gust of greed
They'd swarm in the warm sunrise
On the litter of offal and bones to feed -
A million or so of flies.

Now flies were the wife of Wung's despair;
They would sting and buzz and bite,
And as her only attire was hair
She would itch from morn to night:
But as one day she scratched her hide,
A thought there came to Choo;
"If I were to throw the bones outside,

The flies would go there too."

That spark in a well-nigh monkey mind,
Nay, do not laugh or scorn;
For there in the thoughts of Choo you'll find
Was the sense of Order born;
As she flung the offal far and wide,
And the fly-cloud followed fast,
Battening on the bones outside
The cave was clear at last.

And Wung was pleased when he came at night,
For the air was clean and sweet,
And the cave-kids danced in the gay firelight,
And fed on the new-killed meat;
But the children Choo would chide and boss,
For her cleanly floor was her pride,
And even the baby was taught to toss
His bite of a bone outside.

Then the cave crones came and some admired,
But others were envious;
And they said: "She swanks, she makes us tired
With her complex modern fuss."
However, most of the tribe complied,
Though tradition dourly dies,
And a few Conservatives crossly cried:
"We'll keep our bones and our flies."

So Reformer Choo was much revered
And to all she said: "You see
How my hearth is clean and my floor is cleaned,
And there ain't no flies on me"...
And that was how it all began,
Through horror of muck and mess,
Even in prehistoric Man,
LAW, ORDER and CLEANLINESS'.

And that is why I never kill
A fly, no matter how obscene;
For I believe in God's good will:
He gave us vermin to make us clean.

Robert William Service

Flight

On silver sand where ripples curled
I counted sea-gulls seven;
Shy, secret screened from all the world,
And innocent as heaven.
They did not of my nearness know,
For dawn was barely bright,
And they were still, like spots of snow
In that pale, pearly light.

Then one went forth unto the sea
That rippled up in gold,
And there were rubies flashing free
From out its wing-unfold;
It ducked and dived in pretty play,
The while the other six
So gravely sat it seemed that they
Were marvelled by its tricks.

Then with a sudden flurry each
Down-rushed to join its mate,
And in a flash that sickle beach
With rapture was elate.
With joy they pranked till everyone
Was diamonded with spray,
Then flicked with flame to greet the sun
They rose and winged away.

But with their going, oh, the surge
Of loss they left in me!
For in my heart was born the urge,
The passion to be free.
And where each dawn with terror brings
Some tale of bale and blight,
Who would not envy silver wings,
The sea-gull in its flight!

Let me not know the soils of woe
That chain this stricken earth;
Let me forget the fear and fret

That bind men from their birth;
Let me be the one with wind and sun,
With earth and sky and sea. . . .
Oh, let me teach in living speech
God's glory - Liberty.

Robert William Service

Florentine Pilgrim

"I'll do the old dump in a day,"
He told me in his brittle way.
"Two more, I guess, I'll give to Rome
Before I hit the trail for home;
But while I'm there I kindo' hope
To have an audience with the Pope."

We stood upon the terraced height
With sunny Florence in our sight.
I gazed and gazed, too moved to speak
Until he queried: "What's that creek?"
"The Arno, sir," I said surprised;
He stared at it with empty eyes.

"It is," said I, "the storied stream
Where Dante used to pace and dream,
And wait for Beatrice to pass."
(Oh how I felt a silly ass
Explaining this.) With eyes remote
He asked: "Was Beatrice a boat?"

Then tranced by far Fiesole
Softly I sought to steal away;
But his adhesiveness was grim,
I could not pry apart from him:
And so in our hotel-ward walk
Meekly I listened to his talk.

"Bologna! Say, the lunch was swell;
Them wops know how to feed you well.
Verona! There I met a blonde"
Oh how that baby could respond!
Siena! That's the old burg where
We soused on Asti in the square.

"Antiquity! Why, that's the bunk -
Statues and all that mouldy junk
Will never get you anywhere . . .
My line is ladies' underware,

And better than a dozen Dantes
Is something cute in female scanties. . . .

"One day in Florence is too small
You think, maybe, to see it all.
Well, it don't matter what you've seen -
The thing is: you can say you've been."

Robert William Service

Florrie

Because I was a wonton wild
And welcomed many a lover,
Who is the father of my child
I wish I could discover.
For though I know it is not right
In tender arms to tarry,
A barmaid has to be polite
To Tom and Dick and Harry.

My truest love was Poacher Jim:
I wish my babe was his'n.
Yet I can't father it on him
Because he was in prison.
As uniforms I like, I had
A soldier and a sailor;
Then there was Pete the painter lad,
And Timothy the tailor.

Though virtue hurt you vice ain't nice;
They say to err is human;
Alas! one pays a bitter price,
It's hell to be a woman.
Oh dear! Why was I born a lass
Who hated to say: No, sir.
I'd better in my sorry pass
Blame Mister Simms, the grocer.

Robert William Service

Fool Faith

Said I: "See yon vast heaven shine,--
 What earthly sight diviner?
Before such radiant Design
 Why doubt Designer?"

Said he: "Design is just a thought
 In human cerebation,
And meaningless if Man is not
 Part of creation.

"But grant Design,--we may imply
 The job took toil aplenty;
Then why one sole designer, why
 Not ten or twenty.

"But should there be one Source supreme
 Of matter and of motion,
Why mould it like our man-machine
 For daft devotion?"

Said I: "You may be right or wrong,
 I'll seek not to discover . . .
I listen to yon starry song,--
 Still, still God's lover."

Robert William Service

Fore-Warning

I'd rather be the Jester than the Minstrel of the King;
I'd rather jangle cap and bells than twang the stately harp;
I'd rather make his royal ribs with belly-laughter ring,
Than see him sitting in the suds and sulky as a carp.
I'd rather be the Court buffoon than its most high-browed sage:
 So you who read, take heed, take heed, -
 Ere yet you turn my page.

Robert William Service

Forgotten Master

As you gaze beyond the bay
With such wanness in your eyes,
You who have out-stayed your day,
Seeing other stars arise,
Slender though your lifehold be,
Still you dream beside the sea.

We, alas! may live too long,
Know the best part of us die;
Echo of your even-song
Hushes down the darkling sky . . .
But your greatness would be less
If you cherished bitterness.

I am sure you do not care
Though the rabble turn thumbs down;
Their neglect you well can bear,
knowing you have won your crown,
proudly given of your best . . .
Masterlinck, leave God the rest.

Robert William Service

Fortitude

Time, the Jester, jeers at you;
Your life's a fleeting breath;
Your birthday's flimsy I.O.U.
To that old devil, Death.
And though to glory you attain,
Or be to beauty born,
Your pomp and vanity are vain:
Time ticks you off with scorn.

Time, the Cynic, sneers at you,
And stays you in your stride;
He flouts the daring deeds you do,
And pillories your pride.
The triumph of your yesterday
He pages with the Past;
He taunts you with the grave's decay
And calls the score at last.

All this I now, yet what care I!
Despite his dusty word,
I hold my tattered banner high,
And swing my broken sword.
In blackest night I glimpse a gleam,
And nurse a faith sublime,
To do, to dare, to hope, to dream,
to fight you, Foeman Time;
Yea, in the dark, a deathless beam
To smite you, Tyrant Time.

Robert William Service

Forward

I've tinkered at my bits of rhymes
In weary, woeful, waiting times;
In doleful hours of battle-din,
Ere yet they brought the wounded in;
Through vigils of the fateful night,
In lousy barns by candle-light;
In dug-outs, sagging and aflood,
On stretchers stiff and bleared with blood;
By ragged grove, by ruined road,
By hearths accurst where Love abode;
By broken altars, blackened shrines
I've tinkered at my bits of rhymes.

I've solaced me with scraps of song
The desolated ways along:
Through sickly fields all shrapnel-sown,
And meadows reaped by death alone;
By blazing cross and splintered spire,
By headless Virgin in the mire;
By gardens gashed amid their bloom,
By gutted grave, by shattered tomb;
Beside the dying and the dead,
Where rocket green and rocket red,
In trembling pools of poisoning light,
With flowers of flame festoon the night.
Ah me! by what dark ways of wrong
I've cheered my heart with scraps of song.

So here's my sheaf of war-won verse,
And some is bad, and some is worse.
And if at times I curse a bit,
You needn't read that part of it;
For through it all like horror runs
The red resentment of the guns.
And you yourself would mutter when
You took the things that once were men,
And sped them through that zone of hate
To where the dripping surgeons wait;
And wonder too if in God's sight

War ever, ever can be right.

Yet may it not be, crime and war

But effort misdirected are?

And if there's good in war and crime,

There may be in my bits of rhyme,

My songs from out the slaughter mill:

So take or leave them as you will.

Robert William Service

Four-Foot Shelf

'Come, see,' said he, 'my four-foot shelf,
A forty volume row;
And every one I wrote myself,
But that, of course, you know.'
I stared, I searched a memory dim,
For though an author too,
Somehow I'd never heard of him,--
None of his books I knew.

Said I: 'I'd like to borrow one,
Fond memories to recall.'
Said he: 'I'll gladly give you some,
And autograph them all.'
And so a dozen books he brought,
And signed tome after tome:
Of course I thanked him quite a lot,
And took them home.

So now I have to read his work,
Though dry as dust it be;
No portion of it may I shirk,
Lest he should question me.
This tale is true,--although it looks
To me a bloody shame,
A guy could father forty books,
yet no one know his name.

Robert William Service

Freedom's Fool

To hell with Government I say;
I'm sick of all the piddling pack.
I'd like to scam, get clean away,
And never, nevermore come back.
With heart of hope I long to go
To some lost island of the sea,
And there get drunk with joy to know
No one on earth is over me.

There will be none to say me nay,
So from my lexicon I can
Obliterate the word "obey",
And mock the meddling laws of man.
The laws of Nature and of God
Are good enough for guys like me,
Who scorn to kiss the scarlet rod
Of office and authority.

No Stars and Stripes nor Union Jack,
Nor tri-colour nor crimson rag
Shall claim my love, I'll turn my back
On every land, on every flag.
My banner shall be stainless white,
An emblem of the Golden Rule,
Yet for its freedom I will fight
And die - like any other fool.

Oh Government's a bitter pill!
No force or fear shall forge my fate;
I'll bow to no communal will,
For I myself shall be the State.
Uncurst by man-curb and control,
my Isle shall be emparadised,
And I will re-possess my soul . . .
Mad Anarchist! - Well, wasn't Christ?

Robert William Service

Freethinker

Although the Preacher be a bore,
The Atheist is even more.

I ain't religious worth a damn;
My views are reckoned to be broad;
And yet I shut up like a clam
When folks get figgerin' on God;
I'd hate my kids to think like me,
And though they leave me in the lurch,
I'm always mighty glad to see
 My fam'ly trot to Church.

Although of books I have a shelf
Of skeptic stuff, I must confess
I keep their knowledge to myself:
Doubt doesn't help to happiness.
I never scoff at Holy Writ,
But envy those who hold it true,
And though I've never been in it
 I'm proud to own a pew.

I always was a doubting Tom;
I guess some lads are born that way.
I couldn't stick religion from
The time I broke the Sabbath Day.
Yet unbelief's a bitter brew,
And this in arid ways I've learned;
If you believe a thing, it's true
 As far as your concerned.

I'm sentimental, I agree,
For how it always makes me glad
To turn from Ingersoll and see
My little girls Communion-clad.
And as to church my people plod
I cry to them with simple glee:
"Say, folks, if you should talk to God,
 Put in a word for me."

Frustration

Gazing to gold seraph wing,
With wistful wonder in my eyes,
A blue-behinded ape, I swing
Upon the palms of Paradise.

A parakeet of gaudy hue
Upon a flame tree smugly rocks;
Oh, we're a precious pair, we two,
I gibber while the parrot squawks.

"If I had but your wings," I sigh,
"How ardently would I aspire
To soar celestially high
And mingle with yon angel choir."

His beady eye is bitter hard;
Right mockingly he squints at me;
As critic might review a bard
His scorn is withering to see.

And as I beat my brest and howl,
"Poor fool," he shrills, my bliss to wreck.
So . . . so I steal behind that fowl
And grab his claw and screw his neck.

And swift his scarlet wings I tear;
Seeking to soar, with hope divine,
I frantically beat the air,
And crash to earth and - snap my spine.

Yet as I lie with shaken breaths
Of pain I watch my seraph throng. . . .
Oh, I would die a dozen deaths
Could I but sing one deathless song!

Robert William Service

Fulfilment

I sing of starry dreams come true,
 Of hopes fulfilled;
Of rich reward beyond my due,
 Of harvest milled.
The full fruition of the years
 Is mine to hold,
And in despite of toil and tears
 The sun is gold.

I have no hate for any one
 On this good earth;
My days of hardihood are done,
 And hushed my hearth.
No echo of a world afar
 Can trouble me;
Above a grove the evening star
 Serene I see.

No jealousy nor passion base
 Can irk me now;
Recieved am I unto God's grace
 With tranquil brow.
Adieu to love I have and hold,
 Farewell to friend;
In peace and faith my hands I fold
 And wait the end.

Robert William Service

Funk

When your marrer bone seems 'oller,
And you're glad you ain't no taller,
 And you're all a-shakin' like you 'ad the chills;
When your skin creeps like a pullet's,
And you're duckin' all the bullets,
 And you're green as gorgonzola round the gills;
When your legs seem made of jelly,
And you're squeamish in the belly,
 And you want to turn about and do a bunk:
For Gawd's sake, kid, don't show it!
Don't let your mateys know it --
 You're just sufferin' from funk, funk, funk.

Of course there's no denyin'
That it ain't so easy tryin'
 To grin and grip your rifle by the butt,
When the 'ole world rips asunder,
And you sees yer pal go under,
 As a bunch of shrapnel sprays 'im on the nut;
I admit it's 'ard contrivin'
When you 'ears the shells arrivin',
 To discover you're a bloomin' bit o' spunk;
But, my lad, you've got to do it,
And your God will see you through it,
 For wot 'E 'ates is funk, funk, funk.

So stand up, son; look gritty,
And just 'um a lively ditty,
 And only be afraid to be afraid;
Just 'old yer rifle steady,
And 'ave yer bay'nit ready,
 For that's the way good soldier-men is made.
And if you 'as to die,
As it sometimes 'appens, why,
 Far better die a 'ero than a skunk;
A-doin' of yer bit,
And so -- to 'ell with it,
 There ain't no bloomin' funk, funk, funk.

Futility

Dusting my books I spent a busy day:
Not ancient tomes, time-hallowed and unread,
but modern volumes, classics in their way,
whose makers now are numbered with the dead;
Men of a generation more than mine,
With whom I tattled, battled and drank wine.

I worshipped them, rejoiced in their success,
Grudging them not the gold that goes with fame.
I thought them near-immortal, I confess,
And naught could dim the glory of each name.
How I perused their pages with delight! . . .
To-day I peer with sadness in my sight.

For, death has pricked each to a flat balloon.
A score of years have gone, they're clean forgot.
Who would have visioned such a dreary doom?
By God! I'd like to burn the blasted lot.
Only, old books are mighty hard to burn:
They char, they flicker and their pages turn.

And as you stand to poke them in the flame,
You see a living line that stabs the heart.
Brave writing that! It seems a cursed shame
That to a bonfire it should play its part.
Poor book! You're crying, and you're not alone:
Some day someone will surely burn my own.

No, I will dust my books and put them by,
Yet never look into their leaves again;
For scarce a soul remembers them save I,
Re-reading them would only give me pain.
So I will sigh, and say with curling lip:
Futility! Thy name is authorship.

Robert William Service

Gangrene

So often in the mid of night
 I wake me in my bed
With utter panic of affright
 To find my feet are dead;
And pace the floor to ease my pain
 And make them live again.

The folks at home are so discreet;
 They see me walk and walk
To keep the blood-flow in my feet,
 And though they never talk
I've heard them whisper: 'Mother may
 Have them cut off some day.'

Cut off my feet! I'd rather die . . .
 And yet the years of pain,
When in the darkness I will lie
 And pray to God in vain,
Thinking in agony: Oh why
Can doctors not annul our breath
 In honourable death?

Robert William Service

Gentle Gaoler

Being a gaoler I'm supposed
 To be a hard-boiled guy;
Yet never prison walls enclosed
 A kinder soul than I:
Passing my charges precious pills
 To end their ills.

And if in gentle sleep they die,
 And pass to pleasant peace,
No one suspects that it is I
 Who gave them their release:
No matter what the Doctor thinks,
 The Warden winks.

A lifer's is a fearful fate;
 It wrings the heart of me.
And what a saving to the State
 A sudden death must be!
Doomed men should have the legal right
 To end their plight.

And so my veronel they take,
 And bid goodbye to pain;
And sleep, and never, never wake
 To living hell again:
Oh call me curst or call me blest,--
 I give them rest.

Robert William Service

Ghosts

I to a crumpled cabin came
upon a hillside high,
And with me was a withered dame
As weariful as I.
"It used to be our home," she said;
"How well I remember well!
Oh that our happy hearth should be
Today an empty shell!"

The door was flailing in the storm
That deafed us with its din;
The roof that kept us once so warm
Now let the snow-drift in.
The floor sagged to the sod below,
The walls caved crazily;
We only heard the wind of woe
Where once was glow and glee.

So there we stood disconsolate
Beneath the Midnight Dome,
And ancient miner and his mate,
Before our wedded home,
Where we had know such love and cheer . . .
I sighed, then soft she said:
"Do not regret - remember, dear,
 We, too, are dead."

Robert William Service

Gignol

Addict of Punch and Judy shows
I was when I was small;
My kiddy laughter, I suppose,
Rang louder than them all.
The Judge with banter I would bait,
The Copper was a wretch;
But oh how I would hiss my hate
For grim Jack Ketch.

Although a grandsire grey I still
Love Punch and Judy shows,
And with my toddlers help to fill
Enthusiastic rows.
How jolly is their mirth to see,
And what a sigh they fetch,
When Punch begs to be shown and he
Jerks up Jack Ketch.

Heigh ho! No more I watch the play;
It is the audience
That gives me my delight today,--
Such charm of innocence!
Immortal mimes! It seems to me,
Could I re-live my span,
With gusto I would like to be
A Punch and Judy Man.

Robert William Service

Gipsy

The poppies that in Spring I sow,
In rings of radiance gleam and glow,
Like lords and ladies gay.
A joy are they to dream beside,
As in the air of eventide
They flutter, dip and sway.

For some are scarlet, some are gold,
While some in fairy flame unfold,
And some are rose and white.
There's pride of breeding in their glance,
And pride of beauty as they dance
Cotillions of delight.

Yet as I lift my eyes I see
Their swarthy kindred wild and free.
Who flaunt it in the field.
"Begone, you Romanies!" I say,
"Lest you defile this bright array
Whose loveliness I shield."

My poppies are a sheen of light;
They take with ecstasy the sight,
And hold the heart elate
Yet why do I so often turn
To where their outcast brothers burn
With passion at my gate?

My poppies are my joy and pride;
Yet wistfully I gaze outside
To where their sisters yearn;
Their blowzy crimson cups afire,
Their lips aflutter with desire
To give without return.

My poppies dance a minuet;
Like courtiers in silk they set
My garden all aglow
Yet O the vagrants at my gate!

The gipsy trulls who peer and wait! . . .
Calling the heart they know.

Robert William Service

God's Battleground

God dwells in you; in pride and shame,
In all you do to blight or bless;
In all you are of praise and blame,
In beauty or in ugliness.
"Divine Creation" - What a fraud!
God did not make you . . . You make God.

God lives in me, in all I feel
Of love and hate, of joy and pain,
Of grace and greed, or woe and weal,
Of fear and cheer, of loss and gain:
For good or evil I am He,
Yea, saint or devil, One are we.

God fends and fights in each of us;
His altars we, or bright or dim;
So with no sacerdotal fuss
But worthy act let's worship Him:
Goodness is Godness - let us be
Deserving of Divinity.

And of His presence be aware,
And by our best His love express;
A gentle word is like a prayer,
A kindly act is holiness:
Don't let God down; let Him prevail
And write his AMEN to our tale.

Robert William Service

God's Grief

"Lord God of Hosts," the people pray,
"Make strong our arms that we may slay
Our cursed foe and win the day."
"Lord God of Battles," cries the foe,
"Guide us to strike a bloody blow,
And lay the adversary low."

But brooding o'er the battle smother
Bewails the Lord: "Brother to brother,
Why must ye slaughter one another?
When will ye come to understand
My peace, and hand reach out to hand,
In every race, in every land?"

And yet, his weary words despite,
Went murderously on the fight,
Till God from mankind hid His sight,
Saying: "Poor children, must you gain
To brotherhood through millions slain?
--Was anguish on the Cross in vain?"

Robert William Service

Gods In The Gutter

I dreamed I saw three demi-gods who in a cafe sat,
And one was small and crapulous, and one was large and fat;
And one was eaten up with vice and verminous at that.

The first he spoke of secret sins, and gems and perfumes rare;
And velvet cats and courtesans voluptuously fair:
"Who is the Sybarite?" I asked. They answered: "Baudelaire."

The second talked in tapestries, by fantasy beguiled;
As frail as bubbles, hard as gems, his pageantries he piled;
"This Lord of Language, who is he?" They whispered "Oscar Wilde."

The third was staring at his glass from out abysmal pain;
With tears his eyes were bitten in beneath his bulbous brain.
"Who is the sodden wretch?" I said. They told me: "Paul Verlaine."

Oh, Wilde, Verlaine and Baudelaire, their lips were wet with wine;
Oh poseur, pimp and libertine! Oh cynic, sot and swine!
Oh votaries of velvet vice! . . . Oh gods of light divine!

Oh Baudelaire, Verlaine and Wilde, they knew the sinks of shame;
Their sun-aspiring wings they scorched at passion's altar flame;
Yet lo! enthroned, enskied they stand, Immortal Sons of Fame.

I dreamed I saw three demi-gods who walked with feet of clay,
With cruel crosses on their backs, along a miry way;
Who climbed and climbed the bitter steep to which men turn and pray.

Robert William Service

God's Skallywags

The God of Scribes looked down and saw
The bitter band of seven,
Who had outraged his holy law
And lost their hope of Heaven:
Came Villon, petty thief and pimp,
And obscene Baudelaire,
And Byron with his letcher limp,
And Poe with starry stare.

And Wilde who lived his hell on earth,
And Burns, the bawdy bard,
And Francis Thompson, from his birth
Malevolently starred. . . .
As like a line of livid ghosts
They started to paradise,
The galaxy of Heaven's hosts
Looked down in soft surmise.

Said God: "You bastards of my love,
You are my chosen sons;
Come, I will set you high above
These merely holy ones.
Your sins you've paid in gall and grief,
So to these radiant skies,
Seducer, drunkard, dopester, thief,
Immortally arise.

I am your Father, fond and just,
And all your folly see;
Your bestiality and lust
I also know in me.
You did the task I gave to you . . .
Arise and sit beside
My Son, the best beloved, who
Was also crucified.

Robert William Service

God's Vagabond

A passion to be free
Has ever mastered me;
To none beneath the sun
Will I bow down,--not one
Shall leash my liberty.

My life's my own; I rise
With glory in my eyes;
And my concept of hell
Is to be forced to sell
Myself to one who buys.

With heart of rebel I
Man's government defy;
With hate of bondage born
Monarch and mob I scorn:
My King the Lord on high.

God's majesty I know;
And worship in the glow
Of beauty that I see,
Of love embracing me;
My heaven to be free:
May it be ever so.

Robert William Service

Going Home

I'm goin' 'ome to Blighty -- ain't I glad to 'ave the chance!
I'm loaded up wiv fightin', and I've 'ad my fill o' France;
I'm feelin' so excited-like, I want to sing and dance,
For I'm goin' 'ome to Blighty in the mawnin'.

I'm goin' 'ome to Blighty: can you wonder as I'm gay?
I've got a wound I wouldn't sell for 'alf a year o' pay;
A harm that's mashed to jelly in the nicest sort o' way,
For it takes me 'ome to Blighty in the mawnin'.

'Ow everlastin' keen I was on gettin' to the front!
I'd ginger for a dozen, and I 'elped to bear the brunt;
But Cheese and Crust! I'm crazy, now I've done me little stunt,
To sniff the air of Blighty in the mawnin'.

I've looked upon the wine that's white, and on the wine that's red;
I've looked on cider flowin', till it fairly turned me 'ead;
But oh, the finest scoff will be, when all is done and said,
A pint o' Bass in Blighty in the mawnin'.

I'm goin' back to Blighty, which I left to strafe the 'Un;
I've fought in bloody battles, and I've 'ad a 'eap of fun;
But now me flipper's busted, and I think me dooty's done,
And I'll kiss me gel in Blighty in the mawnin'.

Oh, there be furrin' lands to see, and some of 'em be fine;
And there be furrin' gels to kiss, and scented furrin' wine;
But there's no land like England, and no other gel like mine:
Thank Gawd for dear old Blighty in the mawnin'.

Robert William Service

Golden Days

Another day of toil and strife,
Another page so white,
Within that fateful Log of Life
That I and all must write;
Another page without a stain
To make of as I may,
That done, I shall not see again
Until the Judgment Day.

Ah, could I, could I backward turn
The pages of that Book,
How often would I blench and burn!
How often loathe to look!
What pages would be meanly scrolled;
What smeared as if with mud;
A few, maybe, might gleam like gold,
Some scarlet seem as blood.

O Record grave, God guide my hand
And make me worthy be,
Since what I write to-day shall stand
To all eternity;
Aye, teach me, Lord of Life, I pray,
As I salute the sun,
To bear myself that every day
May be a Golden One.

Robert William Service

Good-Bye, Little Cabin

O dear little cabin, I've loved you so long,
And now I must bid you good-bye!
I've filled you with laughter, I've thrilled you with song,
And sometimes I've wished I could cry.
Your walls they have witnessed a weariful fight,
And rung to a won Waterloo:
But oh, in my triumph I'm dreary to-night --
Good-bye, little cabin, to you!

Your roof is bewhiskered, your floor is a-slant,
Your walls seem to sag and to swing;
I'm trying to find just your faults, but I can't --
You poor, tired, heart-broken old thing!
I've seen when you've been the best friend that I had,
Your light like a gem on the snow;
You're sort of a part of me -- Gee! but I'm sad;
I hate, little cabin, to go.

Below your cracked window red raspberries climb;
A hornet's nest hangs from a beam;
Your rafters are scribbled with adage and rhyme,
And dimmed with tobacco and dream.
"Each day has its laugh", and "Don't worry, just work".
Such mottoes reproachfully shine.
Old calendars dangle -- what memories lurk
About you, dear cabin of mine!

I hear the world-call and the clang of the fight;
I hear the hoarse cry of my kind;
Yet well do I know, as I quit you to-night,
It's Youth that I'm leaving behind.
And often I'll think of you, empty and black,
Moose antlers nailed over your door:
Oh, if I should perish my ghost will come back
To dwell in you, cabin, once more!

How cold, still and lonely, how weary you seem!
A last wistful look and I'll go.
Oh, will you remember the lad with his dream!

The lad that you comforted so.
The shadows enfold you, it's drawing to-night;
The evening star needles the sky:
And huh! but it's stinging and stabbing my sight --
God bless you, old cabin, good-bye!

Robert William Service

Grandad

Heaven's mighty sweet, I guess;
Ain't no rush to git there:
Been a sinner, more or less;
Maybe wouldn't fit there.
Wicked still, bound to confess;
Might jest pine a bit there.

Heaven's swell, the preachers say:
Got so used to earth here;
Had such good times all the way,
Frolic, fun and mirth here;
Eighty Springs ago to-day,
Since I had my birth here.

Quite a spell of happy years.
Wish I could begin it;
Cloud and sunshine, laughter, tears,
Livin' every minute.
Women, too, the pretty dears;
Plenty of 'em in it.

Heaven! that's another tale.
Mightn't let me chew there.
Gotta have me pot of ale;
Would I like the brew there?
Maybe I'd get slack and stale -
No more chores to do there.

Here I weed the garden plot,
Scare the crows from pillage;
Simmer in the sun a lot,
Talk about the tillage.
Yarn of battles I have fought,
Greybeard of the village.

Heaven's mighty fine, I know
Still, it ain't so bad here.
See them maples all aglow;
Starlings seem so glad here:

I'll be mighty peeved to go,
Scrumptious times I've had here.

Lord, I know You'll understand.
With Your Light You'll lead me.
Though I'm not the pious brand,
I'm here when You need me.
Gosh! I know that HEAVEN'S GRAND,
But dang it! God, don't speed me.

Robert William Service

Grand-PÈre

And so when he reached my bed
The General made a stand:
"My brave young fellow," he said,
"I would shake your hand."

So I lifted my arm, the right,
With never a hand at all;
Only a stump, a sight
Fit to appal.

"Well, well. Now that's too bad!
That's sorrowful luck," he said;
"But there! You give me, my lad,
The left instead."

So from under the blanket's rim
I raised and showed him the other,
A snag as ugly and grim
As its ugly brother.

He looked at each jagged wrist;
He looked, but he did not speak;
And then he bent down and kissed
Me on either cheek.

You wonder now I don't mind
I hadn't a hand to offer. . . .
They tell me (you know I'm blind)
'Twas Grand-P`re Joffre.

Robert William Service

Grand-Pa's Whim

While for me gapes the greedy grave
 It don't make sense
That I should have a crazy crave
 To paint our fence.
Yet that is what I aim to do,
 Though dim my sight:
Jest paint them aged pickets blue,
 Or green or white.

Jest squat serenely in the sun
 Wi' brush an' paint,
An' gay them pickets one by one,
 --A chore! It ain't.
The job is joy. Although I'm slow
 I save expense:
So folks, let me before I go,
 Smart that ol' fence.

Them pickets with my hands I made,
 When young and sry;
I coloured them a gleeful shade
 To glad the eye.
So now as chirpy as a boy,
 'Ere I go hence,
Once more let me jest bright to joy
 Our picket fence.

Robert William Service

Grey Gull

'Twas on an iron, icy day
I saw a pirate gull down-plane,
And hover in a wistful way
Nigh where my chickens picked their grain.
An outcast gull, so grey and old,
Withered of leg I watched it hop,
By hunger goaded and by cold,
To where each fowl full-filled its crop.

They hospitably welcomed it,
And at the food rack gave it place;
It ate and ate, it preened a bit,
By way way of gratitude and grace.
It parleyed with my barnyard cock,
Then resolutely winged away;
But I am fey in feather talk,
And this is what I heard it say:

"I know that you and all your tribe
Are shielded warm and fenced from fear;
With food and comfort you would bribe
My weary wings to linger here.
An outlaw scarred and leather-lean,
I battle with the winds of woe:
You think me scaly and unclean...
And yet my soul you do not know,

"I storm the golden gates of day,
I wing the silver lanes of night;
I plumb the deep for finny prey,
On wave I sleep in tempest height.
Conceived was I by sea and sky,
Their elements are fused in me;
Of brigand birds that float and fly
I am the freest of the free.

"From peak to plain, from palm to pine
I coast creation at my will;
The chartless solitudes are mine,

And no one seeks to do me ill.
Until some cauldron of the sea
Shall gulp for me and I shall cease...
Oh I have lived enormously
And I shall have prodigious peace."

With yellow bill and beady eye
This spoke, I think, that old grey gull;
And as I watched it Southward fly
Life seemed to be a-sudden dull.
For I have often held this thought -
If I could change this mouldy me,
By heaven! I would choose the lot,
Of all the gypsy birds, to be
A gull that spans the spacious sea.

Robert William Service

Grin

If you're up against a bruiser and you're getting knocked about --

Grin.

If you're feeling pretty groggy, and you're licked beyond a doubt --

Grin.

Don't let him see you're funkng, let him know with every clout,
Though your face is battered to a pulp, your blooming heart is stout;
Just stand upon your pins until the beggar knocks you out --

And grin.

This life's a bally battle, and the same advice holds true

Of grin.

If you're up against it badly, then it's only one on you,

So grin.

If the future's black as thunder, don't let people see you're blue;
Just cultivate a cast-iron smile of joy the whole day through;
If they call you "Little Sunshine", wish that THEY'D no troubles, too --

You may -- grin.

Rise up in the morning with the will that, smooth or rough,

You'll grin.

Sink to sleep at midnight, and although you're feeling tough,

Yet grin.

There's nothing gained by whining, and you're not that kind of stuff;
You're a fighter from away back, and you WON'T take a rebuff;
Your trouble is that you don't know when you have had enough --

Don't give in.

If Fate should down you, just get up and take another cuff;
You may bank on it that there is no philosophy like bluff,

And grin.

Robert William Service

Growing Old

Somehow the skies don't seem so blue
As they used to be;
Blossoms have a fainter hue,
Grass less green I see.
There's no twinkle in a star,
Dawns don't seem so gold . . .
Yet, of course, I know they are:
Guess I'm growing old.

Somehow sunshine seems less bright,
Birds less gladly sing;
Moons don't thrill me with delight,
There's no kick in Spring.
Hills are steeper now and I'm
Sensitive to cold;
Lines are not so keen to rhyme . . .
Gosh! I'm growing old.

Yet in spite of failing things
I've no cause to grieve;
Age with all its ailing brings
Blessings, I believe:
Kindo' gentles up the mind
As the hope we hold
That with loving we will find
Friendliness in human kind,
Grace in growing old.

Robert William Service

Grumpy Grandpa

Grand-daughter of the Painted Nails,
As if they had been dipped in gore,
I'd like to set you lugging pails
And make you scrub the kitchen floor.
I'm old and crotchety of course,
And on this point my patience fails;
I'd sue my old girl for divorce
If she showed up with painted nails.

Grand-daughter of the Painted Nails,
Like to a Jezebel are you;
Do you expect to snare the males
With talons of such bloody hue?
I could forgive your smudging lips,
Your scarlet cheek that powder veils,
But not your sanguine finger-tips . . .
Don't paw me with your painted nails.

Grand-daughter of the Painted Nails,
Were I the sire of maidens ten,
I'd curse them over hills and dales,
And hold them to the scorn of men
If they had claws of crimson dye;
Aye, though they sang like nightingales,
Unto the welkin I would cry:
"Avaunt, ye hags with Painted Nails!"

Robert William Service

Gypsy Jill

They're hanging Bill at eight o' clock,
 And millions will applaud.
He killed, and so they have to kill,
 Such is the will of God.
His brother Tom is on my bed
 To keep me comforted.

I see his bleary, blotchy face,
 I hear his sodden snore.
He plans that he can take Bill's place;
 I felt worse than a whore
As in his arms I cried all night,
 Thinking of poor Bill's plight.

I keep my eyes upon the clock;
 It nears the stroke of eight.
I think how bravely Bill will walk
 To meet his gallows fate . . .
His loaded gun is in the tent,--
 I know now what he meant.

Though Tom is boastful he will wed
 With me, no more to part,
I'll put a bullet through his head,
 Another through my heart:
At eight, stone-dead we three will be,
 --Bill, Tom and me.

Robert William Service

Hate

I had a bitter enemy,
His heart to hate he gave,
And when I died he swore that he
Would dance upon my grave;
That he would leap and laugh because
A livid corpse was I,
And that's the reason why I was
In no great haste to die.

And then - such is the quirk of fate,
One day with joy I read,
Despite his vitalizing hate
My enemy was dead.
Maybe the poison in his heart
Had helped to haste his doom:
He was not spared till I depart
To spit upon my tomb.

The other day I chanced to go
To where he lies alone.
'Tis easy to forgive a foe
When he is dead and gone. . . .
Poor devil! Now his day is done,
(Though bright it was and brave,)
Yet I am happy there is none
To dance upon my grave.

Robert William Service

Heart O' The North

And when I come to the dim trail-end,
I who have been Life's rover,
This is all I would ask, my friend,
Over and over and over:

A little space on a stony hill
With never another near me,
Sky o' the North that's vast and still,
With a single star to cheer me;

Star that gleams on a moss-grey stone
Graven by those who love me --
There would I lie alone, alone,
With a single pine above me;

Pine that the north wind whinneys through --
Oh, I have been Life's lover!
But there I'd lie and listen to
Eternity passing over.

Robert William Service

Henry

Mary and I were twenty-two
 When we were wed;
A well-matched pair, right smart to view
 The town's folk said.
For twenty years I have been true
 To nuptial bed.

But oh alas! The march of time,
 Life's wear and tear!
Now I am in my lusty prime
 With pep to spare,
While she looks ten more years than I'm,
 With greying hair.

'Twas on our trip dear friends among,
 To New Orleans,
A stranger's silly trip of tongue
 Kiboshed my dreams:
I heard her say: 'How very young
 His mother seems.'

Child-bearing gets a woman down,
 And six had she;
Yet now somehow I feel a clown
 When she's with me;
When cuties smile one cannot frown,
 You must agree.

How often I have heard it said:
 'For happy fate,
In age a girl ten years ahead
 Should choose her mate.'
Now twenty years to Mary wed
 I know too late.

Robert William Service

Her Letter

"I'm taking pen in hand this night, and hard it is for me;
My poor old fingers tremble so, my hand is stiff and slow,
And even with my glasses on I'm troubled sore to see. . . .
You'd little know your mother, boy; you'd little, little know.
You mind how brisk and bright I was, how straight and trim and smart;
'Tis weariful I am the now, and bent and frail and grey.
I'm waiting at the road's end, lad; and all that's in my heart,
Is just to see my boy again before I'm called away."

"Oh well I mind the sorry day you crossed the gurly sea;
'Twas like the heart was torn from me, a waeful wife was I.
You said that you'd be home again in two years, maybe three;
But nigh a score of years have gone, and still the years go by.
I know it's cruel hard for you, you've bairnies of your own;
I know the siller's hard to win, and folks have used you ill:
But oh, think of your mother, lad, that's waiting by her lone!
And even if you canna come -- just write and say you will."

"Aye, even though there's little hope, just promise that you'll try.
It's weary, weary waiting, lad; just say you'll come next year.
I'm thinking there will be no `next'; I'm thinking soon I'll lie
With all the ones I've laid away . . . but oh, the hope will cheer!
You know you're all that's left to me, and we are seas apart;
But if you'll only say you'll come, then will I hope and pray.
I'm waiting by the grave-side, lad; and all that's in my heart
Is just to see my boy again before I'm called away."

Robert William Service

Her Toys

I sat her in her baby chair,
 And set upon its tray
Her kewpie doll and teddy bear,
 But no, she would not play.
Although they looked so wistfully
 Her favour to implore,
She laughed at me with elfin glee
 And dashed them to the floor.

I brought her lamb and circus clown,
 But it was just the same:
With shrill of joy she threw them down
 As if it were a game.
Maybe it was, for she would look
 To see where they were lain
And act pathetic till I took
 Her toys to her again.

To-day there's just an empty chair,
 And 'mid a mist of pain
I'd give my life if she were there
 To toss her toys again.
A tiny ghost is all I see,
 Who laughs the while I cry,
And lifts her little hands with glee
 --Unto the sky.

Robert William Service

Hero Worship

Said he: "You saw the Master clear;
By Rushy Pond alone he sat,
Serene and silent as a seer,
in tweedy coat and seedy hat.
you tell me you did not intrude,
(Although his book was in your hand,)
Upon his melancholy mood . . .
I do not understand.

"You did not tell him: 'I have come
From o'er the sea to speak to you.'
You did not dare, your lips were dumb . . .
You thought a little zephyr blew
From Rushy Pond a touch of him
You'll cherish to your dying day,
Perhaps with tears your eyes were dim . . .
And then - you went away.

"And down the years you will proclaim:
'O call me dullard, dub me dunce!
But let this be my meed of fame:
I looked on Thomas Hardy once.
Aye, by a stile I stood a span
And with these eyes did plainly see
A little, shrinking, shabby man . . .
But Oh a god to me!'"

Said I: "'Tis true, I scarce dared look,
yet he would have been kind, I'm sure;
But though I clutched his precious book
I feared to beg his signature.
Ah yes, my friend, I merit mirth.
You're bold, you have the right to laugh,
And if Christ came again to earth
You'd cadge his autograph."

Robert William Service

Highland Hospitality

Unto his housemaid spoke the Laird:
"Tonight the Bishop is our guest;
The spare room must be warmed and aired:
To please him we will do our best.
A worthy haggis you must make,
And serve a bowl of barley bree;
We must be hearty for the sake
Of Highland Hospitality.

The feast was set, the candles lit,
The Bishop came with modest mien,
And (one surmised) was glad to sit
And sup in this ancestral scene.
A noble haggis graced the board;
The Laird proposed a toast or two,
And ever and anon he poured
His guest a glass of Mountain Dew.

Then to his maid the Laird gave tongue:
"My sonsie Jean, my friend is old.
Comparatively you are young,
And not so sensitive to cold.
Poor chiel! His blood austerely beats,
Though it be sped by barley bree . . .
Slip half an hour between the sheets,
Brave lass, and warm his bed a wee.

Said she: "I'll do the best I can
So that his couch may cosy be,
And as a human warming pan
Prove Highland Hospitality."
So hearing sounds of mild carouse,
As in the down she pillowed deep:
"In half an hour I will arouse,"
She vowed, then soundly went to sleep.

So when the morn was amber-orbed
The Bishop from a dream awoke,
And as his parritch he absorbed,

Unto his host he slyly spoke:
"Your haggis, Laird, was nobly bred,
And braw your brew of barley bree -
But oh your thought to warm the bed!
That's Highland Hospitality.

Robert William Service

His Boys

"I'm going, Billy, old fellow. Hist, lad! Don't make any noise.
There's Boches to beat all creation, the pitch of a bomb away.
I've fixed the note to your collar, you've got to get back to my Boys,
You've got to get back to warn 'em before it's the break of day."

The order came to go forward to a trench-line traced on the map;
I knew the brass-hats had blundered, I knew and I told 'em so;
I knew if I did as they ordered I would tumble into a trap,
And I tried to explain, but the answer came like a pistol: "Go."

Then I thought of the Boys I commanded -- I always called them "my Boys" --
The men of my own recruiting, the lads of my countryside;
Tested in many a battle, I knew their sorrows and joys,
And I loved them all like a father, with more than a father's pride.

To march my Boys to a shambles as soon as the dawn of day;
To see them helplessly slaughtered, if all that I guessed was true;
My Boys that trusted me blindly, I thought and I tried to pray,
And then I arose and I muttered: "It's either them or it's you."

I rose and I donned my rain-coat; I buckled my helmet tight.
I remember you watched me, Billy, as I took my cane in my hand;
I vaulted over the sandbags into the pitchy night,
Into the pitted valley that served us as No Man's Land.

I strode out over the hollow of hate and havoc and death,
From the heights the guns were angry, with a vengeful snarling of steel;
And once in a moment of stillness I heard hard panting breath,
And I turned . . . it was you, old rascal, following hard on my heel.

I fancy I cursed you, Billy; but not so much as I ought!
And so we went forward together, till we came to the valley rim,
And then a star-shell sputtered . . . it was even worse than I thought,
For the trench they told me to move in was packed with Boche to the brim.

They saw me too, and they got me; they peppered me till I fell;
And there I scribbled my message with my life-blood ebbing away;
"Now, Billy, you fat old duffer, you've got to get back like hell;
And get them to cancel that order before it's the dawn of day.

"Billy, old boy, I love you, I kiss your shiny black nose;
Now, home there. . . . Hurry, you devil, or I'll cut you to ribands. . . . See . . ."
Poor brute! he's off! and I'm dying. . . . I go as a soldier goes.
I'm happy. My Boys, God bless 'em! . . . It had to be them or me.

Robert William Service

Hobo

A father's pride I used to know,
A mother's love was mine;
For swinish husks I let them go,
And bedded with the swine.
Since then I've come on evil days
And most of life is hell;
But even swine have winsome ways
When once you know them well.

One time I guessed I'd cease to roam,
And greet the folks again;
And so I rode the rods to home
And through the window pane
I saw them weary, worn and grey . . .
I gazed from the garden gloom,
And like sweet, shiny saints were they
Int taht sweet, shiny room.

D'ye think I hollored out: "Hullo!"
The prodigal to play,
And eat the fatted calf? Ah no,
I cursed and ran away.
My eyes were blears of whisky tears
As to a pub I ran:
But once at least I beat the beast
And proved myself a man.

Oh, some day I am going back,
But I'll have gold galore;
I'll wear a suit of sobber black
And knock upon the door.
I'll tell them how I've made a stake,
We'll have the grandest time. . . .
"Say, Mister, give a guy a break:
For Chrissake, spare a dime."

Robert William Service

Home And Love

Just Home and Love! the words are small
Four little letters unto each;
And yet you will not find in all
The wide and gracious range of speech
Two more so tenderly complete:
When angels talk in Heaven above,
I'm sure they have no words more sweet
 Than Home and Love.

Just Home and Love! it's hard to guess
Which of the two were best to gain;
Home without Love is bitterness;
Love without Home is often pain.
No! each alone will seldom do;
Somehow they travel hand and glove:
If you win one you must have two,
 Both Home and Love.

And if you've both, well then I'm sure
You ought to sing the whole day long;
It doesn't matter if you're poor
With these to make divine your song.
And so I praisefully repeat,
When angels talk in Heaven above,
There are no words more simply sweet
 Than Home and Love.

Robert William Service

Horatio

His portrait hung upon the wall.

Oh how at us he used to stare.

Each Sunday when I made my call! --

And when one day it wasn't there,

Quite quick I seemed to understand

The light was green to hold her hand.

Her eyes were amorously lit;

I knew she wouldn't mind at all.

Yet what I did was sit and sit

Seeing that blankness on the wall . . .

Horatio had a gentle face,--

How would my mug look in his place?

That oblong of wall-paper wan!

And while she prattled prettily

I sensed the red light going on,

So I refused a cup of tea,

And took my gold-topped cane and hat--

My going seemed to leave her flat.

Horatio was a decent guy,

And when she ravished from her heart

A damsite better man than I,

She seemed to me,--well, just a tart:

Her lack of tact I can't explain.

His picture,--is it hung again?

Robert William Service

Hot Digitty Dog

Hot digitty dog! Now, ain't it queer,
I've been abroad for over a year;
Seen a helluva lot since then,
Killed, I reckon, a dozen men;
Six was doubtful, but six was sure,
Three in Normandy, three in the Ruhr.
Four I got with a hand grenade,
Two I shot in a midnight raid:
Oh, I ain't sorry, except perhaps
To think that my jerries wasn't japs.

Hot digitty dog! Now ain't it tough;
I oughta be handed hero stuff -
Bands and banquets, and flags and flowers,
Speeches, peaches, confetti showers;
"Welcome back to the old home town,
Colour Sargent Josephus Brown.
Fought like a tiger, one of our best,
Medals and ribands on his chest.
cheers for a warrior, fresh from the fight . . ."
Sure I'd 'a got 'em - - had I been white.

Hot digitty dog! It's jist too bad,
Gittin' home an' nobody gald;
Sneakin' into the Owl Drug Store
Nobody knowin' me any more;
Admirin' my uniform fine and fit -
Say, I've certainly changed a bit
From the lanky lad who used to croon
To a battered banjo in Shay's Saloon;
From the no-good nigger who runned away
After stickin' his knife into ol' man Shay.

They's a lynched me, for he was white,
But he raped my sister one Sunday night;
So I did what a proper man should do,
And I sunk his body deep in the slough.
Oh, he taunted me to my dark disgrace,
Called me a nigger, spat in my face;

So I buried my jack-knife in his heart,
Laughin' to see the hot blood start;
Laughin' still, though it's long ago,
And nobody's ever a-gonna know.

Nobody's ever a-gonna tell
How Ol' Man Shay went straight to hell;
nobody's gonna make me confess -
And what is a killin' more or less.
My skin may be black, but by Christ! I fight;
I've slain a dozen, and each was white,
And none of 'em ever did me no harm,
And my conscience is clear - I've no alarm;
So I'll go where I sank Ol' Man Shay in the bog,
And spit in the water . . . Hot digitty dog!

Robert William Service

Humility

My virtues in Carara stone
Cut carefully you all my scan;
Beneath I lie, a fetid bone,
The marble worth more than the man.

If on my pure tomb they should grave
My vices,--how the folks would grin!
And say with sympathetic wave:
"Like us he was a man of sin."

And somehow he consoled thereby,
Knowing they may, though Hades bent,
When finally they come to die,
Enjoy a snow-white monument.

And maybe it is just as well
When we from life and lust are riven,
That though our souls should sink to hell
Our tombs point: Destination Heaven!

Robert William Service

I Have Some Friends

I have some friends, some worthy friends,
And worthy friends are rare:
These carpet slippers on my feet,
That padded leather chair;
This old and shabby dressing-gown,
So well the worse of wear.

I have some friends, some honest friends,
And honest friends are few;
My pipe of briar, my open fire,
A book that's not too new;
My bed so warm, the nights of storm
I love to listen to.

I have some friends, some good, good friends,
Who faithful are to me:
My wrestling partner when I rise,
The big and burly sea;
My little boat that's riding there
So saucy and so free.

I have some friends, some golden friends,
Whose worth will not decline:
A tawny Irish terrier, a purple shading pine,
A little red-roofed cottage that
So proudly I call mine.

All other friends may come and go,
All other friendships fail;
But these, the friends I've worked to win,
Oh, they will never stale;
And comfort me till Time shall write
The finish to my tale.

Robert William Service

I Shall Not Burn

I have done with love and lust,
I reckon not for gold or fame;
I await familiar dust
These frail fingers to reclaim:
Not for me the tiger flame.

Not for me the furnace glow,
Rage of fire and ashen doom;
To sweet earth my bones bestow
Where above a lowly tomb
January roses bloom.

Fools and fools and fools are you
Who your dears to fires confide;
Give to Mother Earth her due:
Flesh may waste but bone will bide,--
Let loved ones lie side by side.

Let God's Acre ever dream;
Shed your tears and blossoms bring;
On age-burnished bone will gleam
Crucifix and wedding ring:
Graves are for sweet comforting.

Curst be those who my remains
Hurl to horror of the flames!

Robert William Service

I Will Not Fight

I will not fight: though proud of pith
I hold no one worth striving with;
And should resentment burn my breast
I deem that silence serves me best:
So having not a word to say,
Contemptuous I turn away.

I will not fret: my rest of life
Free I will keep from hate and strife;
Let lust and sin and anger sleep,
I will not delve the subsoil deep,
But be content with inch of earth,
Where daisies have their birth.

I will not grieve: Till day be done
I will be tranquil in the sun,
With garden glow and quiet nook,
And song of bird and spell of book . . .
God bless you all! I will not fight,
But love and dream until--Goodnight!

Robert William Service

If You Had A Friend

If you had a friend strong, simple, true,
Who knew your faults and who understood;
Who believed in the very best of you,
And who cared for you as a father would;
Who would stick by you to the very end,
Who would smile however the world might frown:
I'm sure you would try to please your friend,
You never would think to throw him down.

And supposing your friend was high and great,
And he lived in a palace rich and tall,
And sat like a King in shining state,
And his praise was loud on the lips of all;
Well then, when he turned to you alone,
And he singled you out from all the crowd,
And he called you up to his golden throne,
Oh, wouldn't you just be jolly proud?

If you had a friend like this, I say,
So sweet and tender, so strong and true,
You'd try to please him in every way,
You'd live at your bravest -- now, wouldn't you?
His worth would shine in the words you penned;
You'd shout his praises . . . yet now it's odd!
You tell me you haven't got such a friend;
You haven't? I wonder . . . What of God?

Robert William Service

Ignorance

Oh happy he who cannot see
 With scientific eyes;
Who does not know how flowers grow,
 And is not planet wise;
Content to find with simple mind
 Joys as they are:
To whom a rose is just a rose,
 A star--a star.

It is not good, I deem, to brood
 On things beyond our ken;
A rustic I would live and die,
 Aloof from learned men;
And laugh and sing with zest of Spring
 In life's exultant scene,--
For vain my be philosophy,
 And what does meaning mean?

I'm talking rot,--I'm really not
 As dumb as I pretend;
But happiness, I dimly guess,
 Is what counts in the end.
To educate is to dilate
 The nerves of pain:
So let us give up books and live
 Like hinds again.

The best of wisdom surely is
 To be not overwise;
For may not thought be evil fraught,
 And truth less kind than lies?
So let me praise the golden days
 I played a gay guitar,
And deemed a rose was just a rose,
 A star--a star.

Robert William Service

I'M Scared Of It All

I'm scared of it all, God's truth! so I am;
It's too big and brutal for me.
My nerve's on the raw and I don't give a damn
For all the "hoorah" that I see.
I'm pinned between subway and overhead train,
Where automobillicies swoop down:
Oh, I want to go back to the timber again --
I'm scared of the terrible town.

I want to go back to my lean, ashen plains;
My rivers that flash into foam;
My ultimate valleys where solitude reigns;
My trail from Fort Churchill to Nome.
My forests packed full of mysterious gloom,
My ice-fields agrind and aglare:
The city is deadfalled with danger and doom --
I know that I'm safer up there.

I watch the wan faces that flash in the street;
All kinds and all classes I see.
Yet never a one in the million I meet,
Has the smile of a comrade for me.
Just jaded and panting like dogs in a pack;
Just tensed and intent on the goal:
O God! but I'm lonesome -- I wish I was back,
Up there in the land of the Pole.

I wish I was back on the Hunger Plateaus,
And seeking the lost caribou;
I wish I was up where the Coppermine flows
To the kick of my little canoe.
I'd like to be far on some weariful shore,
In the Land of the Blizzard and Bear;
Oh, I wish I was snug in the Arctic once more,
For I know I am safer up there!

I prowl in the canyons of dismal unrest;
I cringe -- I'm so weak and so small.
I can't get my bearings, I'm crushed and oppressed

With the haste and the waste of it all.
The slaves and the madman, the lust and the sweat,
The fear in the faces I see;
The getting, the spending, the fever, the fret --
It's too bleeding cruel for me.

I feel it's all wrong, but I can't tell you why --
The palace, the hovel next door;
The insolent towers that sprawl to the sky,
The crush and the rush and the roar.
I'm trapped like a fox and I fear for my pelt;
I cower in the crash and the glare;
Oh, I want to be back in the avalanche belt,
For I know that it's safer up there!

I'm scared of it all: Oh, afar I can hear
The voice of my solitudes call!
We're nothing but brute with a little veneer,
And nature is best after all.
There's tumult and terror abroad in the street;
There's menace and doom in the air;
I've got to get back to my thousand-mile beat;
The trail where the cougar and silver-tip meet;
The snows and the camp-fire, with wolves at my feet;
Good-bye, for it's safer up there.

To be forming good habits up there;
To be starving on rabbits up there;
In your hunger and woe,
Though it's sixty below,
Oh, I know that it's safer up there!

Robert William Service

Imagination

A gaunt and hoary slab of stone
I found in desert place,
And wondered why it lay alone
In that abandoned place.
Said I: 'Maybe a Palace stood
Where now the lizards crawl,
With courts of musky quietude
And turrets tall.

Maybe where low the vultures wing
'Mid mosque and minaret,
The proud pavilion of a King
Was luminously set.
'Mid fairy fountains, alcoves dim,
Upon a garnet throne
He ruled,--and now all trace of him
Is just this stone.

Ah well, I've done with wandering,
But from a blousy bar
I see with drunk imagining
A Palace like a star.
I build it up from one grey stone
With gardens hanging high,
And dream . . . Long, long ere Babylon
It's King was I.

Robert William Service

Immortality

Full well I trow that when I die
 Down drops the curtain;
Another show is all my eye
 And Betty Martin.
I know the score, and with a smile
 Of rueful rating,
I reckon I am not worth while
 Perpetuating.

I hope that God,--if God there be
 Of love and glory,
Will let me off Eternity,
 And end my story.
Will count me just a worn-out bit
 Of human matter,
Who's done his job or bungled it,
 --More like the latter.

I did not beg for mortal breath,
 Plus hell or Heaven;
So let the last pay-off be death,
 And call it even.
To Nature I will pay my debt
 With stoic laughter:
But spare me, God, your awful threat
 Of Life Here-after!

Robert William Service

In Praise of Alcohol

In Praise of Alcohol

Of vintage wine I am a lover;
To drink deep would be my delight;
If 'twere not for the bleak hangover
I'd get me loaded every night;
I'd whoop it up with song and laughter -
If 'twere not for the morning after.
For though to soberness I'm given
It is a thought I've often thunk:
The nearest that is Earth to Heaven
Is to get sublimely drunk;
Is to achieve divine elation
By means of generous libation.
Alas, the wine-cups claim their payment
And as the price if often pain,
if we could sense what morning grey meant
We never would get soused again;
Rather than buy a hob-nailed liver
I'm sure that we'd abstain for ever.
Yet how I love the glow of liquor,
As joyfully I drink it up!
hoping that unto life's last flicker
With praise I'll raise the ruby cup;
And let me like a jolly monk
Proceed to get sublimely drunk.

Robert William Service

Include Me Out

I grabbed the new Who's Who to see
My name - but it was not.
Said I: "The form they posted me
I filled and sent - so what?"

I searched the essies," dour with doubt . . .
Darn! It was plain as day
The scurvy knaves had left me out . . .
Oh was I mad? I'll say.

Then all at once I sensed the clue;
'Twas simple, you'll allow . . .
The book I held was Who WAS Who -
Oh was I glad - and how!

Robert William Service

Indifference

When I am dead I will not care
 Forever more,
If sky be radiantly fair
 Or tempest roar.
If my life-hoard in sin be spent,
 My wife re-wed,--
I'll be so damned indifferent
 When I am dead.

When I meet up with dusty doom
 What if I rest
In common ditch or marble tomb,
 If curst or blest?
Shall my seed be to wealth or fame,
 Or gallows led,--
To me it will be all the same
 When I am dead.

So say for me no pious prayer,
 Be no tear shed;
In nothingness I cannot care,
 I'll be so dead.
I shall not reck of war or peace
 When I go hence:
Lord, let me win sublime release,--
 INDIFFERENCE!

Robert William Service

Infidelity

Three Triangles

TRIANGLE ONE

My husband put some poison in my beer,
And fondly hoped that I would drink it up.
He would get rid of me - no bloody fear,
For when his back was turned I changed the cup.
He took it all, and if he did not die,
Its just because he's heartier than I.

And now I watch and watch him night and day
dreading that he will try it on again.
I'm getting like a skeleton they say,
And every time I feel the slightest pain
I think: he's got me this time. . . . Oh the beast!
He might have let me starve to death, at least.

But all he thinks of is that shell-pink nurse.
I know as well as well that they're in loe.
I'm sure they kiss, and maybe do things worse,
Although she looks as gentle as a dove.
I see their eyes with passion all aglow:
I know they only wait for me to go.

Ah well, I'll go (I have to, anyway),

But they will pay the price of lust and sin.
I've sent a letter to the police to say:
"If I should die its them have dome me in."
And now a lot of vernal I'll take,
And go to sleep, and never, never wake.

But won't I laugh! Aye, even when I'm dead,
To think of them both hanging by the head.

TRIANGLE TWO

My wife's a fancy bit of stuff it's true;

But that's no reason she should do me dirt.
Of course I know a girl is tempted to,
With mountain men a-fussin' round her skirt.
A 'andome women's bound to 'ave a 'eart,
But that's no reason she should be a tart.

I didn't oughter give me 'ome address
To sergeant when 'e last went on 'is leave;
And now the 'ole shebang's a bloody mess;
I didn't think the missis would deceive.
And 'ere was I, a-riskin' of me life,
And thee was 'e, a-sleepin' wiv me wife.

Go blimy, but this thing 'as got to stop.
Well, next time when we makes a big attack,
As soon as we gets well across the top,
I'll plug 'em (accidental) in the back.
'E'll cop a blinkin' packet in 'is spine,
And that'll be the end of 'im, the swine.

It's easy in the muck-up of a fight;
And all me mates'll think it was the foe.
And 'oo can say it doesn't serve 'im right?
And I'll go 'ome and none will ever know,
My missis didn't oughter do that sort o' thing,
Seein' as 'ow she wears my weddin' ring.

Well, we'll be just as 'appy as before,
When otherwise she might a' bin a 'ore.

TRIANGLE THREE

It's fun to see Joe fuss around that kid.
I know 'e loves 'er more than all the rest,
Because she's by a lot the prettiest.
'E wouldn't lose 'er for a 'undred quid.
I love 'er too, because she isn't his'n;
But Jim, his brother's, wot they've put in prision.

It's 'ard to 'ave a 'usband wot you 'ate;
So soft that if 'e knowed you'd 'ad a tup,
'E wouldn't 'ave the guts to beat you up.

Now Jim - 'e's wot I call a proper mate.
I daren't try no monkey tricks wiv 'im.
'E'd flay be 'ide off (quite right, too) would Jim.

I won't let on to Jim when 'e comes out;
But Joe - each time I see 'im kissin' Nell,
I 'ave to leave the room and laughlike 'ell.
"E'll 'ave the benefit (damn little) of the doubt.
So let 'im kiss our Nellie fit to smother;
There ain't no proof 'er father is 'is brother.

Well, anyway I've no remorse. You see,
I've kept my frailty in the family.

Robert William Service

Infirmities

Because my teeth are feebly few
I cannot bolt my grub like you,
But have to chew and chew and chew

As you can see;

Yet every mouthful seems so good
I would not haste it if I could,
And so I salivate my food

With ecstasy.

Because my purse is poor in pence
I spend my dough with common-sense,
And live without the least pretence

In simple state;

The things I can't afford to buy
Might speed the day I have to die,
So pleased with poverty am I

And bless my fate.

Because my heart is growing tired,
No more by foolish passion fired,
Nor by ambitious hope inspired,

As in my youth,

I am content to sit and rest,
And prove the last of life's the best,
And ponder with a cheerful zest

Some saintly truth.

Because I cannot do the things
I used to, comfort round me clings,
And from the moil of market brings

Me rich release;

So welcome age with tranquil mind;
Even infirmities are kind,
And in our frailing we may find

Life's crown of peace.

Robert William Service

Innocence

The height of wisdom seems to me
That of a child;
So let my ageing vision be
Serene and mild.
The depth of folly, I aver,
Is to fish deep
In that dark pool of science where
Truth-demons sleep.

Let me not be a bearded sage
Seeing too clear;
In issues of the atom age
Man-doom I fear.
So long as living's outward show
To me is fair,
What lies behind I do not know,
And do not care.

Of woeful fears of future ill
That earth-folk haunt,
Let me, as radiant meadow rill,
Be ignorant.
Aye, though a sorry dunce I be
In learning's school,
Lord, marvellously make of me
Your Happy Fool!

Robert William Service

Insomnia

Heigh ho! to sleep I vainly try;
Since twelve I haven't closed an eye,
And now it's three, and as I lie,
From Notre Dame to St. Denis
The bells of Paris chime to me;
"You're young," they say, "and strong and free."

I do not turn with sighs and groans
To ease my limbs, to rest my bones,
As if my bed were stuffed with stones,
No peevish murmur tips my tongue --
Ah no! for every sound upflung
Says: "Lad, you're free and strong and young."

And so beneath the sheet's caress
My body purrs with happiness;
Joy bubbles in my veins. . . . Ah yes,
My very blood that leaps along
Is chiming in a joyous song,
Because I'm young and free and strong.

Maybe it is the springtide. I am so happy I am afraid.
The sense of living fills me with exultation. I want to sing,
to dance; I am dithyrambic with delight.

I think the moon must be to blame:
It fills the room with fairy flame;
It paints the wall, it seems to pour
A dappled flood upon the floor.
I rise and through the window stare . . .
Ye gods! how marvelously fair!
From Montrouge to the Martyr's Hill,
A silver city rapt and still;
Dim, drowsy deeps of opal haze,
And spire and dome in diamond blaze;
The little lispings leaves of spring
Like sequins softly glimmering;
Each roof a plaque of argent sheen,
A gauzy gulf the space between;

Each chimney-top a thing of grace,
Where merry moonbeams prank and chase;
And all that sordid was and mean,
Just Beauty, deathless and serene.

O magic city of a dream!
From glory unto glory gleam;
And I will gaze and pity those
Who on their pillows drowse and doze . . .
And as I've nothing else to do,
Of tea I'll make a rousing brew,
And coax my pipes until they croon,
And chant a ditty to the moon.

There! my tea is black and strong. Inspiration comes with
every sip. Now for the moon.

The moon peeped out behind the hill
As yellow as an apricot;
Then up and up it climbed until
Into the sky it fairly got;
The sky was vast and violet;
The poor moon seemed to faint in fright,
And pale it grew and paler yet,
Like fine old silver, rinsed and bright.
And yet it climbed so bravely on
Until it mounted heaven-high;
Then earthward it serenely shone,
A silver sovereign of the sky,
A bland sultana of the night,
Surveying realms of lily light.

Robert William Service

Inspiration

How often have I started out
With no thought in my noodle,
And wandered here and there about,
Where fancy bade me toddle;
Till feeling faunlike in my glee
I've voiced some gay distiches,
Returning joyfully to tea,
A poem in my britches.

A-squatting on a thymy slope
With vast of sky about me,
I've scribbled on an envelope
The rhymes the hills would shout me;
The couplets that the trees would call,
The lays the breezes proffered . . .
Oh no, I didn't think at all -
I took what Nature offered.

For that's the way you ought to write -
Without a trace of trouble;
Be super-charged with high delight
And let the words out-bubble;
Be voice of vale and wood and stream
Without design or proem:
Then rouse from out a golden dream
To find you've made a poem.

So I'll go forth with mind a blank,
And sea and sky will spell me;
And lolling on a thymy bank
I'll take down what they tell me;
As Mother Nature speaks to me
Her words I'll gaily docket,
So I'll come singing home to tea
A poem in my pocket.

Robert William Service

Intolerance

I have no brief for gambling, nay
The notion I express
That money earned 's the only way
To pay for happiness.
With cards and dice I do not hold;
By betting I've been bit:
Conclusion: to get honest gold
You've got to sweat for it.

Though there be evil in strong drink
It's brought me heaps of fun;
And now, with some reserve, I think
My toping days are done.
Though at teetotal cranks I laugh,
Yet being sound and hale,
I find the best of drinks to quaff
Is good old Adam's ale.

I do not like your moralist,
Who with a righteous grin
Informs you o'er a pounding fist:
"Unchastity is sin."
I don't believe it, but I grant,
By every human test,
From parson, pimp and maiden aunt,
Morality is best.

Yet what a bore our lives would be
If we lived as we should;
It's such a blessing to be free,
And not be over-good.
I value virtues great and small,
As I in life advance:
But O the greatest sin of all
I count--INTOLERANCE.

Robert William Service

It Is Later Than You Think

Lone amid the cafe's cheer,
Sad of heart am I to-night;
Dolefully I drink my beer,
But no single line I write.
There's the wretched rent to pay,
Yet I glower at pen and ink:
Oh, inspire me, Muse, I pray,
It is later than you think!

Hello! there's a pregnant phrase.
Bravo! let me write it down;
Hold it with a hopeful gaze,
Gauge it with a fretful frown;
Tune it to my lyric lyre . . .
Ah! upon starvation's brink,
How the words are dark and dire:
It is later than you think.

Weigh them well. . . . Behold yon band,
Students drinking by the door,
Madly merry, bock in hand,
Saucers stacked to mark their score.
Get you gone, you jolly scamps;
Let your parting glasses clink;
Seek your long neglected lamps:
It is later than you think.

Look again: yon dainty blonde,
All allure and golden grace,
Oh so willing to respond
Should you turn a smiling face.
Play your part, poor pretty doll;
Feast and frolic, pose and prink;
There's the Morgue to end it all,
And it's later than you think.

Yon's a playwright -- mark his face,
Puffed and purple, tense and tired;
Pasha-like he holds his place,

Hated, envied and admired.
How you gobble life, my friend;
Wine, and woman soft and pink!
Well, each tether has its end:
Sir, it's later than you think.

See yon living scarecrow pass
With a wild and wolfish stare
At each empty absinthe glass,
As if he saw Heaven there.
Poor damned wretch, to end your pain
There is still the Greater Drink.
Yonder waits the sanguine Seine . . .
It is later than you think.

Lastly, you who read; aye, you
Who this very line may scan:
Think of all you planned to do . . .
Have you done the best you can?
See! the tavern lights are low;
Black's the night, and how you shrink!
God! and is it time to go?
Ah! the clock is always slow;
It is later than you think;
Sadly later than you think;
Far, far later than you think.

Robert William Service

Jalopy Joy

Past ash cans and alley cats,
Fetid. overflowing gutters,
Leprous lines of rancid flats
Where the frowsy linen flutters;
With a rattle and a jar,
hark! I sing a happy ditty,
As I speed my Master far
From the poison of the City.

Speed him to the sportive sea,
Watch him walloping the briny,
Light his pipe and brew his tea
In a little wood that's piny;
Haven him to peace of mind.
Drowsy dreams in pleasant places,
Where the woman's eyes are kind,
And the men have ruddy faces.

Just a jalopyy am I,
But he's always been my lover,
So each Sunday morn I try
Youthful joy to re-discover.
For he loves the wild and free,
And though he would never know it,
Nature thrills him with the glee
And the rapture of the poet.

He's a little invoice clerk,
I'm a worn and ancient flivver;
I have an asthmatic spark,
He an alcoholic liver;
Yet with clatter, clang and creak
We are lyrical for one day;
Then another loathly week,
Living for another Sunday.

Robert William Service

Jane

My daughter Jane makes dresses
For beautiful Princesses;
But though she's plain is Jane,
Of needlework she's vain,
And makes such pretty things
For relatives of Kings.

She reads the picture papers
Where Royalties cut capers,
And often says to me:
'How wealthy they must be,
That nearly every day
A new robe they can pay.'

Says I: 'If your Princesses
Could fabric pretty dresses,
Though from a throne they stem
I would think more of them.
Peeress and shopgirl are
To my mind on a par.'

Says Jane: 'But for their backing
I might be sewing sacking.
Instead, I work with joy
In exquisite employ,
Embroidering rich dresses
For elegant Princesses . . .
Damn social upsetters
Who criticise their betters!'

Robert William Service

Jean Desprez

Oh ye whose hearts are resonant, and ring to War's romance,
Hear ye the story of a boy, a peasant boy of France;
A lad uncouth and warped with toil, yet who, when trial came,
Could feel within his soul upleap and soar the sacred flame;
Could stand upright, and scorn and smite, as only heroes may:
Oh, harken! Let me try to tell the tale of Jean Desprez.

With fire and sword the Teuton horde was ravaging the land,
And there was darkness and despair, grim death on every hand;
Red fields of slaughter sloping down to ruin's black abyss;
The wolves of war ran evil-fanged, and little did they miss.
And on they came with fear and flame, to burn and loot and slay,
Until they reached the red-roofed croft, the home of Jean Desprez.

"Rout out the village, one and all!" the Uhlan Captain said.
"Behold! Some hand has fired a shot. My trumpeter is dead.
Now shall they Prussian vengeance know; now shall they rue the day,
For by this sacred German slain, ten of these dogs shall pay."
They drove the cowering peasants forth, women and babes and men,
And from the last, with many a jeer, the Captain chose he ten;
Ten simple peasants, bowed with toil; they stood, they knew not why,
Against the grey wall of the church, hearing their children cry;
Hearing their wives and mothers wail, with faces dazed they stood.
A moment only. . . . Ready! Fire! They weltered in their blood.

But there was one who gazed unseen, who heard the frenzied cries,
Who saw these men in sabots fall before their children's eyes;
A Zouave wounded in a ditch, and knowing death was nigh,
He laughed with joy: "Ah! here is where I settle ere I die."
He clutched his rifle once again, and long he aimed and well. . . .
A shot! Beside his victims ten the Uhlan Captain fell.

They dragged the wounded Zouave out; their rage was like a flame.
With bayonets they pinned him down, until their Major came.
A blonde, full-blooded man he was, and arrogant of eye;
He stared to see with shattered skull his favourite Captain lie.
"Nay, do not finish him so quick, this foreign swine," he cried;
"Go nail him to the big church door: he shall be crucified."

With bayonets through hands and feet they nailed the Zouave there,
And there was anguish in his eyes, and horror in his stare;
"Water! A single drop!" he moaned; but how they jeered at him,
And mocked him with an empty cup, and saw his sight grow dim;
And as in agony of death with blood his lips were wet,
The Prussian Major gaily laughed, and lit a cigarette.

But mid the white-faced villagers who cowered in horror by,
Was one who saw the woeful sight, who heard the woeful cry:
"Water! One little drop, I beg! For love of Christ who died. . . ."
It was the little Jean Desprez who turned and stole aside;
It was the little bare-foot boy who came with cup abrim
And walked up to the dying man, and gave the drink to him.

A roar of rage! They seize the boy; they tear him fast away.
The Prussian Major swings around; no longer is he gay.
His teeth are wolfishly agleam; his face all dark with spite:
"Go, shoot the brat," he snarls, "that dare defy our Prussian might.
Yet stay! I have another thought. I'll kindly be, and spare;
Quick! give the lad a rifle charged, and set him squarely there,
And bid him shoot, and shoot to kill. Haste! Make him understand
The dying dog he fain would save shall perish by his hand.
And all his kindred they shall see, and all shall curse his name,
Who bought his life at such a cost, the price of death and shame."

They brought the boy, wild-eyed with fear; they made him understand;
They stood him by the dying man, a rifle in his hand.
"Make haste!" said they; "the time is short, and you must kill or die."
The Major puffed his cigarette, amusement in his eye.
And then the dying Zouave heard, and raised his weary head:
"Shoot, son, 'twill be the best for both; shoot swift and straight," he said.
"Fire first and last, and do not flinch; for lost to hope am I;
And I will murmur: Vive La France! and bless you ere I die."

Half-blind with blows the boy stood there; he seemed to swoon and sway;
Then in that moment woke the soul of little Jean Desprez.
He saw the woods go sheening down; the larks were singing clear;
And oh! the scents and sounds of spring, how sweet they were! how dear!
He felt the scent of new-mown hay, a soft breeze fanned his brow;
O God! the paths of peace and toil! How precious were they now!

The summer days and summer ways, how bright with hope and bliss!

The autumn such a dream of gold . . . and all must end in this:
This shining rifle in his hand, that shambles all around;
The Zouave there with dying glare; the blood upon the ground;
The brutal faces round him ringed, the evil eyes aflame;
That Prussian bully standing by, as if he watched a game.
"Make haste and shoot," the Major sneered; "a minute more I give;
A minute more to kill your friend, if you yourself would live."

They only saw a bare-foot boy, with blanched and twitching face;
They did not see within his eyes the glory of his race;
The glory of a million men who for fair France have died,
The splendour of self-sacrifice that will not be denied.
Yet . . . he was but a peasant lad, and oh! but life was sweet. . . .
"Your minute's nearly gone, my lad," he heard a voice repeat.
"Shoot! Shoot!" the dying Zouave moaned; "Shoot! Shoot!" the soldiers said.
Then Jean Desprez reached out and shot . . . the Prussian Major dead!

Robert William Service

Jim

Never knew Jim, did you? Our boy Jim?
Bless you, there was the likely lad;
Supple and straight and long of limb,
Clean as a whistle, and just as glad.
Always laughing, wasn't he, dad?
Joy, pure joy to the heart of him,
And, oh, but the soothing ways he had,
 Jim, our Jim!

But I see him best as a tiny tot,
A bonny babe, though it's me that speaks;
Laughing there in his little cot,
With his sunny hair and his apple cheeks.
And my! but the blue, blue eyes he'd got,
And just where his wee mouth dimpled dim
Such a fairy mark like a beauty spot --
 That was Jim.

Oh, the war, the war! How my eyes were wet!
But he says: "Don't be sorrowing, mother dear;
You never knew me to fail you yet,
And I'll be back in a year, a year."
'Twas at Mons he fell, in the first attack;
For so they said, and their eyes were dim;
But I laughed in their faces: "He'll come back,
 Will my Jim."

Now, we'd been wedded for twenty year,
And Jim was the only one we'd had;
So when I whispered in father's ear,
He wouldn't believe me -- would you, dad?
There! I must hurry . . . hear him cry?
My new little baby. . . . See! that's him.
What are we going to call him? Why,
 Jim, just Jim.

Jim! For look at him laughing there
In the same old way in his tiny cot,
With his rosy cheeks and his sunny hair,

Jobson Of The Star

Within a pub that's off the Strand and handy to the bar,
With pipe in mouth and mug in hand sat Jobson of the Star.
"Come, sit ye down, ye wond'ring wight, and have a yarn," says he.
"I can't," says I, "because to-night I'm off to Tripoli;
To Tripoli and Trebizond and Timbuctoo mayhap,
Or any magic name beyond I find upon the map.
I go errant trail to try, to clutch the skirts of Chance,
To make once more before I die the gesture of Romance."
The Jobson yawned above his jug, and rumbled: "Is that so?
Well, anyway, sit down, you mug, and have a drink before you go."

Now Jobson is a chum of mine, and in a dusty den,
Within the street that's known as Fleet, he wields a wicked pen.
And every night it's his delight, above the fleeting show,
To castigate the living Great, and keep the lowly low.
And all there is to know he knows, for unto him is spurred
The knowledge of the knowledge of the Thing That Has Occurred.
And all that is to hear he hears, for to his ear is whirled
The echo of the echo of the Sound That Shocks The World.
Let Revolutions rage and rend, and Kingdoms rise and fall,
There Jobson sits and smokes and spits, and writes about it all.

And so we jawed a little while on matters small and great;
He told me his cynic smile of graves affairs of state.
Of princes, peers and presidents, and folks beyond my ken,
He spoke as you and I might speak of ordinary men.
For Jobson is a scribe of worth, and has respect for none,
And all the mighty ones of earth are targets for his fun.
So when I said good-bye, says he, with his satyric leer:
"Too bad to go, when life is so damned interesting here.
The Government rides for a fall, and things are getting hot.
You'd better stick around, old pal; you'll miss an awful lot."

Yet still I went and wandered far, by secret ways and wide.
Adventure was the shining star I took to be my guide.
For fifty moons I followed on, and every moon was sweet,
And lit as if for me alone the trail before my feet.
From cities desolate with doom my moons swam up and set,
On tower and temple, tent and tomb, on mosque and minaret.

To heights that hailed the dawn I scaled, by cliff and chasm sheer;
To far Cathy I found my way, and fabulous Kashmir.
From camel-back I traced the track that bars the barren bled,
And leads to hell-and-blazes, and I followed where it led.
Like emeralds in sapphire set, and ripe for human rape,
I passed with passionate regret the Islands of Escape.
With death I clinched a time or two, and gave the brute a fall.
Hunger and cold and thirst I knew, yet...how I loved it all!
Then suddenly I seemed to tire of trekking up and town,
And longed for some domestic fire, and sailed for London Town.

And in a pub that's off the Strand, and handy to the bar,
With pipe in mouth and mug in hand sat Jobson of the Star.
"Hullo!" says he, "come, take a pew, and tell me where you've been.
It seems to me that lately you have vanished from the scene."
"I've been," says I, "to Kordovan and Kong and Calabar,
To Sarawak and Samarkand, to Ghat and Bolivar;
To Caracas and Guayaquil, to Lhasa and Pekin,
To Brahmapurta and Brazil, to Bagdad and Benin.
I've sailed the Black Sea and the White, The Yellow and the Red,
The Sula and the Celebes, the Bering and the Dead.
I've climbed on Chimborazo, and I've wandered in Peru;
I've camped on Kinchinjunga, and I've crossed the Great Karoo.
I've drifted on the Hoang-ho, the Nile and Amazon;
I've swam the Tiber and the Po.." thus I was going on,
When Jobson yawned above his beer, and rumbled: "Is that so?...
It's been so damned exciting here, too bad you had to go.
We've had the devil of a slump; the market's gone to pot;
You should have stuck around, you chump, you've missed an awful lot."

.....

In haggard lands where ages brood, on plains burnt out and dim,
I broke the bread of brotherhood with ruthless men and grim.
By ways untrod I walked with God, by parched and bitter path;
In deserts dim I talked with Him, and learned to know His Wrath.
But in a pub that's off the Strand, sits Jobson every night,
And tells me what a fool I am, and maybe he is right.
For Jobson is a man of stamp, and proud of him am I;
And I am just a bloody tramp, and will be till I die.

Joey

I thought I would go daft when Joey died.
He was my first, and wise beyond his years.
For nigh a hundred nights I cried and cried,
Until my weary eyes burned up my tears.
Willie and Rosie tried to comfort me:
A woeful, weeping family were we.

I was a widow with no friends at all,
Ironing men's shirts to buy my kiddies grub;
And then one day a lawyer came to call,
Me with my arms deep in the washing-tub.
The gentleman who ran poor Joey down
Was willing to give us a thousand poun'.

What a godsend! It meant goodbye to care,
The fear of being dumped out on the street.
Rosie and Willie could have wool to wear,
And more than bread and margerine to eat . . .
To Joey's broken little legs we owe
Our rescue from a fate of want and woe.

How happily he hurried home to me,
Bringing a new-baked, crisp-brown loaf of bread.
The headlights of the car he did not see,
And when help came they thought that he was dead.
He stared with wonder from a face so wan . . .
A long, last look and he was gone,--was gone.

We've comfort now, and yet it hurts to know
We owe our joy to little, laughing Joe.

Robert William Service

Julie Claire

Oh Julie Claire was very fair,
Yet generous as well,
And many a lad of metal had
A saucy tale to tell
Of sultry squeeze beneath the trees
Or hugging in the hay . . .
Of love her share had Julie Claire
When life was lush and gay.

And then the village wealth to pillage
Came the Teuton horde;
The haughty Huns with mighty guns
And clattering of sword.
And Julie Claire had honey hair
With eyes of soft azure,
So she became the favoured flame
Of the Kommandatur.

But when at last the plague was past,
The bloody war well won,
We clipped the locks of every dox
Who dallied with the Hun.
Each wench with scorn was duly shorn;
Our Marie the shears would weld,
And Julie's head with ringlets shed
Was like a turnip peeled.

But of these days of wanton ways
No more the village talks,
For Julie Claire has wed the Maire
Who clipped her golden locks . . .
Nay, do not try to me I
Must suffer for my sins,
For all agree the Marie must be
The father of her twins.

Robert William Service

Julot The Apache

You've heard of Julot the apache, and Gigolette, his mome. . . .
Montmartre was their hunting-ground, but Belville was their home.
A little chap just like a boy, with smudgy black mustache, --
Yet there was nothing juvenile in Julot the apache.
From head to heel as tough as steel, as nimble as a cat,
With every trick of twist and kick, a master of savate.
And Gigolette was tall and fair, as stupid as a cow,
With three combs in the greasy hair she banged upon her brow.
You'd see her on the Place Pigalle on any afternoon,
A primitive and strapping wench as brazen as the moon.
And yet there is a tale that's told of Clichy after dark,
And two gendarmes who swung their arms with Julot for a mark.
And oh, but they'd have got him too; they banged and blazed away,
When like a flash a woman leapt between them and their prey.
She took the medicine meant for him; she came down with a crash . . .
"Quick now, and make your get-away, O Julot the apache!" . . .
But no! He turned, ran swiftly back, his arms around her met;
They nabbed him sobbing like a kid, and kissing Gigolette.

Now I'm a reckless painter chap who loves a jamboree,
And one night in Cyrano's bar I got upon a spree;
And there were trollops all about, and crooks of every kind,
But though the place was reeling round I didn't seem to mind.
Till down I sank, and all was blank when in the bleary dawn
I woke up in my studio to find -- my money gone;
Three hundred francs I'd scraped and squeezed to pay my quarter's rent.
"Some one has pinched my wad," I wailed; "it never has been spent."
And as I racked my brains to seek how I could raise some more,
Before my cruel landlord kicked me cowering from the door:
A knock . . . "Come in," I gruffly groaned; I did not raise my head,
Then lo! I heard a husky voice, a swift and silky tread:
"You got so blind, last night, mon vieux, I collared all your cash --
Three hundred francs. . . . There! Nom de Dieu," said Julot the apache.

And that was how I came to know Julot and Gigolette,
And we would talk and drink a bock, and smoke a cigarette.
And I would meditate upon the artistry of crime,
And he would tell of cracking cribs and cops and doing time;
Or else when he was flush of funds he'd carelessly explain

He'd biffed some bloated bourgeois on the border of the Seine.
So gentle and polite he was, just like a man of peace,
And not a desperado and the terror of the police.

Now one day in a bistro that's behind the Place Vendôme
I came on Julot the apache, and Gigolette his mome.
And as they looked so very grave, says I to them, says I,
"Come on and have a little glass, it's good to rinse the eye.
You both look mighty serious; you've something on the heart."
"Ah, yes," said Julot the apache, "we've something to impart.
When such things come to folks like us, it isn't very gay . . .
It's Gigolette -- she tells me that a gosse is on the way."
Then Gigolette, she looked at me with eyes like stones of gall:
"If we were honest folks," said she, "I wouldn't mind at all.
But then . . . you know the life we lead; well, anyway I mean
(That is, providing it's a girl) to call her Angeline."
"Cheer up," said I; "it's all in life. There's gold within the dross.
Come on, we'll drink another verre to Angeline the gosse."
And so the weary winter passed, and then one April morn
The worthy Julot came at last to say the babe was born.
"I'd like to chuck it in the Seine," he sourly snarled, "and yet
I guess I'll have to let it live, because of Gigolette."
I only laughed, for sure I saw his spite was all a bluff,
And he was prouder than a prince behind his manner gruff.
Yet every day he'd blast the brat with curses deep and grim,
And swear to me that Gigolette no longer thought of him.
And then one night he dropped the mask; his eyes were sick with dread,
And when I offered him a smoke he groaned and shook his head:
"I'm all upset; it's Angeline . . . she's covered with a rash . . .
She'll maybe die, my little gosse," cried Julot the apache.

But Angeline, I joy to say, came through the test all right,
Though Julot, so they tell me, watched beside her day and night.
And when I saw him next, says he: "Come up and dine with me.
We'll buy a beefsteak on the way, a bottle and some brie."
And so I had a merry night within his humble home,
And laughed with Angeline the gosse and Gigolette the mome.
And every time that Julot used a word the least obscene,
How Gigolette would frown at him and point to Angeline:
Oh, such a little innocent, with hair of silken floss,
I do not wonder they were proud of Angeline the gosse.
And when her arms were round his neck, then Julot says to me:

"I must work harder now, mon vieux, since I've to work for three."
He worked so very hard indeed, the police dropped in one day,
And for a year behind the bars they put him safe away.

So dark and silent now, their home; they'd gone -- I wondered where,
Till in a laundry near I saw a child with shining hair;
And o'er the tub a strapping wench, her arms in soapy foam;
Lo! it was Angeline the gosse, and Gigolette the mome.
And so I kept an eye on them and saw that all went right,
Until at last came Julot home, half crazy with delight.
And when he'd kissed them both, says he: "I've had my fill this time.
I'm on the honest now, I am; I'm all fed up with crime.
You mark my words, the page I turn is going to be clean,
I swear it on the head of her, my little Angeline."

And so, to finish up my tale, this morning as I strolled
Along the boulevard I heard a voice I knew of old.
I saw a rosy little man with walrus-like mustache . . .
I stopped, I stared. . . . By all the gods! 'twas Julot the apache.
"I'm in the garden way," he said, "and doing mighty well;
I've half an acre under glass, and heaps of truck to sell.
Come out and see. Oh come, my friend, on Sunday, wet or shine . . .
Say! -- it's the First Communion of that little girl of mine."

Robert William Service

Just Think!

Just think! some night the stars will gleam
 Upon a cold, grey stone,
And trace a name with silver beam,
 And lo! 'twill be your own.

That night is speeding on to greet
 Your epitaphic rhyme.
Your life is but a little beat
 Within the heart of Time.

A little gain, a little pain,
 A laugh, lest you may moan;
A little blame, a little fame,
 A star-gleam on a stone.

Robert William Service

Kail Yard Bard

A very humble pen I ply
 Beneath a cottage thatch;
And in the sunny hours I try
 To till my cabbage patch;
And in the gloaming glad am I
 To lift the latch.

I do not plot to pile up pelf,
 With jowl and belly fat;
To simple song I give myself,
 And seek no gain at that:
Content if milk is on the shelf
 To feed the cat.

I joy that haleness I possess,
 Though fame has passed me by;
And see such gold of happiness
 A-shining in the sky,
I wonder who has won success,
 Proud men or I?

I do not grieve that I am poor,
 And by the world unknown;
Free as the wind, serene and sure,
 In peace I live alone.
'Tis better to be bard obscure
 Than King on Throne.

Robert William Service

Kathleen

It was the steamer Alice May that sailed the Yukon foam.
And touched in every river camp from Dawson down to Nome.
It was her builder, owner, pilot, Captain Silas Geer,
Who took her through the angry ice, the last boat of the year;
Who patched her cracks with gunny sacks and wound her pipes with wire,
And cut the spruce upon the banks to feed her boiler fire;
Who headed her into the stream and bucked its mighty flow,
And nosed her up the little creeks where no one else would go;
Who bragged she had so small a draft, if dew were on the grass,
With gallant heart and half a start his little boat would pass.
Aye, ships might come and ships might go, but steady every year
The Alice May would chug away with Skipper Silas Geer.

Now though Cap geer had ne'er a fear the devil he could bilk,
He owned a gastric ulcer and his grub was mostly milk.
He also owned a Jersey cow to furnish him the same,
So soft and sleek and mild and meek, and Kathleen was her name.
And so his source of nourishment he got to love her so
That everywhere the captain went the cow would also go;
And though his sleeping quarters were ridiculously small,
He roped a section of them off to make Kathleen a stall.
So every morn she'd wake him up with mellifluous moo,
And he would pat her on the nose and go to wake the crew.
Then when he'd done his daily run and hitched on to the bank,
She'd breath above his pillow till to soothing sleep he sank.
So up and down the river seeded sourdoughs would allow,
They made a touching tableau, Captain Silas and his cow.

Now as the Captain puffed his pipe and Kathleen chewed her cud,
There came to him a poetess, a Miss Belinda Budd.
"An epic I would write," said she, "about this mighty stream,
And from your gallant bark 'twould be romantic as a dream."
Somewhat amazed the Captain gazed at her and shook his head;
"I'm sorry, Miss, but we don't take she passengers," he said.
"My boat's a freighter, we have no accommodation space
For women-folk - my cabin is the only private palce.
It's eight foot small from wall to wall, and I have, anyhow,
No room to spare, for half I share with Kathleen, That's my cow."
The lady sighed, then soft replied: "I love your Yukon scene,

And for its sake your room I'll take, and put up with Kathleen."

Well, she was so dead set to go the Captain said: "By heck!
I like your spunk; you take my bunk and I'll camp on the deck."
So days went by then with a sigh she sought him so anew:
"Oh, Captain Geer, Kathleen's a dear, but does she have to moo?
In early morn like motor horn she bellows overhead,
While all the night without respite she snores above my bed.
I know it's true she dotes on you, your smile she seems to miss;
She leans so near I live in fear my brow she'll try to kiss.
Her fond regard makes it so hard my Pegasus to spur...
Oh, please be kind and try to find another place for her."

Bereft of cheer was captain Geer; his face was glazed with gloom:
He scratched his head: "There ain't," he said, "another inch of room.
With freight we're packed; it's stowed and stacked - why even on the deck.
There's seven salted sourdoughs and they're sleeping neck and neck.
I'm sorry, Miss, that Kathleen's kiss has put your muse to flight;
I realize her amber eyes abstract you when you write.
I used to love them orbs above a-shining down on me,
And when she'd chew my whickers you can't calculate my glee.
I ain't at all poetical, but gosh! I guess your plight,
So I will try to plan what I can fix up for to-night."

Thus while upon her berth the wan and weary Author Budd
Bewailed her fate, Kathleen sedate above her chewed her cud;
And as he sought with brain distraught a steady course to steer,
Yet find a plan, a worried man was Captain Silas Geer.
Then suddenly alert was he, he hollered to his mate;
"Hi, Patsy, press our poetess to climb on deck and wait.
Hip-hip-hooray! Bid her be gay and never more despair;
My search is crowned - by heck, I've found an answer to her prayer."

To Patsy's yell like glad gazelle came bounding Bardess Budd;
No more forlorn, with hope new-born she faced the foaming flood;
While down the stair with eager air was seen to disappear,
Like one inspired (by genius fired) exultant Captain Geer.
Then up he came with eye aflame and honest face aglow,
And oh, how loud he laughed, as proud he led her down below.
"Now you may write by day or night upon our Yukon scene,
For I," he cried, "have clarified the problem of Kathleen.
I thought a lot, then like a shot the remedy I found:

I jest unhitched her rope and switched the loving creature round.
No more her moo will trouble you, you'll sleep right restful now.
Look, Lady, look! - I'm giving you... the tail end of the cow."

Robert William Service

Katie Drummond

My Louis loved me oh so well
And spiered me for his wife;
He would have haled me from the hell
That was my bawdy life:
The mother of his bairns to be,
Daftlike he saw in me.

But I, a hizzie of the town
Just telt him we must part;
Loving too well to drag him down
I tore him from my heart:
To save the honour of his name
I went back to my shame.

They say he soared to starry fame,
Romance flowed from his pen;
A prince of poets he became,
Pride of his fellow men:
My breast was pillow for his head,
Yet naught of his I've read.

Smoking my cutty pipe the while,
In howths of Leith I lag;
* My Louis lies in South Sea isle
As I a sodden hag
Live on . . . Oh Love, by men enskied
The day you went--I died.

*R.L.S.

Robert William Service

Kelly Of The Legion

Now Kelly was no fighter;
He loved his pipe and glass;
An easygoing blighter,
Who lived in Montparnasse.
But 'mid the tavern tattle
He heard some guinney say:
"When France goes forth to battle,
The Legion leads the way.

"The scourings of creation,
Of every sin and station,
The men who've known damnation,
Are picked to lead the way."

Well, Kelly joined the Legion;
They marched him day and night;
They rushed him to the region
Where largest loomed the fight.
"Behold your mighty mission,
Your destiny," said they;
"By glorious tradition
The Legion leads the way.

"With tattered banners flying
With trail of dead and dying,
On! On! All hell defying,
The Legion sweeps the way."

With grim, hard-bitten faces,
With jests of savage mirth,
They swept into their places,
The men of iron worth;
Their blooded steel was flashing;
They swung to face the fray;
Then rushing, roaring, crashing,
The Legion cleared the way.

The trail they blazed was gory;
Few lived to tell the story;

Through death they plunged to glory;
But, oh, they cleared the way!

Now Kelly lay a-dying,
And dimly saw advance,
With split new banners flying,
The fantassins of France.
Then up amid the melee
He rose from where he lay;
"Come on, me boys," says Kelly,
"The Layjun lades the way!"

Aye, while they faltered, doubting
(Such flames of doom were spouting),
He caught them, thrilled them, shouting:
"The Layjun lades the way!"

They saw him slip and stumble,
Then stagger on once more;
They marked him trip and tumble,
A mass of grime and gore;
They watched him blindly crawling
Amid hell's own affray,
And calling, calling, calling:
"The Layjun lades the way!"

And even while they wondered,
The battle-wrack was sundered;
To Victory they thundered,
But . . . Kelly led the way.

Still Kelly kept agoing;
Berserker-like he ran;
His eyes with fury glowing,
A lion of a man;
His rifle madly swinging,
His soul athirst to slay,
His slogan ringing, ringing,
"The Layjun lades the way!"

Till in a pit death-baited,
Where Huns with Maxims waited,

He plunged . . . and there, blood-sated,
To death he stabbed his way.

Now Kelly was a fellow
Who simply loathed a fight:
He loved a tavern mellow,
Grog hot and pipe alight;
I'm sure the Show appalled him,
And yet without dismay,
When Death and Duty called him,
He up and led the way.

So in Valhalla drinking
(If heroes meek and shrinking
Are suffered there), I'm thinking
'Tis Kelly leads the way.

Robert William Service

Kings Must Die

Alphonso Rex who died in Rome
Was quite a fistful as a kid;
For when I visited his home,
That gorgeous palace in Madrid,
The grinning guide-chap showed me where
He rode his bronco up the stair.

That stairway grand of marbled might,
The most majestic in the land,
In statures splendour, flight on flight,
He urged his steed with whip in hand.
No lackey could restrain him for
He gained the gilded corridor.

He burst into the Royal suite,
And like a cowboy whooped with glee;
Dodging the charger's flying feet
The Chamberlain was shocked to see:
Imagine how it must have been a
Grief to Mother Queen Christina!

And so through sheer magnificence
I roamed from stately room to room,
Yet haunted ever by the sense
Of tragical dynastic doom.
The walls were wailing: Kings must die,
Being plain blokes like you and I.

Well, here's the moral to my rhyme:
When memories more worthy fade
We find that whimsically Time
Conserves some crazy escapade.
So as I left I stood to stare
With humorous enjoyment where
Alphonso crashed the Palace stair.

Robert William Service

Kittens

A ray of sun strayed softly round,
For something to caress,
Until a resting place it found
Of joy and thankfulness;
'Twas Minette, our Angora cat,
With deep contented purr,
Relaxed in rapture on a mat,
Three kittens nuzzling her.

With tenderness the sunbeam kissed
her fur of silver-grey;
Her eyes held an ecstatic mist,
In boundless bliss she lay;
The sunny radiance seemed to hold
Her longer than it should,
As if it sought to shine in gold
Such mystic motherhood.

The darling kittens grew and grew;
Then one day Mother Cat,
Back from their gambolling withdrew,
And glared at them and - spat.
Aye, though they toddled after her
With playful stratagem,
Instead of soft maternal purr
She snarled and clawed at them.

And now she goes her callous way
And never gives them heed;
You barely would believe that they
Were children of her breed.
Upon the roof we see her creep
And howl with fiendish tone,
While on the hearth-rug softly sleep
Three kittens on their own.

And such is nature's way, it seems,
And maybe right at that;
So Mother, drop your foolish dreams

And emulate the Cat.
And when your offspring well are grown,
And strong and swift and tall,
Just turn them out upon their own
And let them fight - or fall.

Robert William Service

Land Mine

A grey gull hovered overhead,
Then wisely flew away.
'In half a jiffy you'll be dead,'
I thought I heard it say;
As there upon the railway line,
Checking an urge to cough,
I laboured to de-fuse the mine
That had not yet gone off.

I tapped around the time-clock rim,
Then something worried me.
I heard the singing of a hymn:
Nearer my God to Thee.
That damned Salvation Army band!
I phoned back to the boys:
'Please tell them,--they will understand,--
Cut out the bloody noise!'

Silence . . . I went to work anew,
And then I heard a tick
That told me the blast was due,--
I never ran so quick.
I heard the fury-roar behind;
The earth erupted hell,
As hoisted high and stunned and blind
Into a ditch I fell.

Then when at last I crawled from cover,
My hands were bloody raw;
And I was blue and bruised all over,
And this is what I saw:
All pale, but panting with elation,
And very much unstuck,
There was the Army of Salvation
Emerging from the muck.

And then I heard the Captain saying:
"Twas Heaven heard our pleas;
For there anight we all were praying

Down on our bended knees.
'Twas little hope your comrades gave you,
 Though we had faith divine . . .
The blessed Lord stooped down to save you,
 But Gosh! He cut it fine.'

Robert William Service

Last Look

What would I choose to see when I
To this bright earth shall bid good-bye?
When fades forever from my sight
The world I've loved with long delight?
What would I pray to look on last,
When Death shall draw the Curtain fast?

I've loved the farewell of the Sun,
Low-lapsing after work well done;
Or leaping from a sea forlorn,
Gold-glad to greet a day new born. . . .
Shall I elect to round my dream
The Sun I hail as Lord Supreme?

Ah no! Of Heaven's shining host,
It is the Moon I love the most;
And if, when I shall cease to be,
God lets me keep one memory
Of loveliness that held me thrall,
The Moon's the one I would recall.

. . . The new Moon fine as pearly clip
From Cleopatra's finger-tip;
. . . The ripe Moon vaulting o'er the trees
As ruddy as a Cheddar cheese;
. . . The late Moon, frail and wanly fair,
Relaxed on silver rocking chair. . . .

But most of all, the Moon intense
With radiant indifference;
So placid, glacid, pure, serene,
Of all perfection proudly Queen. . . .
Oh Mistress Mine, let me adore
Your beauty but one moment more!
One last look . . . Let the Curtain fall,
Then let me look no more at all.

Robert William Service

Laughter

I Laugh at Life: its antics make for me a giddy games,
Where only foolish fellows take themselves with solemn aim.
I laugh at pomp and vanity, at riches, rank and pride;
At social inanity, at swager, swank and side.
At poets, pastry-cooks and kings, at folk sublime and small,
Who fuss about a thousand things that matter not at all;
At those who dream of name and fame, at those who scheme for pelf. . . .
But best of all the laughing game - is laughing at myself.

Some poet chap had labelled man the noblest work of God:
I see myself a charlatan, a humbug and a fraud.
Yea, 'spite of show and shallow wit, an sentimental drool,
I know myself a hypocrite, a coward and a fool.
And though I kick myself with glee profoundly on the pants,
I'm little worse, it seems to me, than other human ants.
For if you probe your private mind, impervious to shame,
Oh, Gentle Reader, you may find you're much about the same.

Then let us mock with ancient mirth this comic, cosmic plan;
The stars are laughing at the earth; God's greatest joke is man.
For laughter is a buckler bright, and scorn a shining spear;
So let us laugh with all our might at folly, fraud and fear.
Yet on our sorry selves be spent our most sardonic glee.
Oh don't pay life a compliment to take is seriously.
For he who can himself despise, be surgeon to the bone,
May win to worth in others' eyes, to wisdom in his own.

Robert William Service

Laziness

Let laureates sing with rapturous swing
Of the wonder and glory of work;
Let pulpiteers preach and with passion impeach
The indolent wretches who shirk.
No doubt they are right: in the stress of the fight
It's the slackers who go to the wall;
So though it's my shame I perversely proclaim
It's fine to do nothing at all.

It's fine to recline on the flat of one's spine,
With never a thought in one's head:
It's lovely to lie staring up at the sky
When others are earning their bread.
It's great to feel one with the soil and the sun,
Drowned deep in the grasses so tall;
Oh it's noble to sweat, pounds and dollars to get,
But - it's grand to do nothing at all.

So sing to the praise of the fellows who laze
Instead of lambasting the soil;
The vagabonds gay who lounge by the way,
Conscientious objectors to toil.
But lest you should think, by this spatter of ink,
The Muses still hold me in thrall,
I'll round out my rhyme, and (until the next time)
Work like hell - doing nothing at all.

Robert William Service

Learn To Like

School yourself to savour most
Joys that have but little cost;
Prove the best of life is free,
Sun and stars and sky and sea;
Eager in your eyes to please,
Proffer meadows, brooks and trees;
Nature strives for your content,
Never charging you a cent.

Learn to love a garden gay,
Flowers and fruit in rich array.
Care for dogs and singing birds,
Have for children cheery words.
Find plain food and comfort are
More than luxury by far.
Music, books and honest friends
Outweigh golden dividends.

Love your work and do it well,
Scorning not a leisure spell.
Hold the truest form of wealth
Body fit and ruddy health.
Let your smile of happiness
Rustic peace serenely stress:
Home to love and heart to pray--
Thank your God for every day.

Robert William Service

Leaves

The leaves are falling one and one,
 Each like a life to me,
As over-soonly in the sun
 They spiral goldenly:
So airily and warily
 They falter free.

The leaves are falling two and two,
 Beneath a baleful sky;
So silently the sward they strew,
 Reluctantly they die . . .
Rich crimson leaves,--and no one grieves
 There doom but I.

The leaves are falling three and three
 Beneath the mothlike moon;
They flutter downward silverly
 In muted rigadoon;
And russet dry remote they lie
 From feathered tune.

The leaves are lying numberless,
 Disconsolately dead;
Where lucent was their sylvan dress
 And lightsome was their tread,
They rot below the bitter snow,
 Uncomforted.

A leaf's a life, and one by one
 They drift each darkling day;
Rare friends who lusted in the sun
 Are frailing fast away . . .
How sadly soon will mourn the moon
 My dark decay!

Robert William Service

L'Envoi

We've finished up the filthy war;
We've won what we were fighting for . . .
(Or have we? I don't know).
But anyway I have my wish:
I'm back upon the old Boul' Mich',
And how my heart's aglow!
Though in my coat's an empty sleeve,
Ah! do not think I ever grieve
(The pension for it, I believe,
Will keep me on the go).

So I'll be free to write and write,
And give my soul to sheer delight,
Till joy is almost pain;
To stand aloof and watch the throng,
And worship youth and sing my song
Of faith and hope again;
To seek for beauty everywhere,
To make each day a living prayer
That life may not be vain.

To sing of things that comfort me,
The joy in mother-eyes, the glee
Of little ones at play;
The blessed gentleness of trees,
Of old men dreaming at their ease
Soft afternoons away;
Of violets and swallows' wings,
Of wondrous, ordinary things
In words of every day.

To rhyme of rich and rainy nights,
When like a legion leap the lights
And take the town with gold;
Of taverns quaint where poets dream,
Of cafes gaudily agleam,
And vice that's overbold;
Of crystal shimmer, silver sheen,
Of soft and soothing nicotine,

Of wine that's rich and old,

Of gutters, chimney-tops and stars,
Of apple-carts and motor-cars,
The sordid and sublime;
Of wealth and misery that meet
In every great and little street,
Of glory and of grime;
Of all the living tide that flows --
From princes down to puppet shows --
I'll make my humble rhyme.

So if you like the sort of thing
Of which I also like to sing,
Just give my stuff a look;
And if you don't, no harm is done --

In writing it I've had my fun;
Good luck to you and every one --
And so

Here ends my book.

Robert William Service

Les Grands Mutilés

I saw three wounded of the war:
And the first had lost his eyes;
And the second went on wheels and had
No legs below the thighs;
And the face of the third was featureless,
And his mouth ran cornerwise.
So I made a rhyme about each one,
And this is how my fancies run.

Robert William Service

L'Escargot D'Or

O Tavern of the Golden Snail!
Ten sous have I, so I'll regale;
Ten sous your amber brew to sip
(Eight for the bock and two the tip),
And so I'll sit the evening long,
And smoke my pipe and watch the throng,
The giddy crowd that drains and drinks,
I'll watch it quiet as a sphinx;
And who among them all shall buy
For ten poor sous such joy as I?
As I who, snugly tucked away,
Look on it all as on a play,
A frolic scene of love and fun,
To please an audience of One.

O Tavern of the Golden Snail!
You've stuff indeed for many a tale.
All eyes, all ears, I nothing miss:
Two lovers lean to clasp and kiss;
The merry students sing and shout,
The nimble garcons dart about;
Lo! here come Mimi and Musette
With: "S'il vous plait, une cigarette?"
Marcel and Rudolf, Shaunard too,
Behold the old rapsallion crew,
With flowing tie and shaggy head . . .
Who says Bohemia is dead?
Oh shades of Murger! prank and clown,
And I will watch and write it down.

O Tavern of the Golden Snail!
What crackling throats have gulped your ale!
What sons of Fame from far and near
Have glowed and mellowed in your cheer!
Within this corner where I sit
Banville and Coppée clashed their wit;
And hither too, to dream and drain,
And drown despair, came poor Verlaine.
Here Wilde would talk and Synge would muse,

Maybe like me with just ten sous.
Ah! one is lucky, is one not?
With ghosts so rare to drain a pot!
So may your custom never fail,
O Tavern of the Golden Snail!

Robert William Service

Lindy Lou

If the good King only knew,
 Lindy Lou,
What a cherub child are you,
 It is true,
He would step down from his throne,
And would claim you for his own,
Then whatever would I do,
 Lindy Lou?

As I kiss your tiny feet,
 Lindy Lou,
I just feel I want to eat
 All of you.
What's so heaven-sweet and mild
As a happy baby-child?
If you died I would die too,
 Lindy Lou?

What's so lovely on this earth,
 Lindy Lou,
As your innocence and mirth
 Shining through?
Let us all do what we may
To make little children gay,
Heaven-happy, just as you,
 Lindy Lou.

Robert William Service

Lip-Stick Liz

Oh Lip-Stick Liz was in the biz, That's the oldest known in history;
She had a lot of fancy rags, Of her form she made no myst'ry.
She had a man, a fancy man, His name was Alexander,
And he used to beat her up because he couldn't understand her.

Now Lip-Stick Liz she loved her man And she couldn't love no other
So when she saw him with a Broadway Blonde, Her rage she could not smother.
She saw him once and she saw him twice But the third time nearly crazed her,
So she walked bang into a hardware store, And she bought a brand new razor.

Now Lip-Stick Liz she trailed them two For she was tired of weeping;
She trailed them two, in a flash hotel And there she found them sleeping;
So she gashed them once and she gashed them twice Their ju'lar veins to sever,
And the bright blood flowed like a brook between. And their lives were gone
forever.

Now Lip-Stick Liz went to the p'lice And sez she: "Me hands are gory,
And you'll put me away in a deep dark cell When once you've heard me story."
So they've put her away in a deep dark cell, Until her life be over
And what is the moral of the whole damn show, I wish I could discover.

Chorus:

Oh Lip-Stick Liz! What a lousy life this is.
It's a hell of a break for a girl on the make,
Oh Lip-Stick Liz!

Robert William Service

Little Brother

Wars have been and wars will be
Till the human race is run;
Battles red by land and sea,
Never peace beneath the sun.
I am old and little care;
I'll be cold, my lips be dumb:
Brother mine, beware, beware . . .
Evil looms the wrath to come.

Eastern skies are dark with strife,
Western lands are stark with fear;
Rumours of world-war are rife,
Armageddon draweth near.
If your carcass you would save,
Hear, oh hear, the dreadful drum!
Fly to forest, cower in cave . . .
Brother, heed the wrath to come!

Brother, you were born too late;
Human life is but a breath.
Men delve deep, where darkly wait
Sinister the seeds of death,
There's no moment to delay;
Sorrowing the stars are blind.
Little Brother, how I pray
You may sanctuary find.
Peoples of the world succumb . . .
Fly, poor fools, the WRATH TO COME!

Robert William Service

Little Moccasins

Come out, O Little Moccasins, and frolic on the snow!
Come out, O tiny beaded feet, and twinkle in the light!
I'll play the old Red River reel, you used to love it so:
Awake, O Little Moccasins, and dance for me to-night!

Your hair was all a gleamy gold, your eyes a corn-flower blue;
Your cheeks were pink as tinted shells, you stepped light as a fawn;
Your mouth was like a coral bud, with seed pearls peeping through;
As gladdening as Spring you were, as radiant as dawn.

Come out, O Little Moccasins! I'll play so soft and low,
The songs you loved, the old heart-songs that in my mem'ry ring;
O child, I want to hear you now beside the campfire glow!
With all your heart a-throbbing in the simple words you sing.

For there was only you and I, and you were all to me;
And round us were the barren lands, but little did we fear;
Of all God's happy, happy folks the happiest were we. . . .
(Oh, call her, poor old fiddle mine, and maybe she will hear!)

Your mother was a half-breed Cree, but you were white all through;
And I, your father was -- but well, that's neither here nor there;
I only know, my little Queen, that all my world was you,
And now that world can end to-night, and I will never care.

For there's a tiny wooden cross that pricks up through the snow:
(Poor Little Moccasins! you're tired, and so you lie at rest.)
And there's a grey-haired, weary man beside the campfire glow:
(O fiddle mine! the tears to-night are drumming on your breast.)

Robert William Service

Little Puddleton

I

Let others sing of Empire and of pomp beyond the sea,
A song of Little Puddleton is good enough for me,
A song of kindly living, and of coming home to tea.

I seldom read the papers, so I don't know what goes on.
I go to bed at sunset, and I leap alert at dawn,
To gossip with my garden, which I'll have you understand,
Is the neatest and the sweetest little garden in the land;
A span of sunny quietude, with walls so high and stout,
They shut me in from all the world, and shut the whole world out,
So that its sad bewilderment seems less than true to me:
As placid as a pool I live, as tranquil as a tree;
And all its glory I would give for glint of linnet's wings;
My cabbages are more to me than continents and kings.
Dominion have I of my own, where feud and faction cease,
A heaven of tranquillity, a paradise of peace.

II

Let continents be bathed in blood and cities leap in flame;
The life of Little Puddleton goes on and on the same;
Its ritual we follow, as we play a pleasant game.

The village workies sit and smoke their long-stemmed pipes of clay.
And cheerily they nod to me, and pass the time of day.
We talk of pigs and clover, and the prospect of the crops,
And the price of eggs and butter - there the conversation drops.
For in a doubt-distracted world I keep the rustic touch;
I think it better not to think too deeply nor too much;
But just to dream and take delight in all I hear and see,
The tinker in the tavern, with his trollop on his knee;
The ivied church, the anvil clang, the geese upon the green,
The drowsy noon, the hush of eve so holy and serene.
This is my world, then back again with heart of joy I go
To cottage walls of mellow stain, and garden all aglow.

III

For all I've been and all I've seen I have no vain regret
One comes to Little Puddleton, contented to forget;
Accepting village values, immemorially set.

I did not make this world and so it's not my job to mend;
But I have fought for fifty years and now I hear the end;
And I am heart-faint from the fight, and claim the right to rest,
And dare to hope the last of life will prove to be the best.
For there have I four sturdy walls with low and humble thatch,
A smiling little orchard and a big potato patch.
And so with hoe in hand I stand and mock the dubious sky;
let revolution rock the land, serene, secure am I.
I grow my simple food, I groom my lettuce and my beans;
I feast in colour, form and song, and ask not what it means.
Beauty suffices in itself; then when my strength is spent,
like simple hind with empty mind, I cultivate content.

Behold then Little Puddleton, the end of all my dreams.
Not much to show for life, I know; yet O how sweet it seems!
For when defeated day goes down in carnage in the West,
How blesses sanctuary is, and peace and love and rest!

Robert William Service

Lobster For Lunch

His face was like a lobster red,
His legs were white as mayonnaise:
"I've had a jolly lunch," he said,
That Englishman of pleasant ways.
"Thy do us well at our hotel:
In England food is dull these days."

"We had a big langouste for lunch.
I almost ate the whole of it.
And now I'll smoke and read my Punch,
And maybe siesta a bit;
And then I'll plunge into the sea
And get an appetite for tea."

We saw him plunge into the sea,
With jolly laugh, his wife and I.
"George does enjoy his food," said she;
"In Leeds lobsters are hard to buy.
How lucky we to have a chance
To spend our holiday in France!"

And so we watched him swim and swim
So far and far we scarce could see,
Until his balding head grew dim;
And then there came his children three,
And we all waited there for him, -
Ah yes, a little anxiously.

But George, alas! came never back.
Of him they failed to find a trace;
His wife and kids are wearing black,
And miss a lot his jolly face . . .
But oh how all the lobsters laugh,
And write in wrack his epitaph.

Robert William Service

Local Lad

I never saw a face so bright
 With brilliant blood and joy,
As was the grinning mug last night
 Of Dick, our local boy,
When with a clumsy, lucky clout
 He knocked the champion out.

A week ago he swung a pick
 And sweated in a ditch.
Tonight he's togged up mighty slick,
 And fancies himself rich.
With floozies, fine food, bubbly drink
 He'll go to hell I think.

Unless they make another match;
 And if they do I guess
The champion won't have a scratch,
 But Dick will be a mess;
His map will be a muck of gore
 As he sprawls on the floor.

Then he'll go back his pick to swing,
 And sweat deep in the mud . . .
Yet still I see him in the ring,
 So gay with glee and blood,
Dancing a jig and holding high
 His gloves to climb the sky.

Robert William Service

Longevity

I watched one day a parrot grey - 'twas in a barber shop.
"Cuckold!" he cried, until I sighed: "You feathered devil, stop!"
Then balefully he looked at me, and slid along his perch,
With sneering eye that seemed to pry me very soul to search.
So fierce, so bold, so grim, so cold, so agate was his stare:
And then that bird I thought I heard this sentiment declare: -

"As it appears, a hundred years a parrot may survive,
When you are gone I'll sit upon this perch and be alive.
In this same spot I'll drop my crot, and crack my sunflower seeds,
And cackle loud when in a shroud you rot beneath the weeds.
I'll carry on when carrion you lie beneath the yew;
With claw and beak my grub I'll seek when grubs are seeking you."

"Foul fowl! said I, "don't prophesy, I'll jolly well contrive
That when I rot in bone-yard lot you cease to be alive."
So I bespoke that barber bloke: "Joe, here's a five pound note.
It's crisp and new, and yours if you will slice that parrot's throat."
"In part," says he, "I must agree, for poor I be in pelf,
With right good will I'll take your bill, but - cut his throat yourself."

So it occurred I took that bird to my ancestral hall,
And there he sat and sniggered at the portraits on the wall.
I sought to cut his wind-pipe but he gave me such a peck,
So cross was I, I swore I'd try to wring his blasted neck;
When shrill he cried: "It's parrotcide what you propose to do;
For every time you make a rhyme you're just a parrot too."

Said I: "It's true. I bow to you. Poor parrots are we all."
And now I sense with reverence the wisdom of his poll.
For every time I want a rhyme he seems to find the word;
In any doubt he helps me out - a most amazing bird.
This line that lies before your eyes he helped me to indite;
I sling the ink but often think it's he who ought to write.
It's he who should in mystic mood concoct poetic screeds,
And I who ought to drop my crot and crackle sunflower seeds.

A parrot nears a hundred years (or so the legend goes),
So were I he this century I might see to its close.

Then I might swing within my ring while revolutions roar,
And watch a world to ruin hurled - and find it all a bore.
As upside-down I cling and clown, I might with parrot eyes
Blink blandly when excited men are moulding Paradise.
New Christs might die, while grimly I would croak and carry on,
Till gnarled and old I should behold the year TWO THOUSAND dawn.

But what a fate! How I should hate upon my perch to sit,
And nothing do to make anew a world for angels fit.
No, better far, though feeble are my lyric notes and flat,
Be dead and done than anyone who lives a life like that.
Though critic-scarred a humble bard I feel I'd rather be,
Than flap and flit and shriek and spit through all a century.

So feathered friend, until the end you may divide my den,
And make a mess, which (more or less) I clean up now and then.
But I prefer the doom to share of dead and gone compeers,
Than parrot be, and live to see ten times a hundred years.

Robert William Service

Lord Let Me Live

Lord, let me live, that more and more
Your wonder world I may adore;
With every dawn to grow and grow
Alive to graciousness aglow;
And every eve in beauty see
Reason for rhapsody.

Lord, let me bide, that I may prove
The buoyant brightness of my love
For sapphire sea and lyric sky
And buttercup and butterfly;
And glory in the golden thought
Of rapture You have wrought.

Lord, let me linger, just for this,--
To win to utterness of bliss;
To see in every dawn design
Proof of Your Providence divine;
With night to find ablaze above,
Assurance of Your love.

Lord, for Your praise my days prolong,
That I may sing in sunny sort,
And prove with my exultant song
The longest life is all too short:
Aye, even in a bead of dew
To shrine in beauty--YOU.

Robert William Service

Lost

"Black is the sky, but the land is white--
 (O the wind, the snow and the storm!)--
Father, where is our boy to-night?
 Pray to God he is safe and warm."

"Mother, mother, why should you fear?
 Safe is he, and the Arctic moon
Over his cabin shines so clear--
 Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."

"It's getting dark awful sudden. Say, this is mighty queer!
 Where in the world have I got to? It's still and black as a tomb.
I reckoned the camp was yonder, I figured the trail was here--
 Nothing! Just draw and valley packed with quiet and gloom;
Snow that comes down like feathers, thick and gobby and gray;
 Night that looks spiteful ugly--seems that I've lost my way.
"The cold's got an edge like a jackknife--it must be forty below;
 Leastways that's what it seems like--it cuts so fierce to the bone.
The wind's getting real ferocious; it's heaving and whirling the snow;
 It shrieks with a howl of fury, it dies away to a moan;
Its arms sweep round like a banshee's, swift and icily white,
 And buffet and blind and beat me. Lord! it's a hell of a night.

"I'm all tangled up in a blizzard. There's only one thing to do--
 Keep on moving and moving; it's death, it's death if I rest.
Oh, God! if I see the morning, if only I struggle through,
 I'll say the prayers I've forgotten since I lay on my mother's breast.
I seem going round in a circle; maybe the camp is near.
 Say! did somebody holler? Was it a light I saw?
Or was it only a notion? I'll shout, and maybe they'll hear--
 No! the wind only drowns me--shout till my throat is raw.

"The boys are all round the camp-fire wondering when I'll be back.
 They'll soon be starting to seek me; they'll scarcely wait for the light.
What will they find, I wonder, when they come to the end of my track--
 A hand stuck out of a snowdrift, frozen and stiff and white.
That's what they'll strike, I reckon; that's how they'll find their pard,
 A pie-faced corpse in a snowbank--curse you, don't be a fool!
Play the game to the finish; bet on your very last card;

Nerve yourself for the struggle. Oh, you coward, keep cool!

I'm going to lick this blizzard; I'm going to live the night.

It can't down me with its bluster--I'm not the kind to be beat.

On hands and knees will I buck it; with every breath will I fight;

It's life, it's life that I fight for--never it seemed so sweet.

I know that my face is frozen; my hands are numblike and dead;

But oh, my feet keep a-moving, heavy and hard and slow;

They're trying to kill me, kill me, the night that's black overhead,

The wind that cuts like a razor, the whipcord lash of the snow.

Keep a-moving, a-moving; don't, don't stumble, you fool!

Curse this snow that's a-piling a-purpose to block my way.

It's heavy as gold in the rocker, it's white and fleecy as wool;

It's soft as a bed of feathers, it's warm as a stack of hay.

Curse on my feet that slip so, my poor tired, stumbling feet;

I guess they're a job for the surgeon, they feel so queerlike to lift--

I'll rest them just for a moment--oh, but to rest is sweet!

The awful wind cannot get me, deep, deep down in the drift."

"Father, a bitter cry I heard,

Out of the night so dark and wild.

Why is my heart so strangely stirred?

'Twas like the voice of our erring child."

"Mother, mother, you only heard

A waterfowl in the locked lagoon--

Out of the night a wounded bird--

Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."

Who is it talks of sleeping? I'll swear that somebody shook

Me hard by the arm for a moment, but how on earth could it be?

See how my feet are moving--awfully funny they look--

Moving as if they belonged to a someone that wasn't me.

The wind down the night's long alley bowls me down like a pin;

I stagger and fall and stagger, crawl arm-deep in the snow.

Beaten back to my corner, how can I hope to win?

And there is the blizzard waiting to give me the knockout blow.

Oh, I'm so warm and sleepy! No more hunger and pain.

Just to rest for a moment; was ever rest such a joy?

Ha! what was that? I'll swear it, somebody shook me again;

Somebody seemed to whisper: "Fight to the last, my boy."

Fight! That's right, I must struggle. I know that to rest means death;

Death, but then what does death mean? --ease from a world of strife.

Life has been none too pleasant; yet with my failing breath
Still and still must I struggle, fight for the gift of life.

* * * * *

Seems that I must be dreaming! Here is the old home trail;
Yonder a light is gleaming; oh, I know it so well!
The air is scented with clover; the cattle wait by the rail;
Father is through with the milking; there goes the supper-bell.

* * * * *

Mother, your boy is crying, out in the night and cold;
Let me in and forgive me, I'll never be bad any more:
I'm, oh, so sick and so sorry: please, dear mother, don't scold--
It's just your boy, and he wants you. . . . Mother, open the door. . . .

"Father, father, I saw a face
Pressed just now to the window-pane!
Oh, it gazed for a moment's space,
Wild and wan, and was gone again!"
"Mother, mother, you saw the snow
Drifted down from the maple tree
(Oh, the wind that is sobbing so!
Weary and worn and old are we)--
Only the snow and a wounded loon--
Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."

Robert William Service

Lost Kitten

Two men I saw reel from a bar
And stumble down the street;
Coarse and uncouth as workmen are,
They walked with wobbly feet.
I watched them, thinking sadly as
I heard their hobnails clink,
The only joy a toiler has
Is to get drowned in drink.

A kitten on a wall,
A skinny, starving stray;
It looked so pitifully small,
A fluff of silver grey.
One of the men came to a stand,
A kindly chap was he,
For with a huge and horny hand
He stroked it tenderly.

With wistful hope it gazed at him
And arched a spine of fur;
It licked his hand so grimy grim
And feebly tried to purr.
And then it climbed upon his chest,
And to his drunken glee,
Upon his shoulder came to rest,
Contented as could be.

The other fellow with a jeer
Made feint to dash it down,
but as it shrank with sudden fear
I saw the first one frown;
And then I heard him coarsely cry:
"Have care for what you do;
Just harm a hair of it and I
Will twist my knife in you."

So there they stood like brutes at bay,
Their blood at fighting heat;
And snarling at each other they

Went weaving down the street,
Leaving the kitten all alone
Upon its stony shelf . . .
And as I haven't heart of stone
I took it home myself.

Robert William Service

Lost Shepherd

Ah me! How hard is destiny!
If we could only know. . . .
I bought my son from Sicily
A score of years ago;
I haled him from our sunny vale
To streets of din and squalor,
And left it to professors pale
To make of him a scholar.

Had he remained a peasant lad,
A shepherd on the hill,
like golden faun in goatskin clad
He might be singing still;
He would have made the flock his care
And lept with gay reliance
On thymy heights, unwitting there
Was such a thing as science.

He would have crooned to his guitar,
Draughts of chianti drinking;
A better destiny by far
Than reading, writing, thinking.
So bent above his books was he,
His thirst for knowledge slaking,
He did not realize that we
Are worm-food in the making.

Ambition got him in its grip
And inched him to his doom;
Fate granted him a fellowship,
Then graved for him a tomb.
"Beneath my feet I can't allow
The grass to grow," he said;
And toiled so tirelessly that now
It grows above his head.

His honour scrolls shall feed the flame,
They mean no more to me;
His ashes I with bitter blame

Will take to Sicily.
And there I'll weep with heart bereft,
By groves and sunny rills,
And wish my laughing boy I'd left
A shepherd on the hills.

Robert William Service

Lottery Ticket

'A ticket for the lottery
I've purchased every week,' said she
 'For years a score
Though desperately poor am I,
Oh how I've scrimped and scraped to buy
 One chance more.

Each week I think I'll gain the prize,
And end my sorrows and my sighs,
 For I'll be rich;
Then nevermore I'll eat bread dry,
With icy hands to cry and cry
 And stitch and stitch.'

'Tis true she won the premier prize;
It was of formidable size,
 Ten million francs.
I know, because the man who sold
It to her splenically told
 He got no thanks.

The lucky one was never found,
For she was snugly underground,
 And minus breath;
And with that ticket tucked away,
In some old stocking, so they say,
 She starved to death.

Robert William Service

Lowly Laureate

O Sacred Muse, my lyre excuse! -
My verse is vagrant singing;
Rhyme I invoke for simple folk
Of penny-wise upbringing:
For Grannies grey to paste away
Within an album cover;
For maids in class to primly pass,
And lads to linger over.

I take the clay of every day
And mould it in my fashion;
I seek to trace the commonplace
With humor and compassion.
Of earth am I, and meekly try
To be supremely human:
To please, I plan, the little man,
And win the little women.

No evil theme shall daunt my dream
Of fellow-love and pity;
I tune my lute to prostitute,
To priest I pipe my ditty.
Through gutter-grime be in my rhyme,
I bow to altars holy. . . .
Lord, humble me, so I may be
A Laureate of the Lowly.

Robert William Service

Lucille

Of course you've heard of the Nancy Lee, and how she sailed away
On her famous quest of the Arctic flea, to the wilds of Hudson's Bay?
For it was a foreign Prince's whim to collect this tiny cuss,
And a golden quid was no more to him than a copper to coves like us.
So we sailed away and our hearts were gay as we gazed on the gorgeous scene;
And we laughed with glee as we caught the flea of the wolf and the wolverine;
Yea, our hearts were light as the parasite of the ermine rat we slew,
And the great musk ox, and the silver fox, and the moose and the caribou.
And we laughed with zest as the insect pest of the marmot crowned our zeal,
And the wary mink and the wily "link", and the walrus and the seal.
And with eyes aglow on the scornful snow we danced a rigadon,
Round the lonesome lair of the Arctic hare, by the light of the silver moon.

But the time was nigh to homeward hie, when, imagine our despair!
For the best of the lot we hadn't got -- the flea of the polar bear.
Oh, his face was long and his breath was strong, as the Skipper he says to me:
"I wants you to linger 'ere, my lad, by the shores of the Hartic Sea;
I wants you to 'unt the polar bear the perishin' winter through,
And if flea ye find of its breed and kind, there's a 'undred quid for you."
But I shook my head: "No, Cap," I said; "it's yourself I'd like to please,
But I tells ye flat I wouldn't do that if ye went on yer bended knees."
Then the Captain spat in the seething brine, and he says: "Good luck to you,
If it can't be did for a 'undred quid, supposin' we call it two?"
So that was why they said good-by, and they sailed and left me there --
Alone, alone in the Arctic Zone to hunt for the polar bear.

Oh, the days were slow and packed with woe, till I thought they would never
end;
And I used to sit when the fire was lit, with my pipe for my only friend.
And I tried to sing some rollicky thing, but my song broke off in a prayer,
And I'd drowse and dream by the driftwood gleam; I'd dream of a polar bear;
I'd dream of a cloudlike polar bear that blotted the stars on high,
With ravenous jaws and flenzing claws, and the flames of hell in his eye.
And I'd trap around on the frozen ground, as a proper hunter ought,
And beasts I'd find of every kind, but never the one I sought.
Never a track in the white ice-pack that humped and heaved and flawed,
Till I came to think: "Why, strike me pink! if the creature ain't a fraud."
And then one night in the waning light, as I hurried home to sup,
I hears a roar by the cabin door, and a great white hulk heaves up.

So my rifle flashed, and a bullet crashed; dead, dead as a stone fell he,
And I gave a cheer, for there in his ear -- Gosh ding me! -- a tiny flea.

At last, at last! Oh, I clutched it fast, and I gazed on it with pride;
And I thrust it into a biscuit-tin, and I shut it safe inside;
With a lid of glass for the light to pass, and space to leap and play;
Oh, it kept alive; yea, seemed to thrive, as I watched it night and day.
And I used to sit and sing to it, and I shielded it from harm,
And many a hearty feed it had on the heft of my hairy arm.
For you'll never know in that land of snow how lonesome a man can feel;
So I made a fuss of the little cuss, and I christened it "Lucille".
But the longest winter has its end, and the ice went out to sea,
And I saw one day a ship in the bay, and there was the Nancy Lee.
So a boat was lowered and I went aboard, and they opened wide their eyes --
Yes, they gave a cheer when the truth was clear, and they saw my precious
prize.

And then it was all like a giddy dream; but to cut my story short,
We sailed away on the fifth of May to the foreign Prince's court;
To a palmy land and a palace grand, and the little Prince was there,
And a fat Princess in a satin dress with a crown of gold on her hair.
And they showed me into a shiny room, just him and her and me,
And the Prince he was pleased and friendly-like, and he calls for drinks for three.
And I shows them my battered biscuit-tin, and I makes my modest spiel,
And they laughed, they did, when I opened the lid, and out there popped Lucille.

Oh, the Prince was glad, I could soon see that, and the Princess she was too;
And Lucille waltzed round on the tablecloth as she often used to do.
And the Prince pulled out a purse of gold, and he put it in my hand;
And he says: "It was worth all that, I'm told, to stay in that nasty land."
And then he turned with a sudden cry, and he clutched at his royal beard;
And the Princess screamed, and well she might -- for Lucille had disappeared.

"She must be here," said his Noble Nibbs, so we hunted all around;
Oh, we searched that place, but never a trace of the little beast we found.
So I shook my head, and I glumly said: "Gol darn the saucy cuss!
It's mighty queer, but she isn't here; so . . . she must be on one of us.
You'll pardon me if I make so free, but -- there's just one thing to do:
If you'll kindly go for a half a mo' I'll search me garments through."
Then all alone on the shiny throne I stripped from head to heel;
In vain, in vain; it was very plain that I hadn't got Lucille.
So I garbed again, and I told the Prince, and he scratched his august head;
"I suppose if she hasn't selected you, it must be me," he said.

So he retired; but he soon came back, and his features showed distress:
"Oh, it isn't you and it isn't me." . . . Then we looked at the Princess.
So she retired; and we heard a scream, and she opened wide the door;
And her fingers twain were pinched to pain, but a radiant smile she wore:
"It's here," she cries, "our precious prize. Oh, I found it right away. . . ."
Then I ran to her with a shout of joy, but I choked with a wild dismay.
I clutched the back of the golden throne, and the room began to reel . . .
What she held to me was, ah yes! a flea, but . . . it wasn't my Lucille.

Robert William Service

Lucindy Jane

When I was young I was too proud
 To wheel my daughter in her pram.
"It's infra dig," I said aloud,--
 Bot now I'm old, behold I am
Perambulating up and down
 Grand-daughter through the town.

And when I come into the Square,
 Beside the fountain I will stop;
And as to rest I linger there,
 The dames will say: "How do, Grand-pop!
Lucindy Jane with eyes so blue
 Looks more and more like you."

And sure it's pleased as Punch I get,
 And take Lucindy on my knee;
Aye, at the risk of getting wet,
 I blether to the girls a wee:
Then as we have a bottle date
 Home we perambulate.

Gosh! That's the joy of all my day;
 And as I play the part of nurse:
"She's got your nose," I hear them say.
 Thinks I: "Well now, she might have worse."
And how I dream I'll live to see
 A great-grandchild upon my knee,
 Whom folks say looks like me!

Robert William Service

Mactavish

I do not write for love of pelf,
Nor lust for phantom fame;
I do not rhyme to please myself,
Nor yet to win acclaim:
No, strange to say it is my plan,
What gifts I have, to lavish
Upon a simple working man
 MACTAVISH.

For that's the rather smeary name,
Of dreary toil a hinter,
That heads the galley proofs that came
This morning from my printer;
My patient pencil much they need,
Yet how my eyes they ravish,
As at the top of each I read:
 MACTAVISH.

Who is the meek and modest man,
Who puffs no doubt a pipe,
And has my manuscript to scan,
And put in magic type?
Somehow I'm glad that he is not
Iberian or Slavish -
I hail him as a brother Scot,
 MACTAVISH.

I do not want to bore him with
My work, I make it snappy;
For even though his name were Smith,
I'd like him to be happy.
I hope, because I'm stumped for rhyme,
He will not think me knavish,
If I should call him just this time:
 MACTAVISH.

Forgive me, Friend Mactavish. I
No doubt have cost you curses;
I'm sorry for you as you try

To put my type in verses;
And though new names I know you by,
When of new books creator,
I'll always look on you as my
COLLABORATOR.

Robert William Service

Mad Maria

Mad Maria in the Square
Sits upon a wicker chair.
When the keeper asks the price
Mad Maria counts her lice.
No pesito can she pay,
So he shrugs and goes away;
Hopes she'll pay him with her prayers,
Shabby keeper of the chairs.

Mad Maria counts her lice,
Cracks them once and cracks them twice,
Combs them from her sunny hair;
People stop to turn and stare.
Innocent in thought and deed
Mad Maria pays no heed,
And the Cross upon her breast
Proves her blessed of the blest.

So she sings her little song,
Happy as the day is long,
hunting in her camisole
Shy partakers of her dole;
thinking: Heaven please forgive -
Even lice have leave to live;
(But sweet Reader, do not blame,
For she kills them just the same.)

Mad Maria goes unchid,
Mildest maid in all Madrid;

While around in serried ranks
Rear the bold facades of Banks;
But when wrath of Heaven smites
Hosts of Mammon's parasites,
Mad Maria will not fall,
Being oh so very small.

Pariahs to God belong,
to be weak is to be strong;

Fools are richer than the wise,
And who see with shining eyes
Angels in the sordid street
Deem their happiness complete. . . .
Mad Maria counts her beads,
Cracks her lice and - Heaven heeds.

Robert William Service

Madam La Maquise

Said Hongray de la Glaciere unto his proud Papa:

"I want to take a wife mon Père," The Marquis laughed: "Ha! Ha!

And whose, my son?" he slyly said; but Hongray with a frown
Cried, "Fi! Papa, I mean - to wed, I want to settle down."

The Marquis de la Glaciere responded with a smile;

"You're young my boy; I much prefer that you should wait awhile."

But Hongray sighed: "I cannot wait, for I am twenty-four;

And I have met my blessed fate: I worship and adore.

Such beauty, grace and charm has she, I'm sure you will approve,

For if I live a century none other can I love."

"I have no doubt," the Marquis shrugged, "that she's a proper
pet;

But has she got a decent dot, and is she of our set?"

"Her dot," said Hongray, "will suffice; her family you know.

The girl with whom I fain would splice is Mirabelle du Veau."

What made the Marquis start and stare, and clutch his perfumed beard?

Why did he stagger to a chair and murmur: "As I feared?"

Dilated were his eyes with dread, and in a voice of woe

He wailed: "My son, you cannot wed with Mirabelle du Veau."

"Why not? my Parent," Hongray cried. "Her name's without a
slur.

Why should you look so horrified that I should wed with her?"

The Marquis groaned: "Unhappy lad! Forget her if you can,

And see in your respected Dad a miserable man."

"What id the matter? I repeat," said Hongray growing hot.

"She's witty, pretty, rich and sweet... Then- mille diables!- what?"

The Marquis moaned: "Alas! that I your dreams of bliss should banish;

It happened in the days gone-by, when I was Don Juanish.

Her mother was your mother's friend, and we were much together.

Ah well! You know how such things end. (I blame it on the weather.)

We had a very sultry spell. One day, mon Dieu! I kissed her.

My son, you can't wed Mirabelle. She is... she is your sister."

So broken-hearted Hongray went and roamed the world around,

Till hunting in the Occident forgetfulness he found.

Then quite recovered, he returned to the paternal nest,

Until one day, with brow that burned, the Marquis he addresses:

"Felicitate me, Father mine; my brain s in a whirl;
For I have found the mate divine, the one, the perfect girl.
She's healthy, wealthy, witching, wise, with loveliness serene.
And Proud am I to win a prize, half angel and half queen."
"'Tis time to wed," the Marquis said, "You must be twenty-
seven.
But who is she whose lot may be to make your life a heaven?"
"A friend of childhood," Hongray cried. "For whom regard you
feel.
The maid I fain would be my bride is Raymonde de la Veal."

The Marquis de la Glaciere collapsed upon the floor,
And all the words he uttered were: "Forgive me, I implore.
My sins are heavy on my head. Profound remorse I feel.
My son, you simply cannot wed with Raymonde de la Veal."
Then Hongray spoke voice that broke, and corrugated brow:
"Inform me, Sir, why you demur. What is the matter now?"
The Marquis wailed: "My wicked youth! Ah! how it gives me pain.
But let me tell the awful truth, my agony explain...
A cursed Casanova I; a finished flirt her mother;
And so alas! it came to pass we fell for one another:
Our lives were blent in bliss and joy, The sequel you may gather:
You cannot wed Raymonde, my boy, because I am...her father."

Again sore-stricken Hongray fled, and sought his grief to smother,
And as he writhed upon his bed to him there came his Mother.
The Marquise de la Glaciere was snowy-haired and frigid.
Her wintry featured chiselled were, her manner stiff and rigid.
The pride of race was in her face, her bearing high and stately,
And sinking down by Hongray's side she spoke to him sedately:
"What ails you so, my precious child? What throngs of sorrow smite you?
Why are your eyes so wet and wild? Come tell me, I invite you."
"Ah! if I told you, Mother dear," said Hongray with a shiver,
"Another's honour would, I fear, be in the soup forever."
"Nay trust," she begged, "My only boy, the fond Mama who
bore you.
Perhaps I may, your grief alloy. Please tell me, I implore you."

And so his story Hngray told, in accents choked and muffled.
The Marquise listened calm and cold, her visage quite unruffled.
He told of Mirabelle du Veau, his agony revealing.
For Raymonde de la Veal his woe was quite beyond concealing.

And still she sat without a word, her look so high and haughty,
You'd ne'er have thought it was her lord who had behaved so naughty.
Then Hongray finished up: "For life my hopes are doomed to slaughter;
For if I choose another wife, she's sure to be his daughter."
The Marquise rose. "Cheer up," said she, "the last word is not
spoken.

A Mother cannot sit and see her boy's heart rudely broken.
So dry your tears and calm your fears; no longer need you tarry;
To-day your bride you may decide, to-morrow you may marry.
Yes, you may wed with Mirabelle, or Raymonde if you'd rather...
For I as well the truth may tell...Papa is not your father."

Robert William Service

Maid In May

Three maids there were in meadow bright,
The eldest less than seven;
Their eyes were dancing with delight,
And innocent as Heaven.

Wild flowers they wou'd with tender glee,
Their cheeks with rapture rosy;
All radiant they smiled at me,
When I besought a posy.

She gave me a columbine,
And one a poppy brought me;
The tiniest, with eyes ashine,
A simple daisy sought me.

And as I went my sober way,
I heard their careless laughter;
Their hearts too happy with to-day
To care for what comes after.

.

That's long ago; they're gone, all three,
To walk amid the shadows;
Forgotten is their lyric glee
In still and sunny meadows.

For Columbine loved life too well,
And went adventure fairing;
And sank into the pit of hell,
And passed but little caring.
While Poppy was a poor man's wife,
And children had a-plenty;
And went, worn out with toil and strife
When she was five-and-twenty.

And Daisy died while yet a child,
As fragile blossoms perish,
When Winter winds are harsh and wild,

With none to shield and cherish.

Ah me! How fate is dark and dour
To little Children of the Poor.

Robert William Service

Making Good

No man can be a failure if he thinks he's a success;
he may not own his roof-tree overhead,
He may be on his uppers and have hocked his evening dress -
(Financially speaking - in the red)
He may have chronic shortage to repay the old home mortgage,
And almost be a bankrupt in his biz.,
But though he skips his dinner,
And each day he's growing thinner,
If he thinks he is a winner,

Then he is.

But when I say Success I mean the sublimated kind;
A man may gain it yet be on the dole.
To me it's music of the heart and sunshine of the mind,
Serenity and sweetness of the soul.
You may not have a brace of bucks to jingle in your jeans,
Far less the dough to buy a motor car;
But though the row you're hoeing
May be grim, ungodly going,
If you think the skies are glowing -

Then they are.

For a poor man may be wealthy and a millionaire may fail,
It all depends upon the point of view.
It's the sterling of your spirit tips the balance of the scale,
It's optimism, and it's up to you.
For what I figure as success is simple Happiness,
The consummate contentment of your mood:
You may toil with brain and sinew,
And though little wealth is win you,
If there's health and hope within you -

You've made good.

Robert William Service

Mammy

I often wonder how
Life clicks because
They don't make women now
Like Mammy was.
When broods of two or three
Content most men,
How wonderful was she
With children ten!

Though sixty years have gone,
As I look back,
I see her rise at dawn,
Our boots to black;
Pull us from drowsy bed,
Wet sponge to pass,
And speed us porridge fed
To morning class.

Our duds to make and mend,
Far into night,
O'er needle she would spend
By bleary light.
Yet as her head drooped low,
With withered hair,
It seemed the candle glow
Made halo there.

And so with silvered pow
I sigh because
They don't make women now
Like Mammy was.

Robert William Service

Man Child

All day he lay upon the sand
When summer sun was bright,
And let the grains sift through his hand
With infantile delight;
Just like a child, so soft and fair,
Though he was twenty-five -
An innocent, my mother-care
Had kept so long alive.

Oh it is hard to bear a cross
For five-and-twenty years;
A daft son and a husband's loss
Are woes out-weighting tears.
Yet bright and beautiful was he,
Though barely could he walk;
And when he signaled out to sea
His talk was baby talk.

The man I loved was drowned out there
When we were ten weeks wed.
'Tis bitter hard a boy to bear
That's fathered by the dead.
And now I give my life to him
Because he needs me so;
And as I look my sight is dim
With pity, love and woe. . . .

Then suddenly I see him rise,
Tall, stalwart and serene . . .
Lo! There he stands before my eyes,
The man he might have been.

"Dear Mother mine," I hear him say,
"The curse that bound me fast,
Some miracle has swept away,
And all you pain is past.
Now I am strong and sane and free,
And you shall have your due;
For as you loved and cherished me,

I'll love and cherish you."

His kisses sooth away my pain,
His clasp is paradise . . .
Then - then I look at him again
With terror in my eyes:

For down he sinks upon the sand,
And heavy droops his head;
The golden grains drift through his hand . . .
I know - my boy is dead.

Robert William Service

Marie Antoinette

They told to Marie Antoinette:

"The beggars at your gate
Have eyes too sad for tears to wet,
And for your pity wait."

But Marie only laughed and said:

"My heart they will not ache:
If people starve for want of bread
Let them eat cake."

The Court re-echoed her bon mot;

It rang around the land,
Till masses wakened from their woe
With scyth and pick in hand.
It took a careless, callous phrase
To rouse the folk forlorn:
A million roared the Marseillaise:
Freedom was born.

And so to Marie Antoinette

Let's pay a tribute due;
Humanity owes her a debt,
(Ironical, it's true).
She sparked world revolution red,
And as with glee they bore
Upon a pike her lovely head
--Her curls dripped gore.

Robert William Service

Mary Ellen

It's mighty quiet in the house
 Since Mary Ellen quit me cold;
I've swept the hearth and fed the mouse
 That's getting fat and overbold.
I've bought a pig's foot for the pot
 And soon I'll set the fire alight;
Then I may eat or I may not,
 Depends upon my appetite.

Since Mary Ellen left me lone
 I haven't earned a bloody bob.
I sit and sigh, and mope and moan,
 And bellyache I quit my job.
My money's mostly gone,--I think
 I ought to save it up for food . . .
But no, I'll blow it in for drink,
 Then do a bunk for good.

I watch my mouse his whiskers preen;
 He watches me with wicked glee.
Today--oh God! It's years sixteen
 Since Mary Ellen wed with me.
Oh how the dear girl hated vermin!
 She left rat poison on the shelf . . .
Friend Mouse, your doom I new determine
 Then--how about myself?

Robert William Service

Maternity

There once was a Square, such a square little Square,
And he loved a trim Triangle;
But she was a flirt and around her skirt
Vainly she made him dangle.
Oh he wanted to wed and he had no dread
Of domestic woes and wrangles;
For he thought that his fate was to procreate
Cute little Squares and Triangles.

Now it happened one day on that geometric way
There swaggered a big bold Cube.
With a haughty stare and he made that Square
Have the air of a perfect boob;
To his solid spell the Triangle fell,
And she thrilled with love's sweet sickness,
For she took delight in his breadth and height -
But how she adored his thickness!

So that poor little Square just died of despair,
For his love he could not strangle;
While the bold Cube led to the bridal bed
That cute and acute Triangle.
The Square's sad lot she has long forgot,
And his passionate pretensions . . .
For she dotes on her kids-Oh such cute Pyramids
In a world of three dimensions.

Robert William Service

May Miracle

On this festive first of May,
Wending wistfully my way
Three sad sights I saw today.

The first was such a lovely lad
He lit with grace the sordid street;
Yet in a monk's robe he was clad,
With tonsured head and sandalled feet.
Though handsome as a movie star
His eyes had holiness in them,
As if he saw afaint, afar
A stable-stall in Bethlehem.

The second was a crippled maid
Who gazed and gazed with eager glance
Into a window that displayed
The picture of a ballet dance.
And as she leaned on crutches twain,
Before that poster garland-gay
She looked so longingly and vain
I thought she'd never go away.

The last one was a sightless man
Who to the tune of a guitar
Caught coppers in a dingy can,
Patient and sad as blind men are.
So old and grey and grimy too,
His fingers fumbled on the strings,
As emptily he looked at you,
And sang as only sorrow sings.

Then I went home and had a dream
That seemed fantastical to me...
I saw the youth with eye agleam
Put off his robe and dance with glee.
The maid her crutches threw away;
Her withered limbs seemed shapely fine;
And there the two with radiance gay
Divinely danced in soft entwine:

While the blind man, his sight restored,
Guitared the Glory of the Lord.

Robert William Service

Mazie's Ghost

In London City I evade
For charming Burlington Arcade -
For thee in youth I met a maid
 By name of Mazie,
Who lost no time in telling me
The Ritz put up a topping tea,
But having only shillings three
 My smile was hazy.

:Instead," said I, "it might be sport
To take a bus to Hampton Court,"
(Her manner, I remarked, was short,)
 But she assented.
We climbed on top, and all the way
I held her hand, I felt quite gay,
Bu Mazie, I regret to say,
 Seemed discontented.

In fact we almost had a tiff.
It's true it rained and she was stiff,
And all she did was sneeze and sniff
 And shudder coldly.
So I said: "Mazie, there's the maze;
Let's frolic in its leafy ways,"
And buying tickets where one pays
 I entered boldly.

The, as the game is, we were lots;
We dashed and darted, crissed and crossed,
But Mazie she got vexed and sauced
 Me rather smartly.
There wasn't but us two about;
We hollered, no one heard our shout;
The rain poured down: "Oh let's get out,"
 Cried Mazie tartly.

"Keep cool, says I. "You fool," says she;
"I'm sopping wet, I want my tea,
Please take me home," she wailed to me

In accents bitter.
Again we tried, this way and that,
Yet came to where we started at,
And Mazie acted like a cat,
A champion spitter.

She stomped and romped till all was blue,
Then sought herself to find the clue,
And when I saw her next 'twas through
A leafy screening;
"Come on, she cooed, "and join me here;
You'll take me to the Savoy, dear,
And Heidsieck shall our spirits cheer."
I got her meaning.

And yet I sought her everywhere;
I hurried here, I scurried there,
I took each likely lane, I swar,
As I surmised it:
The suddenly I saw once more,
Confronting me, the exit door,
And I was dashing through before
I realized it.

And there I spied a passing bus.
Thinks I: "It's mean to leave her thus,
But after all her fret and fuss
I can't abide her.
So I sped back to London town
And grubbed alone for half-a-crown,
On steak and kidney pie washed down
With sparkling cider.

But since I left that damsel fair,
The thought she may have perished there,
Of cold, starvation and despair
Nigh drives me crazy.
So, stranger, if you should invade
The charming Burlington Arcade,
Tell me if you behold a shade,
Ghost of a most unhappy maid
By name of Mazie.

Robert William Service

Mc'Clusky's Nell

In Mike Maloney's Nugget bar the hooch was flowin' free,
An' One-eyed Mike was shakin' dice wi' Montreal Maree,
An' roarin' rageful warning when the boys got overwild,
When peekin' through the double door he spied a tiny child.
Then Mike Maloney muttered: "Hell! Now ain't that jest too bad;
It's Dud McClusky's orphen Nell a-lookin' for her dad.
An' him in back, a-lushin' wine wi' Violet de Vere-
Three times I've told the lousy swine to keep away from here."
"Pore leetle sing! He leaves her lone, so he go on ze spree:
I feex her yet, zat Violet," said Montreal Maree.
Now I'm accommodatin' when it comes to scented sin
But when I saw that innocent step in our drunken din,
I felt that I would like to crawl an' hide my head in shame.
An' judgin' by their features all them sourdoughs felt the same.
For there they stood like chunks o' wood, forgettin' how to swear,
An' every glass o' likker was suspended in the air.
For with her hair of sunny silk, and big, blue pansy eyes
She looked jest like an angel child stepped outa paradise.
So then Big Mike, paternal like, took her upon his knee.
"Ze pauv' petite! She ees so sweet," said Montreal Maree.

The kid was mighty scared, we saw, an' peaked an' pale an' sad;
She nestled up to One-eyed Mike jest like he was her dad.
Then he got strokin' of her hair an' she began to sob,
An' there was anger in the air of all that plastered mob,
When in a hush so stark an' strained it seemed to stab the ear,
We heard the lush, plunk-parlour laugh o' Violet de Vere.
Then Montreal Maree arose an' vanished from our sight,
An' soon we heard the sound o' blows suggestin' female fight.
An' when she joined the gang again dishevelly was she:
"Jeezechrize! I fix zat Violet," said Montreal Maree.

Then Barman Bill cam forward with what seemed a glass o' milk:
"It's jest an egg-nog Missy, but it's slick an' smooth as silk."
An' as the kiddy slowly sipped wi' gaze o' glad surprise,
Them fifty sozzled sourdoughs uttered fifty happy sighs.
Then Ragtime Joe swung on his stool an' soft began to play
A liltin' tune that made ye think o' daffydills in May;
An' Gumboot Jones in solemn tones said: "You should hear her sing;

They've got the cabin next to mine, an' like a bird in Spring,
She fills that tumble-down old shack wi' simple melodee."
"Maybe she sing a song for us," said Montreal Maree.

Now I don't hold wi' mushy stuff, tear-jerkin' ain't my line,
Yet somehow that kid's singin' sent the shivers down my spine;
An' all them salted sourdoughs sighed, an' every eye was dim
For what she sang upon the bar was just a simple hymn;
Somethin' about "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,"
My Mother used to sing it - say, I listened bleary-eyed.
That childish treble was so sweet, so clear, so tender true,
It seemed to grip you by the heart an' did queer things to you.
It made me think o' childhood days from sin an' sorrow free:
"Zat child, she make me want to cry," said Montreal Maree.

Then up spoke One-eyed Mike: "What can't with us let her abide;
For her dear Mother's sake we gotta send that kid outside.
Ye know this camp's a den o' sin, ye know that Dud's no dice -
Let's stake her to a convent school, an' have her brought up nice."
An' so them bearded sourdoughs crowded round an' on an' all,
Dug down an' flung upon the bar their nuggets great and small.
"I guess we got a thousand bucks," exulted One-eyed Mike;
"You bastards are a credit to the camp of Lucky Strike."
"You see zis leetle silver cross my mozzaire give to me -
Look, boys, I hang it on zee gosse," said Montreal Maree.

Time marches on; that little Nell is now a famous star,
An' yet she got her singin' start on Mike Maloney's bar.
Aye it was back in ninety-eight she made her first dayboo,
An' of that audience to-day are left but only two.
For all them bibulous sourdoughs have bravely passed away.
An' Lucky Strike is jest another ghost town to-day.
But Nell now sings in opera, we saw her in Boheem;
'Twas at a high-toned matinay, an' say! she was a dream.
So also thought the white-haired dame a-sittin' down by me -
My lovin' spouse that once was known as Montreal Maree.

Robert William Service

Men Of The High North

Men of the High North, the wild sky is blazing;
Islands of opal float on silver seas;
Swift splendors kindle, barbaric, amazing;
Pale ports of amber, golden argosies.
Ringed all around us the proud peaks are glowing;
Fierce chiefs in council, their wigwam the sky;
Far, far below us the big Yukon flowing,
Like threaded quicksilver, gleams to the eye.

Men of the High North, you who have known it;
You in whose hearts its splendors have abode;
Can you renounce it, can you disown it?
Can you forget it, its glory and its goad?
Where is the hardship, where is the pain of it?
Lost in the limbo of things you've forgot;
Only remain the guerdon and gain of it;
Zest of the foray, and God, how you fought!

You who have made good, you foreign faring;
You money magic to far lands has whirled;
Can you forget those days of vast daring,
There with your soul on the Top o' the World?
Nights when no peril could keep you awake on
Spruce boughs you spread for your couch in the snow;
Taste all your feasts like the beans and the bacon
Fried at the camp-fire at forty below?

Can you remember your huskies all going,
Barking with joy and their brushes in air;
You in your parka, glad-eyed and glowing,
Monarch, your subjects the wolf and the bear?
Monarch, your kingdom unravished and gleaming;
Mountains your throne, and a river your car;
Crash of a bull moose to rouse you from dreaming;
Forest your couch, and your candle a star.

You who this faint day the High North is luring
Unto her vastness, taintlessly sweet;
You who are steel-braced, straight-lipped, enduring,

Dreadless in danger and dire in defeat:
Honor the High North ever and ever,
Whether she crown you, or whether she slay;
Suffer her fury, cherish and love her--
He who would rule he must learn to obey.

Men of the High North, fierce mountains love you;
Proud rivers leap when you ride on their breast.
See, the austere sky, pensive above you,
Dons all her jewels to smile on your rest.
Children of Freedom, scornful of frontiers,
We who are weaklings honor your worth.
Lords of the wilderness, Princes of Pioneers,
Let's have a rouse that will ring round the earth.

Robert William Service

Michael

"There's something in your face, Michael, I've seen it all the day;
There's something quare that wasn't there when first ye wint away. . . ."

"It's just the Army life, mother, the drill, the left and right,
That puts the stiffenin' in yer spine and locks yer jaw up tight. . . ."

"There's something in your eyes, Michael, an' how they stare and stare --
You're lookin' at me now, me boy, as if I wasn't there. . . ."

"It's just the things I've seen, mother, the sights that come and come,
A bit o' broken, bloody pulp that used to be a chum. . . ."

"There's something on your heart, Michael, that makes ye wake at night,
And often when I hear ye moan, I trimble in me fright. . . ."

"It's just a man I killed, mother, a mother's son like me;
It seems he's always hauntin' me, he'll never let me be. . . ."

"But maybe he was bad, Michael, maybe it was right
To kill the inimy you hate in fair and honest fight. . . ."

"I did not hate at all, mother; he never did me harm;
I think he was a lad like me, who worked upon a farm. . . ."

"And what's it all about, Michael; why did you have to go,
A quiet, peaceful lad like you, and we were happy so? . . ."

"It's thim that's up above, mother, it's thim that sits an' rules;
We've got to fight the wars they make, it's us as are the fools. . . ."

"And what will be the end, Michael, and what's the use, I say,
Of fightin' if whoever wins it's us that's got to pay? . . ."

"Oh, it will be the end, mother, when lads like him and me,
That sweat to feed the ones above, decide that we'll be free. . . ."

"And when will that day come, Michael, and when will fightin' cease,
And simple folks may till their soil and live and love in peace? . . ."

"It's coming soon and soon, mother, it's nearer every day,
When only men who work and sweat will have a word to say;
When all who earn their honest bread in every land and soil
Will claim the Brotherhood of Man, the Comradeship of Toil;
When we, the Workers, all demand: `What are we fighting for?' . . .
Then, then we'll end that stupid crime, that devil's madness -- War."

Robert William Service

Mike

My lead dog Mike was like a bear;
I reckon he was grizzly bred,
For when he reared up in the air
Ho over-topped me by a head.
He'd cuff me with his hefty paws,
Jest like a puppy actin' cute,
And I would swear: by Gosh! he was
The world's most mighty malemute.

But oh the grub that dog could eat!
Yet he was never belly-tight;
It almost broke me buying meat
To satisfy his appetite.
Then came a change I wondered at:
Returning when the dawn was dim,
He seemed mysteriously fat,
And scorned the bones I'd saved for him.

My shack was near the hospital,
Wherein there laboured Nurse Louise,
Who was to me a little pal
I planned in every way to please.
As books and sweets for her I bought,
My mug she seemed to kindo' like;
But Mike - he loved her quite a lot,
And she was very fond of Mike.

Strolling with her as moonlight gleamed,
I saw a strand of cotton trail
From Mike, the which unseemly seemed
To have its source behind his tail.
I trod on it with chagrin grim,
And with a kick his absence urged;
But as he ran, from out of him
Such yards and yards of lint emerged.

And then on me the truth did dawn
Beyond the shadow of a doubt:
That poor dam dog was gorged upon

The poultices threw out. . . .
So "love my dog love me," I thought,
And seized the moment to propose . . .
Mike's dead, but in our garden lot
He's manure for a big dog-rose.

Robert William Service

Milking Time

There's a drip of honeysuckle in the deep green lane;
There's old Martin jogging homeward on his worn old wain;
There are cherry petals falling, and a cuckoo calling, calling,
And a score of larks (God bless 'em) . . . but it's all pain, pain.
For you see I am not really there at all, not at all;
For you see I'm in the trenches where the crump-crumps fall;
And the bits o' shells are screaming and it's only blessed dreaming
That in fancy I am seeming back in old Saint Pol.

Oh I've thought of it so often since I've come down here;
And I never dreamt that any place could be so dear;
The silvered whinstone houses, and the rosy men in blouses,
And the kindly, white-capped women with their eyes spring-clear.
And mother's sitting knitting where her roses climb,
And the angelus is calling with a soft, soft chime,
And the sea-wind comes caressing, and the light's a golden blessing,
And Yvonne, Yvonne is guessing that it's milking time.

Oh it's Sunday, for she's wearing of her broidered gown;
And she draws the pasture pickets and the cows come down;
And their feet are powdered yellow, and their voices honey-mellow,
And they bring a scent of clover, and their eyes are brown.
And Yvonne is dreaming after, but her eyes are blue;
And her lips are made for laughter, and her white teeth too;
And her mouth is like a cherry, and a dimple mocking merry
Is lurking in the very cheek she turns to you.

So I walk beside her kindly, and she laughs at me;
And I heap her arms with lilac from the lilac tree;
And a golden light is welling, and a golden peace is dwelling,
And a thousand birds are telling how it's good to be.
And what are pouting lips for if they can't be kissed?
And I've filled her arms with blossom so she can't resist;
And the cows are sadly straying, and her mother must be saying
That Yvonne is long delaying . . . God! How close that missed.

A nice polite reminder that the Boche are nigh;
That we're here to fight like devils, and if need-be die;
That from kissing pretty wenches to the frantic firing-benches

Of the battered, tattered trenches is a far, far cry.
Yet still I'm sitting dreaming in the glare and grime;
And once again I'm hearing of them church-bells chime;
And how I wonder whether in the golden summer weather
We will fetch the cows together when it's milking time. . . .

(English voice, months later): --

"Ow Bill! A rottin' Frenchy. Whew! 'E ain't 'arf prime."

Robert William Service

Miracles

Each time that I switch on the light
A Miracle it seems to me
That I should rediscover sight
And banish dark so utterly.
One moment I am bleakly blind,
The next--exultant life I find.

Below the sable of the sky
My eyelids double darkness make.
Sleep is divine, yet oh how I
Am glad with wonder to awake!
To welcome, glimmery and wan
The mighty Miracle of Dawn.

For I've mad moments when I seem,
With all the marvel of a child,
To dwell within a world of dream,
To sober fact unreconciled.
Each simple act has struck me thus--
Incredibly miraculous.

When everything I see and do
So magical can seem to me,
How vain it is to seek the True,
The riddle of Reality . . .
So let me with joy lyrical
Proclaim all Life a Miracle!

Robert William Service

Miss Mischievous

Miss Don't-do-this and Don't-do-that
Has such a sunny smile
You cannot help but chuckle at
Her cuteness and her guile.
Her locks are silken floss of gold,
Her eyes are pansy blue:
Maybe of years to eighty old
The best is two.

Miss Don't-do-this and Don't-do-that
To roguishness is fain;
To guard that laughter-loving brat
Is quite a strain;
But when she tires of prank and play
And says good-night,
I'm longing for another day
Of child delight.

Miss Don't-do-this and Don't-do-that
Will grow up soon.
I hope she'll never throw her hat
Athwart the moon.
Yet I'll be sorrowful indeed,
Remembering a day
Before she learned to humbly heed
The word OBEY.

Robert William Service

Missis Moriarty's Boy

Missis Moriarty called last week, and says she to me, says she:

"Sure the heart of me's broken entirely now -- it's the fortunate woman you are;

You've still got your Dinnis to cheer up your home, but me Patsy boy where is he?

Lyin' alone, cold as a stone, kilt in the weariful wahr.

Oh, I'm seein' him now as I looked on him last, wid his hair all curly and bright,

And the wonderful, tenderful heart he had, and his eyes as he wint away,
Shinin' and lookin' down on me from the pride of his proper height:

Sure I'll remember me boy like that if I live to me dyin' day."

And just as she spoke them very same words me Dinnis came in at the door,

Came in from McGonigle's ould shebeen, came in from drinkin' his pay;

And Missis Moriarty looked at him, and she didn't say anny more,

And she wrapped her head in her ould black shawl, and she quietly wint away.

And what was I thinkin', I ask ye now, as I put me Dinnis to bed,

Wid him ravin' and cursin' one half of the night, as cold by his side I sat;

Was I thinkin' the poor ould woman she was wid her Patsy slaughtered and dead?

Was I weepin' for Missis Moriarty? I'm not so sure about that.

Missis Moriarty goes about wid a shinin' look on her face;

Wid her grey hair under her ould black shawl, and the eyes of her mother-mild;
Some say she's a little bit off her head; but anyway it's the case,

Her timper's so swate that you nivver would tell she'd be losin' her only child.

And I think, as I wait up ivery night for me Dinnis to come home blind,

And I'm hearin' his stumblin' foot on the stair along about half-past three:

Sure there's many a way of breakin' a heart, and I haven't made up me mind --

Would I be Missis Moriarty, or Missis Moriarty me?

Robert William Service

Mistinguette

He was my one and only love;
My world was mirror for his face.
We were as close as hand and glove,
Until he came with smiling grace
To say: 'We must be wise, my dear.
You are the idol of today,
But I too plan a proud career,--
Let's kiss and go our way.'

And then he soared to sudden fame,
And even queens applauded him.
A halo glorified his name
That dust of time may never dim.
And me,--I toured golden Brazil,
Yet as gay mobs were cheering me,
The sun seemed black, the brilliance chill,
My triumph mockery.

Today if I should say: 'Hello!'
He'd say: 'How are you?' I'd say: 'Fine.'
Yet never shall he see the woe,
The wanness of my frail decline.
I love him now and always will.
Oh may his star be long to set!
My Maurice is an idol still,--
What wreaths for Mistinguette!

Robert William Service

Montreal Maree

You've heard of Belching Billy, likewise known as Windy Bill,
As punk a chunk of Yukon scum as ever robbed a sluice;
A satellite of Soapy Smith, a capper and a shill,
A slimy tribute-taker from the Ladies on the Loose.
But say, you never heard of how he aimed my gore to spill
(That big gorilla gunnin' for a little guy like me,)
A-howlin' like a malamute an' ravin' he would drill
Me full of holes and all because of Montreal Maree.

Now Spike Mahoney's Bar was stiff with roarin' drunks,
And I was driftin' lonesome-like, scarce knowin' what to do,
So come I joined a poker game and dropped a hundred plunks,
And bein' broke I begged of Spike to take my I.O.U.
Says he: "Me lad, I'll help ye out, but let me make this clear:
If you you don't pay by New year's day your wage I'll garnishee."
So I was broodin' when I heard a whisper in my ear:
"What ees zee trouble, leetle boy?" said Montreal Maree.

Now dance-hall gels is good and bad, but most is in between;
Yeh, some is scum and some is dumb, and some is just plumb cold;
But of straight-shootin' Dawson dames Maree was rated queen,
As pretty as a pansy, wi' a heart o' Hunker gold.
And so although I didn't know her more that passin' by,
I told how Spike would seek my Boss, and jobless I would be;
She listened sympathetic like: "Zut! Baby, don't you cry;
I lend to you zee hundred bucks," said Montreal Maree.

Now though I zippered up my mug somehow the story spread
That I was playin' poker and my banker was Maree;
And when it got to Windy Bill, by Golly, he saw red,
And reachin' for his shootin' iron he started after me.
For he was batty for that babe and tried to fence her in.
And if a guy got in his way, say, he was set to kill;
So fortified with barbwire hooch and wickeder than sin;
"I'll plug that piker full of lead," exploded Windy Bill.

That night, a hundred smackers saved, with joy I started out
To seek my scented saviour in her cabin on the hill;
But barely had I paid my debt, when suddenly a shout . . .

I peered from out the window, and behold! 'twas Windy Bill.
He whooped and swooped and raved and waved his gun as he drew near.
Now he was kickin' in the door, no time was there to flee;
No place to hide: my doom was sealed . . . then sotly in my ear:
"Quick! creep beneez my petticoat," said Montreal Maree.

So pale as death I held my breath below that billowed skirt,
And a she sat I wondered at her voice so calm and clear;
Serene and still she spoke to Bill like he was so much dirt:
"Espèce de skunk! You jus' beeeg drunk. You see no man in here."
Then Bill began to cuss and ran wild shootin' down the hiss,
And all was hushed, and how I wished that bliss could ever be,
When up she rose in dainty pose beside the window sill:
"He spill hees gun, run Baby, run," cried Montreal Maree.

I've heard it said that she got wed and made a wonder wife.
I guess she did; that careless kid had mother in her heart.
But anyway I'll always say she saved my blasted life,
For other girls may come and go, and each may play their part:
But if I live a hundred years I'll not forget the thrill,
The rapture of that moment when I kissed a dimpled knee,
And safely mocked the murderous menace of Windy Bill,
Snug hid beneath the petticoat of Montreal Maree.

Robert William Service

Moon Song

A child saw in the morning skies
The dissipated-looking moon,
And opened wide her big blue eyes,
And cried: "Look, look, my lost balloon!"
And clapped her rosy hands with glee:
"Quick, mother! Bring it back to me."

A poet in a lilled pond
Espied the moon's reflected charms,
And ravished by that beauty blonde,
Leapt out to clasp her in his arms.
And as he'd never learnt to swim,
Poor fool! that was the end of him.

A rustic glimpsed amid the trees
The bluff moon caught as in a snare.
"They say it do be made of cheese,"
Said Giles, "and that a chap bides there. . . .
That Blue Boar ale be strong, I vow --
The lad's a-winkin' at me now."

Two lovers watched the new moon hold
The old moon in her bright embrace.
Said she: "There's mother, pale and old,
And drawing near her resting place."
Said he: "Be mine, and with me wed,"
Moon-high she stared . . . she shook her head.

A soldier saw with dying eyes
The bleared moon like a ball of blood,
And thought of how in other skies,
So pearly bright on leaf and bud
Like peace its soft white beams had lain;
Like Peace! . . . He closed his eyes again.

Child, lover, poet, soldier, clown,
Ah yes, old Moon, what things you've seen!
I marvel now, as you look down,
How can your face be so serene?

And tranquil still you'll make your round,
Old Moon, when we are underground.

Robert William Service

Moon-Lover

I

The Moon is like a ping-pong ball;
I lean against the orchard wall,
And see it soar into the void,
A silky sphere of celluloid.

Then fairy fire enkindles it,
Like gossamer by taper lit,
Until it glows above the trees
As mellow as a Cheddar cheese.

And up and up I watch it press
Into appalling loneliness;
Like realms of ice without a stain,
A corpse Moon come to life again.

Ruthless it drowns a sturdy star
That seeks its regal way to bar;
Seeming with conscious power to grow,
And sweeter, purer, gladder glow.

Dreaming serenely up the sky
Until exultantly on high,
It shimmers with superb delight,
The silver navel of the night.

II

I have a compact to commune
A monthly midnight with the Moon;
Into its face I stare and stare,
And find sweet understanding there.

As quiet as a toad I sit
And tell my tale of days to it;
The tessellated yarn I've spun
In thirty spells of star and sun.

And the Moon listens pensively,
As placid as a lamb to me;
Until I think there's just us two
In silver world of mist and dew.

In all of spangled space, but I
To stare moon-struck into the sky;
Of billion beings I alone
To praise the Moon as still as stone.

And seal a bond between us two,
Closer than mortal ever knew;
For as mute masses I intone
The Moon is mine and mine alone.

III

To know the Moon as few men may,
One must be just a little fey;
And for our friendship's sake I'm glad
That I am just a trifle mad.

And one with all the wild, wise things,
The furtive folk of fur and wings,
That hold the Moon within their eyes,
And make it nightly sacrifice.

O I will watch the maiden Moon
Dance on the sea with silver shoon;
But with the Queen Moon I will keep
My tryst when all the world's asleep.

As I have kept by land and sea
That tryst for half a century;
Entranced in sibylline suspense
Beyond a world of common-sense.

Until one night the Moon alone
Will look upon a graven stone. . . .
I wonder will it miss me then,
Its lover more than other men?

Or will my wistful ghost be there,
Down ages dim to stare and stare,
On silver nights without a stir--
The Moon's Eternal Worshipper?

Robert William Service

Mud

Mud is Beauty in the making,
Mud is melody awaking;
Laughter, leafy whisperings,
Butterflies with rainbow wings;
Baby babble, lover's sighs,
Bobolink in lucent skies;
Ardours of heroic blood
All stem back to Matrix Mud.

Mud is mankind in the moulding,
Heaven's mystery unfolding;
Miracles of mighty men,
Raphael's brush and Shakespear's pen;
Sculpture, music, all we owe
Mozart, Michael Angelo;
Wonder, worship, dreaming spire,
Issue out of primal mire.

In the raw, red womb of Time
Man evolved from cosmic slime;
And our thaumaturgic day
Had its source in ooze and clay . . .
But I have not power to see
Such stupendous alchemy:
And in star-bright lily bud
Lo! I worship Mother Mud.

Robert William Service

Munition Maker

I am the Cannon King, behold!
I perish on a throne of gold.
With forest far and turret high,
Renowned and rajah-rich am I.
My father was, and his before,
With wealth we owe to war on war;
But let no potentate be proud . . .
There are no pockets in a shroud.

By nature I am mild and kind,
To gentleness and ruth inclined;
And though the pheasants over-run
My woods I will not touch a gun.
Yet while each monster that I forge
Thunders destruction from its gorge.
Death's whisper is, I vow, more loud . . .
There are no pockets in a shroud.

My time is short, my ships at sea
Already seem like ghosts to me;
My millions mock me I am poor
As any beggar at my door.
My vast dominion I resign,
Six feet of earth to claim is mine,
Brooding with shoulders bitter-bowed . . .
There are no pockets in a shroud.

Dear God, let me purge my heart,
And be of heaven's hope a part!
Flinging my fortune's foul increase
To fight for pity, love and peace.
Oh that I could with healing fare,
And pledged to poverty and prayer
Cry high above the cringing crowd:
"Ye fools! Be not Mammon cowed . . .
There are no pockets in a shroud."

Robert William Service

Murderers

He was my best and oldest friend.
I'd known him all my life.
And yet I'm sure towards the end
He knew I loved his wife,
And wonder, wonder if it's why
He came so dreadfully to die.

He drove his car at racing speed
And crashed into a tree.
How could he have so little heed?
A skillful driver he.
I think he must have found that day
Some love-letters that went astray.

I looked into the woman's eyes
And there I saw she knew.
There was no shadow of surmise, -
For her himself he slew:
That he might leave her free to wed
The "me" she worshipped in his stead.

She whispered as she bade me go:
"I think he found us out."
And in her face the hate and woe
Was his revenge, no doubt.
Life cannot link us . . . though glad-green
His grave - he stands between.

Robert William Service

Music In The Bush

O'er the dark pines she sees the silver moon,
And in the west, all tremulous, a star;
And soothing sweet she hears the mellow tune
Of cow-bells jangled in the fields afar.

Quite listless, for her daily stent is done,
She stands, sad exile, at her rose-wreathed door,
And sends her love eternal with the sun
That goes to gild the land she'll see no more.

The grave, gaunt pines imprison her sad gaze,
All still the sky and darkling drearily;
She feels the chilly breath of dear, dead days
Come sifting through the alders eerily.

Oh, how the roses riot in their bloom!
The curtains stir as with an ancient pain;
Her old piano gleams from out the gloom
And waits and waits her tender touch in vain.

But now her hands like moonlight brush the keys
With velvet grace -- melodious delight;
And now a sad refrain from over seas
Goes sobbing on the bosom of the night;

And now she sings. (O! singer in the gloom,
Voicing a sorrow we can ne'er express,
Here in the Farness where we few have room
Unshamed to show our love and tenderness,

Our hearts will echo, till they beat no more,
That song of sadness and of motherland;
And, stretched in deathless love to England's shore,
Some day she'll hearken and she'll understand.)

A prima-donna in the shining past,
But now a mother growing old and gray,
She thinks of how she held a people fast
In thrall, and gleaned the triumphs of a day.

She sees a sea of faces like a dream;
She sees herself a queen of song once more;
She sees lips part in rapture, eyes a gleam;
She sings as never once she sang before.

She sings a wild, sweet song that throbs with pain,
The added pain of life that transcends art --
A song of home, a deep, celestial strain,
The glorious swan-song of a dying heart.

A lame tramp comes along the railway track,
A grizzled dog whose day is nearly done;
He passes, pauses, then comes slowly back
And listens there -- an audience of one.

She sings -- her golden voice is passion-fraught,
As when she charmed a thousand eager ears;
He listens trembling, and she knows it not,
And down his hollow cheeks roll bitter tears.

She ceases and is still, as if to pray;
There is no sound, the stars are all alight --
Only a wretch who stumbles on his way,
Only a vagrant sobbing in the night.

Robert William Service

My Ancestors

A barefoot boy I went to school
 To save a cobbler's fee,
For though the porridge pot was full
 A frugal folk were we;
We baked our bannocks, spun our wool,
 And counted each bawbee.

We reft our living from the soil,
 And I was shieling bred;
My father's hands were warped with toil,
 And crooked with grace he said.
My mother made the kettle boil
 As spinning wheel she fed.

My granny smoked a pipe of clay,
 And yammered of her youth;
The hairs upon her chin were grey,
 She had a single tooth;
Her mutch was grimed, I grieve to say,
 For I would speak the truth.

You of your ancestry may boast,--
 Well, here I brag of mine;
For if there is a heaven host
 I hope they'll be in line:
My dad with collie at his heel
 In plaid of tartan stripe;
My mammie with her spinning wheel,
 My granny with her pipe.

Robert William Service

My Bay'Nit

When first I left Blighty they gave me a bay'nit
And told me it 'ad to be smothered wiv gore;
But blimey! I 'aven't been able to stain it,
So far as I've gone wiv the vintage of war.
For ain't it a fraud! when a Boche and yours truly
Gits into a mix in the grit and the grime,
'E jerks up 'is 'ands wiv a yell and 'e's dully
Part of me outfit every time.

Left, right, Hans and Fritz!
Goose step, keep up yer mits!
Oh my, Ain't it a shyme!
Part of me outfit every time.

At toasting a biscuit me bay'nit's a dandy;
I've used it to open a bully beef can;
For pokin' the fire it comes in werry 'andy;
For any old thing but for stickin' a man.
'Ow often I've said: "'Ere, I'm goin' to press you
Into a 'Un till you're seasoned for prime,"
And fiercely I rushes to do it, but bless you!
Part of me outfit every time.

Lor, yus; DON'T they look glad?
Right O! 'Owl Kamerad!
Oh my, always the syme!
Part of me outfit every time.

I'm 'untin' for someone to christen me bay'nit,
Some nice juicy Chewton wot's fightin' in France;
I'm fairly down-'earted -- 'ow CAN yer explain it?
I keeps gettin' prisoners every chance.
As soon as they sees me they ups and surrenders,
Extended like monkeys wot's tryin' to climb;
And I uses me bay'nit -- to slit their suspenders --
Part of me outfit every time.

Four 'Uns; lor, wot a bag!
'Ere, Fritz, sample a fag!

Oh my, ain't it a gyme!
Part of me outfit every time.

Robert William Service

My Bear

I never killed a bear because
I always thought them critters was
 So kindo' cute;
Though round my shack they often came,
I'd raise my rifle and take aim,
 But couldn't shoot.
Yet there was one full six-feet tall
Who came each night and gobbled all
 The grub in sight;
On my pet garden truck he'd feast,
Until I thought I must at least
 Give him a fight.

I put some corn mush in a pan;
He lapped it swiftly down and ran
 With bruin glee;
A second day I did the same,
Again with eagerness he came
 To gulp and flee.
The third day I mixed up a cross
Of mustard and tobasco sauce,
 And ginger too,
Well spiced with pepper of cayenne,
Topped it with treacled mush, and then
 Set out the brew.

He was a huge and husky chap;
I saw him shamble to the trap,
 The dawn was dim.
He squatted down on his behind,
And through the cheese-cloth window-blind
 I peeked at him.
I never saw a bear so glad;
A look of joy seraphic had
 His visage brown;
He slavered, and without suspish-
- Ion hugged that horrid dish,
 And swilled it down.

Just for a moment he was still,
Then he erupted loud and shrill
 With frantic yell;
The picket fence he tried to vault;
He turned a double somersault,
 And ran like hell.
I saw him leap into the lake,
As if a thirst of fire to slake,
 And thrash up foam;
And then he sped along the shore,
And beat his breast with raucous roar,
 And made for home.

I guess he told the folks back there
My homestead was taboo for bear
 For since that day,
Although my pumpkins star the ground,
No other bear has come around,
Nor trace of bruin have I found,
 - Well, let me pray!

Robert William Service

My Book

Before I drink myself to death,
God, let me finish up my Book!
At night, I fear, I fight for breath,
And wake up whiter than a spook;
And crawl off to a bistro near,
And drink until my brain is clear.

Rare Absinthe! Oh, it gives me strength
To write and write; and so I spend
Day after day, until at length
With joy and pain I'll write The End:
Then let this carcass rot; I give
The world my Book -- my Book will live.

For every line is tense with truth,
There's hope and joy on every page;
A cheer, a clarion call to Youth,
A hymn, a comforter to Age:
All's there that I was meant to be,
My part divine, the God in me.

It's of my life the golden sum;
Ah! who that reads this Book of mine,
In stormy centuries to come,
Will dream I rooted with the swine?
Behold! I give mankind my best:
What does it matter, all the rest?

It's this that makes sublime my day;
It's this that makes me struggle on.
Oh, let them mock my mortal clay,
My spirit's deathless as the dawn;
Oh, let them shudder as they look . . .
I'll be immortal in my Book.

And so beside the sullen Seine
I fight with dogs for filthy food,
Yet know that from my sin and pain
Will soar serene a Something Good;

Exultantly from shame and wrong
A Right, a Glory and a Song.

Robert William Service

My Boss

My Boss keeps sporty girls, they say;
His belly's big with cheer.
He squanders in a single day
What I make in a year.
For I must toil with bloody sweat,
And body bent and scarred,
While my whole life-gain he could bet
Upon a single card.

By Boss is big and I am small;
I slave to keep him rich.
He'd look at me like scum and call
Me something of a bitch . . .
Ah no! he wouldn't use that phrase
To designate my mother:
Despite his high and mighty ways,
My Boss is my twin-brother.

Conceived were we in common joy
And born in common pain;
But while I was a brawny boy
My brother stole my brain.
As dumb was I as he was smart,
As blind as he could see;
And so it was, bang from the start
He got the best of me.

I'm one of many in his pay;
From him I draw my dough;
But he would fire me right away
If he should hap to know
A week ago he passed me by;
I heard his wheezing breath,
And in his pouched and blood-shot eye
I saw, stark-staring - Death.

He has his women, cards and wine;
I have my beans and bread.
But oh, the last laugh will be mine

The day I hear he's dead.
Aye, though we shared a common womb
(I gloat to think of it)
Some day I'll stand beside his tomb
And loose my glob and . . . spit.

Robert William Service

My Brothers

While I make rhymes my brother John
Makes shiny shoes which dames try on,
And finding to their fit and stance
They buy and wear with elegance;
But mine is quite another tale,--
 For song there is no sale.

My brother Tom a tailor shop
Is owner of, and ladies stop
To try the models he has planned,
And richly pay, I understand:
Yet not even a dingy dime
Can I make with my rhyme.

My brother Jim sells stuff to eat
Like trotters, tripe and sausage meat.
I dare not by his window stop,
Lest he should offer me a chop;
For though a starving bard I be,
To hell, say I, with charity!

My brothers all are proud of purse,
But though my poverty I curse,
I would not for a diadem
Exchange my lowly lot with them:
A garret and a crust for me,
And reams and dreams of Poetry.

Robert William Service

My Calendar

From off my calendar today
 A leaf I tear;
So swiftly passes smiling May
 Without a care.
And now the gentleness of June
 Will fleetly fly
And I will greet the glamour moon
 Of lush July.

Beloved months so soon to pass,
 Alas, I see
The slim sand silvering the glass
 Of Time for me;
As bodingly midwinter woe
 I wait with rue,
Oh how I grudge the days to go!
 They are so few.

A Calendar's a gayful thing
 To grace a room;
And though with joy of life I sing,
 With secret gloom
I add this merry month of May
 To eighty past,
Thinking each page I tear away
 May be my last.

Robert William Service

My Cancer Cure

"A year to live," the Doctor said;
"There is no cure," and shook his head.
Ah me! I felt as good as dead.
Yet quite resigned to fate was I,
Thinking: "Well, since I have to die
'Twill be beneath the open sky."

And so I sought a wildsome wood
Wherein a lonely cabin stood,
And doomed myself to solitude,
And there was no one I would see:
Each morn a farmer brought to me
My food and hung it on a tree.

Six eggs he brought, and milk a quart,
Enough for wretches of my sort
Whose life is fated to be short.
At night I laid me on the round,
In robe of buffalo wrapped round . . .
'Twas strange that I should sleep so sound.

The farmer man I seldom saw;
I pierced my eggs and sucked them raw;
Sweet mil refreshed my ravaged maw.
So slowly days and weeks went by,
And always I would wonder why
I did not die. . . I did not die.

Thus brooding on my grievous lot
The world of men I fast forgot.
And in the wildwood friends I sought.
The brook bright melodies would sing,
The groves with feathered rapture ring,
And bring me strange, sweet comforting. . . .

Then all at once I knew that I
Miraculously would not die:
When doctors fail let Nature try.

My Centenarian

A hundred years is a lot of living
I've often thought. and I'll know, maybe,
Some day if the gods are good in giving,
And grant me to turn the century.
Yet in all my eighty years of being
I've never known but one ancient man
Who actively feeling, hearing, seeing,
Survived t beyond the hundred span.

Thinking? No, I don't guess he pondered;
He had the brains of a tiny tot,
And in his mind he so often wandered,
I doubted him capable of thought.
He hadn't much to think of anyway,
There in the village of his birth,
Painfully poor in a pinching penny-way,
And grimed with the soiling of Mother Earth.

Then one day motoring past his cottage,
The hovel in which he had been born,
I saw him supping a mess of pottage,
on the sill door, so fail forlorn.
Thinks I: I'll give him a joy that's thrilling,
A spin in my open Cadillac;
And so I asked him, and he was willing,
And I installed him there in the back.

en I put the big bus through its paces,
A hundred miles an hour or more;
And he clutched at me with queer grimaces,
(He's never been in a car before.)
The motor roared and the road was level,
The old chap laughed like an impish boy,
And as I drove like the very devil,
Darn him! he peed his pants with joy.

And so I crowned his long existence
By showing him how our modern speed
Easily can annihilate distance,

And answer to all our modern need.
And I went on my way but little caring,
Until I heard to mild dismay,
His drive had thrilled him beyond all bearing . . .
The poor old devil! - He died next day.

Robert William Service

My Chapel

In idle dream with pipe in hand
I looked across the Square,
And saw the little chapel stand
In eloquent despair.
A ruin of the War it was,
A dreary, dingy mess:
It worried me a lot because
My hobby's happiness.

The shabby Priest said: 'You are kind.
Time leaves us on the lurch,
And there are very few who mind
Their duty to the Church.
But with this precious sum you give,
I'll make it like a gem;
Poor folks will come, our altar live
To comfort them.'

So now my chapel of despair
Is full of joy and song;
I watch the humble go to prayer
Although I don't belong.
An artist and agnostic I
Possess but little pelf;
But oh what blessings it can buy
Them--and myself!

Robert William Service

My Childhood God

When I was small the Lord appeared
 Unto my mental eye
A gentle giant with a beard
 Who homed up in the sky.
But soon that vasty vision blurred,
 And faded in the end,
Till God is just another word
 I cannot comprehend.

I envy those of simple faith
 Who bend the votive knee;
Who do not doubt divinely death
 Will set their spirits free.
Oh could I be like you and you,
 Sweet souls who scan this line,
And by dim altar worship too
 A Deity Divine!

Alas! Mid passions that appal
 I ask with bitter woe
Is God responsible for all
 Our horror here below?
He made the hero and the saint,
 But did He also make
The cannibal in battle paint,
 The shark and rattlesnake?

If I believe in God I should
 Believe in Satan too;
The one the source of all our good,
 The other of our rue . . .
Oh could I second childhood gain!
 For then it might be, I
Once more would see that vision plain,--
 Fond Father in the sky.

Robert William Service

My Coffin

Deeming that I was due to die
I framed myself a coffin;
So full of graveyard zeal was I,
I set the folks a-laughing.
I made it snugly to my fit,
My joinering was honest;
And sometimes in it I would sit,
And fancy I was non est.

I stored it on my cabin shelf
Forever to remind me,
When I was tickled with myself,
That Death was close behind me.
Let's be prepared, I used to say,
E're in the Dark we launch us:
And so with boding day by day
I kept me coffin-conscious.

Then came that winter dark as doom,
No firing wood had I;
My shack was icy as a tomb
And I was set to die.
But e'er the losing of my wits
I saw that coffin there,
S smashing the damned thing to bits
I made a gorgeous flare.

I never saw a flame so bright,
So goldenly divine,
As starred the blackness of the night
That boneyard box of mine.
And now I go forth coffin-shy,
With no more carnal fears,
For radiantly sure am I
I'll stack a hundred years.

Robert William Service

My Consolation

'Nay; I don't need a hearing aid'
I told Mama-in-law;
'For if I had I'd be afraid
Of your eternal jaw;
Although at me you often shout,
I'm undisturbed;
To tell the truth I can't make out
A single word.'

And it's the same with others who
Attempt to gab at me;
I listen to their point of view
And solemnly agree.
To story stale and silly joke
Stone deaf's my ear;
Each day a dozen stupid folk
I fail to hear.

So silence that should be my grief
Is my escape and shield;
From spiteful speech and base relief
My aural sense is sealed.
And in my cosy cot of peace
I close the door.
Praising the gods for rich relief
From fool and bore.

Robert William Service

My Cross

I wrote a poem to the moon
But no one noticed it;
Although I hoped that late or soon
Someone would praise a bit
Its purity and grace forlone,
Its beauty tulip-cool...
But as my poem died still-born,
I felt a fool.

I wrote a verse of vulgar trend
Spiced with an oath or two;
I tacked a snapper at the end
And called it Dan McGrew.
I spouted it to bar-room boys,
Full fifty years away;
Yet still with rude and ribald noise
It lives today.

'Tis bitter truth, but there you are-
That's how a name is made;
Write of a rose, a lark, a star,
You'll never make the grade.
But write of gutter and of grime,
Of pimp and prostitute,
The multitude will read your rhyme,
And pay to boot.

So what's the use to burn and bleed
And strive for beauty's sake?
No one your poetry will read,
Your heart will only break.
But set your song in vulgar pitch,
If rhyme you will not rue,
And make your heroine a bitch...
Like Lady Lou.

Robert William Service

My Cuckoo Clock

I bought a cuckoo clock
And glad was I
To hear its tick and tock,
Its dulcet cry.
But Jones, whose wife is young
And pretty too,
Winced when that bird gave tongue:
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

I have a lady friend
Whom I would wed,
For dalliance should end
In bridal bed.
Until the thought occurred:
Can she be true?
And then I heard that bird:
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Though ignorance is bliss
And love be blind,
Faithless may be the kiss
Of womankind.
So now sweet echoes mock
My wish to woo:
Confound that cursed clock!
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Robert William Service

My Dentist

Sitting in the dentist's chair,
Wishing that I wasn't there,
To forget and pass the time
I have made this bit of rhyme.

I had a rendez-vous at ten;
I rushed to get in line,
But found a lot of dames and men
Had waited there since nine;
I stared at them, then in an hour
Was blandly ushered in;
But though my face was grim and sour
He met me with a grin.

He told me of his horse of blood,
And how it "also ran",
He plans to own a racing stud -
(He seems a wealthy man.)
And then he left me there until
I growled: "At any rate,
I hope he'll not charge in his bill
For all the time I wait."

His wife has sables on her back,
With jewels she's ablaze;
She drives a stately Cadillac,
And I'm the mug who pays:
At least I'm one of those who peer
With pessimistic gloom
At magazines of yester-year
In his damn waiting room.

I am a Christian Scientist;
I don't believe in pain;
My dentist had a powerful wrist,
He tries and tries in vain
To make me grunt or groan or squeal
With probe or rasp or drill. . . .
But oh, what agony I feel

When HE PRESENTS HIS BILL!

Sitting in the dental chair,
Don't you wish you weren't there:
Well, your cup of woe to fill,
Just think of his infernal bill.

Robert William Service

My Dog

'Twas in a pub just off the Strand
When I was in my cups,
There passed a bloke with in his hand
Two tiny puling pups;
And one was on me with a bound,
Seeking to lick my face,
And so I bought him for a pound
And took him to my place.

Three acres by the shore I own,
A hut, a pint wood;
And there for fifteen years alone
He shared my solitude.
It was his own, his only world,
And when with hunting spent,
Each night beside my bed he curled,
And slept in sheer content.

My dog is dead. Though lone I be
I'll never have another;
For with his master-worship he
Was closer than a brother.
My foot is frail and I am old,
Yet how my heart can pity
Pups straining on a short leash-hold
And pent up in the city.

From all thought of self above,
And purged of sex emotion,
I know no form of living love
So deep as dogs devotion.
I have no hope at all of heaven,
I've lived in sin and strife;
But thank God! I at least have given
One dog a happy life.

Robert William Service

My Dog's My Boss

Each day when it's anighing three
 Old Dick looks at the clock,
Then proudly brings my stick to me
 To mind me of our walk.
And in his doggy rapture he
 Does everything but talk.

But since I lack his zip and zest
 My old bones often tire;
And so I ventured to suggest
 Today we hug the fire.
But with what wailing he expressed
 The death of his desire!

He gazed at me with eyes of woe
 As if to say: 'Old boy,
You mustn't lose your grip, you know,
 Let us with laughing joy,
On heath and hill six miles or so
 Our legs and lungs employ.'

And then his bark was stilled to a sigh
 He flopped upon the floor;
But such a soft old mug am I
 I threw aside the door;
So gaily, though the wind was high
 We hiked across the moor.

Robert William Service

My Favoured Fare

Some poets sing of scenery;
Some to fair maids make sonnets sweet.
A fig for love and greenery,
Be mine a song of things to eat.
Let brother bards divinely dream,
I'm just plain human, as you see;
And choose to carol such a theme
 As ham and eggs and tea.

Just two fried eggs or maybe three,
With lacy rims and sunside up,
Pink coral ham and amber tea
Poured in a big, fat china cup.
I have no crave for finer fare;
That's just the chuck for chaps like me.
Aye, if I were a millionaire--
 Just ham and eggs and tea.

When of life's fussiness I tire,
And on my skull I wear a cap,
As tartan-shawled beside the fire
I stroke the kitten on my lap:
Give me no broth and chicken breast;
My last repast shall hearty be . . .
Oh how I'll sup with chuckling zest
 On ham and eggs and tea!

Robert William Service

My Favourite Fan

Being a writer I receive
Sweet screeds from folk of every land;
Some are so weird you'd scarce believe,
And some quite hard to understand:
But as a conscientious man
I type my thanks to all I can.

So when I got a foreign scrawl
That spider-webbed across the page,
Said I: "This is the worst of all;
No doubt a child of tender age
Has written it, so I'll be kind,
And send an answer to her mind.

Promptly I typed a nice reply
And thought that it would be the end,
But in due course confused was I
To get a letter signed: Your Friend;
And with it, full of girlish grace,
A snapshot of a winsome face.

"I am afraid," she wrote to me,
"That you must have been sure surprised
At my poor penmanship . . . You see,
My arms and legs are paralyzed:
With pen held in a sort of sheath
I do my writing with my teeth."

Though sadness followed my amaze,
And pity too, I must confess
The look that lit her laughing gaze
Was one of sunny happiness. . . .
Oh spirit of a heroine!
Your smile so tender, so divine,
I pray, may never cease to shine.

Robert William Service

My Feud

I hate my neighbour Widow Green;
I'd like to claw her face;
But if I did she'd make a scene
And run me round the place:
For widows are in way of spleen
A most pugnacious race.

And yet I must do something quick
To keep the hag in line,
Since her red rooster chose to pick
Five lettuce heads of mine:
And so I fed it arsenic
Which it did not decline.

It disappeared, but on my mat
Before a week had sped
I found Mi-mi, my tabby cat
And it was stoney dead;
I diagnosed with weeping that
On strychnine it had fed.

And so I bought a hamburg steak,
Primed it with powdered glass,
And left it for her dog to take
With gulping from the grass:
Since then, although I lie awake
I have not seen it pass.

Well, that's the scoring up to date:
And as I read a text
From Job to justify my hate
I wonder who'll be next?
Somehow I feel that one must die,
Ma Green or I.

Robert William Service

My Foe

A Belgian Priest-Soldier Speaks;

GURR! You cochon! Stand and fight!
Show your mettle! Snarl and bite!
Spawn of an accursed race,
Turn and meet me face to face!
Here amid the wreck and rout
Let us grip and have it out!
Here where ruins rock and reel
Let us settle, steel to steel!
Look! Our houses, how they spit
Sparks from brands your friends have lit.
See! Our gutters running red,
Bright with blood your friends have shed.
Hark! Amid your drunken brawl
How our maidens shriek and call.
Why have you come here alone,
To this hearth's blood-spattered stone?
Come to ravish, come to loot,
Come to play the ghoulish brute.
Ah, indeed! We well are met,
Bayonet to bayonet.
God! I never killed a man:
Now I'll do the best I can.
Rip you to the evil heart,
Laugh to see the life-blood start.
Bah! You swine! I hate you so.
Show you mercy? No! . . . and no! . . .

There! I've done it. See! He lies
Death a-staring from his eyes;
Glazing eyeballs, panting breath,
How it's horrible, is Death!
Plucking at his bloody lips
With his trembling finger-tips;
Choking in a dreadful way
As if he would something say
In that uncouth tongue of his. . . .
Oh, how horrible Death is!

How I wish that he would die!
So unnerved, unmanned am I.
See! His twitching face is white!
See! His bubbling blood is bright.
Why do I not shout with glee?
What strange spell is over me?
There he lies; the fight was fair;
Let me toss my cap in air.
Why am I so silent? Why
Do I pray for him to die?
Where is all my vengeful joy?
Ugh! My foe is but a boy.

I'd a brother of his age
Perished in the war's red rage;
Perished in the Ypres hell:
Oh, I loved my brother well.
And though I be hard and grim,
How it makes me think of him!
He had just such flaxen hair
As the lad that's lying there.
Just such frank blue eyes were his. . . .
God! How horrible war is!

I have reason to be gay:
There is one less foe to slay.
I have reason to be glad:
Yet -- my foe is such a lad.
So I watch in dull amaze,
See his dying eyes a-glaze,
See his face grow glorified,
See his hands outstretched and wide
To that bit of ruined wall
Where the flames have ceased to crawl,
Where amid the crumbling bricks
Hangs a blackebed crucifix.

Now, oh now I understand.
Quick I press it in his hand,
Close his feeble finger-tips,
Hold it to his faltering lips.

As I watch his welling blood
I would stem it if I could.
God of Pity, let him live!
God of Love, forgive, forgive.

* * * *

His face looked strangely, as he died,
Like that of One they crucified.
And in the pocket of his coat
I found a letter; thus he wrote:
The things I've seen! Oh, mother dear,
I'm wondering can God be here?
To-night amid the drunken brawl
I saw a Cross hung on a wall;
I'll seek it now, and there alone
Perhaps I may atone, atone. . . .

Ah no! 'Tis I who must atone.
No other saw but God alone;
Yet how can I forget the sight
Of that face so woeful white!
Dead I kissed him as he lay,
Knelt by him and tried to pray;
Left him lying there at rest,
Crucifix upon his breast.

Not for him the pity be.
Ye who pity, pity me,
Crawling now the ways I trod,
Blood-guilty in sight of God.

Robert William Service

My Friends

The man above was a murderer, the man below was a thief;
And I lay there in the bunk between, ailing beyond belief;
A weary armful of skin and bone, wasted with pain and grief.

My feet were froze, and the lifeless toes were purple and green and gray;
The little flesh that clung to my bones, you could punch it in holes like clay;
The skin on my gums was a sullen black, and slowly peeling away.

I was sure enough in a direful fix, and often I wondered why
They did not take the chance that was left and leave me alone to die,
Or finish me off with a dose of dope--so utterly lost was I.

But no; they brewed me the green-spruce tea, and nursed me there like a child;
And the homicide he was good to me, and bathed my sores and smiled;
And the thief he starved that I might be fed, and his eyes were kind and mild.

Yet they were woefully wicked men, and often at night in pain
I heard the murderer speak of his deed and dream it over again;
I heard the poor thief sorrowing for the dead self he had slain.

I'll never forget that bitter dawn, so evil, askew and gray,
When they wrapped me round in the skins of beasts and they bore me to a sleigh,
And we started out with the nearest post an hundred miles away.

I'll never forget the trail they broke, with its tense, unuttered woe;
And the crunch, crunch, crunch as their snowshoes sank through the crust of the hollow snow;
And my breath would fail, and every beat of my heart was like a blow.

And oftentimes I would die the death, yet wake up to life anew;
The sun would be all ablaze on the waste, and the sky a blighting blue,
And the tears would rise in my snow-blind eyes and furrow my cheeks like dew.

And the camps we made when their strength outplayed and the day was pinched and wan;
And oh, the joy of that blessed halt, and how I did dread the dawn;
And how I hated the weary men who rose and dragged me on.

And oh, how I begged to rest, to rest--the snow was so sweet a shroud;
And oh, how I cried when they urged me on, cried and cursed them aloud;
Yet on they strained, all racked and pained, and sorely their backs were bowed.

And then it was all like a lurid dream, and I prayed for a swift release
From the ruthless ones who would not leave me to die alone in peace;
Till I wakened up and I found myself at the post of the Mounted Police.

And there was my friend the murderer, and there was my friend the thief,
With bracelets of steel around their wrists, and wicked beyond belief:
But when they come to God's judgment seat--may I be allowed the brief.

Robert William Service

My Future

"Let's make him a sailor," said Father,
"And he will adventure the sea."
"A soldier," said Mother, "is rather
What I would prefer him to be."
"A lawyer," said Father, "would please me,
For then he could draw up my will."
"A doctor," said Mother, "would ease me;
Maybe he could give me a pill."

Said Father: "Let's make him a curate,
A Bishop in gaiters to be."
Said Mother: "I couldn't endure it
To have Willie preaching to me."
Said Father: ""Let him be a poet;
So often he's gathering wool."
Said Mother with temper: "Oh stow it!
You know it, a poet's a fool."

Said Farther: "Your son is a duffer,
A stupid and mischievous elf."
Said Mother, who's rather a huffer:
"That's right - he takes after yourself."
Controlling parental emotion
They turned to me, seeking a cue,
And sudden conceived the bright notion
To ask what I wanted to do.

Said I: "my ambition is modest:
A clown in a circus I'd be,
And turn somersaults in the sawdust
With audience laughing at me."
. . . Poor parents! they're dead and decaying,
But I am a clown as you see;
And though in no circus I'm playing,
How people are laughing at me!

Robert William Service

My Garden

The world is sadly sick, they say,
And plagued by woe and pain.
But look! How looms my garden gay,
With blooms in golden reign!
With lyric music in the air,
Of joy fulfilled in song,
I can't believe that anywhere
 Is hate and harm and wrong.

A paradise my garden is,
And there my day is spent;
A steep myself in sunny bliss,
Incredibly content.
Feeling that I am truly part
Of peace so rapt and still,
There's not a care within my heart . . .
 How can the world be ill?

Aye, though the land be sick they say,
And named unto pain,
My garden never was so gay,
So innocent, so sane.
My roses mock at misery,
My thrushes vie in song . . .
When only beauty I can see,
 How can the world be wrong?

Robert William Service

My Garret

Here is my Garret up five flights of stairs;
Here's where I deal in dreams and ply in fancies,
Here is the wonder-shop of all my wares,
My sounding sonnets and my red romances.
Here's where I challenge Fate and ring my rhymes,
And grope at glory -- aye, and starve at times.

Here is my Stronghold: stout of heart am I,
Greeting each dawn as songful as a linnet;
And when at night on yon poor bed I lie
(Blessing the world and every soul that's in it),
Here's where I thank the Lord no shadow bars
My skylight's vision of the valiant stars.

Here is my Palace tapestried with dreams.
Ah! though to-night ten sous are all my treasure,
While in my gaze immortal beauty gleams,
Am I not dowered with wealth beyond all measure?
Though in my ragged coat my songs I sing,
King of my soul, I envy not the king.

Here is my Haven: it's so quiet here;
Only the scratch of pen, the candle's flutter;
Shabby and bare and small, but O how dear!
Mark you -- my table with my work a-clutter,
My shelf of tattered books along the wall,
My bed, my broken chair -- that's nearly all.

Only four faded walls, yet mine, all mine.
Oh, you fine folks, a pauper scorns your pity.
Look, where above me stars of rapture shine;
See, where below me gleams the siren city . . .
Am I not rich? -- a millionaire no less,
If wealth be told in terms of Happiness.

Robert William Service

My Guardian Angel

When looking back I dimly see
The trails my feet have trod,
Some hand divine, it seems to me,
Has pulled the strings with God;
Some angel form has lifeward leaned
When hope for me was past;
Some love sublime has intervened
To save me at the last.

For look you! I was born a fool,
Damnation was my fate;
My lot to drivel and to drool,
Egregious and frutate.
But in the deep of my despair,
When dark my doom was writ,
Some saving hand was always there
to pull me from the Pit.

A Guardian Angel - how absurd!
I scoff at Power Divine.
And yet . . . a someone spoke the word
That willed me from the swine.
And yet, despite my scorn of prayer,
My lack of love or friend,
I know a Presence will be there,
To save me at the end.

Robert William Service

My Hero

Of all the boys with whom I fought
In Africa and Sicily,
Bill was the bravest of the lot
In our dare-devil Company.
That lad would rather die than yield;
His gore he glorified to spill,
And so in every battlefield
A hero in my eyes was Bill.

Then when the bloody war was done,
He moseyed back to our home town,
And there, a loving mother's son,
Like other kids he settled down.
His old girl seemed a shade straight-laced,
For when I called my buddy "Bill,"
She looked at me with some distaste,
Suggesting that his name was "Will."

And then he had to get engaged,
And took unto himself a wife;
And so inevitably caged,
He settled down to wedded life.
He introduced me to his Missis,
But oh I thought her rather silly,
For in between their frequent kisses
She called my hard-boiled here: "Willie."

Now he has long forgot the War,
The which he did a lot to win,
And feeling full of ginger for
He's happy Pop of cherubs twin.
Yet with his air: "Don't care a damn,"
On Main Street he's my hero still . . .
As proud he wheels a double pram
What guy has got the guts of Bill!

Robert William Service

My Holiday

I love the cheery bustle
Of children round the house,
The tidy maids a-hustle,
The chatter of my spouse;
The laughter and the singing,
The joy on every face:
With frequent laughter ringing,
O, Home's a happy place!

Aye, Home's a bit of heaven;
I love it every day;
My line-up of eleven
Combine to make it gay;
Yet when in June they're leaving
For Sandport by the sea,
By rights I should be grieving,
But gosh! I just fell free.

I'm left with parting kisses,
The guardian of the house;
The romp, it's true, one misses,
I'm quiet as a mouse.
In carpet slippers stealing
From room to room alone
I get the strangest feeling
The place is all my own.

It seems to nestle near me,
It whispers in my ear;
My books and pictures cheer me,
Hearth never was so dear.
In peace profound I lap me,
I take no stock of time,
And from the dreams that hap me,
I make (like this) a rhyme.

Oh, I'm ashamed of saying
(And think it's mean of me),
That when the kids are staying

At Sandspot on the sea,
And I evoke them clearly
Disporting in the spray,
I love them still more dearly
Because . . . they're far away.

Robert William Service

My Hour

Day after day behold me plying
My pen within an office drear;
The dullest dog, till homeward hieing,
Then lo! I reign a king of cheer.
A throne have I of padded leather,
A little court of kiddies three,
A wife who smiles whate'er the weather,
A feast of muffins, jam and tea.

The table cleared, a romping battle,
A fairy tale, a "Children, bed,"
A kiss, a hug, a hush of prattle
(God save each little drowsy head!)
A cozy chat with wife a-sewing,
A silver lining clouds that low'r,
Then she too goes, and with her going,
I come again into my Hour.

I poke the fire, I snugly settle,
My pipe I prime with proper care;
The water's purring in the kettle,
Rum, lemon, sugar, all are there.
And now the honest grog is steaming,
And now the trusty briar's aglow:
Alas! in smoking, drinking, dreaming,
How sadly swift the moments go!

Oh, golden hour! 'twixt love and duty,
All others I to others give;
But you are mine to yield to Beauty,
To glean Romance, to greatly live.
For in my easy-chair reclining . . .
I feel the sting of ocean spray;
And yonder wondrously are shining
The Magic Isles of Far Away.

Beyond the comber's crashing thunder
Strange beaches flash into my ken;
On jetties heaped head-high with plunder

I dance and dice with sailor-men.
Strange stars swarm down to burn above me,
Strange shadows haunt, strange voices greet;
Strange women lure and laugh and love me,
And fling their bastards at my feet.

Oh, I would wish the wide world over,
In ports of passion and unrest,
To drink and drain, a tarry rover
With dragons tattooed on my chest,
With haunted eyes that hold red glories
Of foaming seas and crashing shores,
With lips that tell the strangest stories
Of sunken ships and gold moidores;

Till sick of storm and strife and slaughter,
Some ghostly night when hides the moon,
I slip into the milk-warm water
And softly swim the stale lagoon.
Then through some jungle python-haunted,
Or plumed morass, or woodland wild,
I win my way with heart undaunted,
And all the wonder of a child.

The pathless plains shall swoon around me,
The forests frown, the floods appall;
The mountains tiptoe to confound me,
The rivers roar to speed my fall.
Wild dooms shall daunt, and dawns be gory,
And Death shall sit beside my knee;
Till after terror, torment, glory,
I win again the sea, the sea. . . .

Oh, anguish sweet! Oh, triumph splendid!
Oh, dreams adieu! my pipe is dead.
My glass is dry, my Hour is ended,
It's time indeed I stole to bed.
How peacefully the house is sleeping!
Ah! why should I strange fortunes plan?
To guard the dear ones in my keeping --
That's task enough for any man.

So through dim seas I'll ne'er go spoiling;
The red Tortugas never roam;
Please God! I'll keep the pot a-boiling,
And make at least a happy home.
My children's path shall gleam with roses,
Their grace abound, their joy increase.
And so my Hour divinely closes
With tender thoughts of praise and peace.

Robert William Service

My House

I have a house I've lived in long:
I can't recall my going in.
'Twere better bartered for a song
Ere ruin, rot and rust begin.
When it was fresh and fine and fair,
I used it with neglect, I fear;
But now I husband it with care
And cherish it form year to year.

Oh do not put it to the flame
When I have gone, but let the dust,
The honest earth from which it came,
Reclaim it as is only juts.
For when at last I close the door,
And turn the key and go away,
I deed my house forever more
To silence, sleep and slow decay.

My house is old beyond repair,
And soon I must abandon it,
A poor ghost, seeking everywhere
To find a home as fine and fit;
But if I win domain divine
Wherein eternally to dwell,
I'll not forget, O Body Mine!
Life home of Me, I've loved you well.

Robert William Service

My Hundred Books

A thousand books my library
 Contains;
And all are primed, it seems to me
 With brains.
Mine are so few I scratch in thought
 My head;
For just a hundred of the lot
 I've read.

A hundred books, but of the best,
 I can
With wisdom savour and digest
 And scan.
Yet when afar from kin and kith
 In nooks
Of quietness I'm happy with
 Sweet books.

So as nine hundred at me stare
 In vain,
My lack I'm wistfully aware
 Of brain;
Yet as my leave of living ends,
 With looks
Of love I view a hundred friends,
 My books.

Robert William Service

My Husbands

My first I wed when just sixteen
And he was sixty-five.
He treated me like any queen
The years he was alive.
Oh I betrayed him on the sly,
Like any other bitch,
and how I longed for him to die
And leave me young and rich!

My second is a gigolo
I took when I was old;
That he deceives me well I know,
And hungers for my gold.
When I adore each silken hair
That crowns his handsome head,
I'm everlastingly aware
He wishes I were dead.

How I would love my vieux if he
Today were by my side;
My gig would have been daft for me
When I was first a bride.
But for his mother I can pass,
Although I am his wife;
Like father was my first - alas!
The irony of life.

Robert William Service

My Husky Team

I met an ancient man who mused
With Peary to the Pole.
Said I, "In all that land so hushed
What most inspired your soul?"
He looked at me with bleary eye,
He scratched a hoary head:
"You know that Sourdoughs jest cain't lie
So here's the dope," he said.

"That hike was like a devil's dream,
Just blizzards, gales and fogs,
But I was leadin' wi' my team
O' seven husky dogs.
Day after day I steered my sleigh,
Yet spry o' heart was I,
And every night the Northern Light
Danced ballys in the sky.

"Them dogs o' mine seemed to divine
Their mighty destiny.
They howled with joy, and like a boy
I jined them in their glee.
While like a spark from out the dark
Fame spurred us to our goal,
On, on we sped, the winnin' sled
To gain the Pole, the POLE.

"I saw it clear, I raised a cheer,
I knowed the prize was won:
The huskies too, like wind they flew -
Them critters sure could run.
The light was dim, the site was grim,
But sunshine swept my soul,
To see - each husky lift a limb
And...irrigate the Pole."

Robert William Service

My Indian Summer

Here in the Autumn of my days
My life is mellowed in a haze.
Unpleasant sights are none to clear,
Discordant sounds I hardly hear.
Infirmities like buffers soft
Sustain me tranquilly aloft.
I'm deaf to duffers, blind to bores,
Peace seems to percolate my pores.
I fold my hands, keep quiet mind,
In dogs and children joy I find.
With temper tolerant and mild,
Myself you'd almost think a child.
Yea, I have come on pleasant ways
Here in the Autumn of my days.

Here in the Autumn of my days
I can allow myself to laze,
To rest and give myself to dreams:
Life never was so sweet, it seems.
I haven't lost my sense of smell,
My taste-buds never served so well.
I love to eat - delicious food
Has never seemed one half so good.
In tea and coffee I delight,
I smoke and sip my grog at night.
I have a softer sense of touch,
For comfort I enjoy so much.
My skis are far more blues than greys,
Here in the Autumn of my days.

Here in the Autumn of my days
My heart is full of peace and praise.
Yet though I know that Winter's near,
I'll meet and greet it with a cheer.
With friendly books, with cosy fires,
And few but favourite desires,
I'll live from strife and woe apart,
And make a Heaven in my heart.
For Goodness, I have learned, is best,

And should by Kindness be expressed.
And so December with a smile
I'll wait and welcome, but meanwhile,
Blest interlude! The Gods I praise,
For this, the Autumn of my days.

Robert William Service

My Inner Life

'Tis true my garments threadbare are,
 And sorry poor I seem;
But inly I am richer far
 Than any poet's dream.
For I've a hidden life no one
 Can ever hope to see;
A sacred sanctuary none
 May share with me.

Aloof I stand from out the strife,
 Within my heart a song;
By virtue of my inner life
 I to myself belong.
Against man-ruling I rebel,
 Yet do not fear defeat,
For to my secret citadel
 I may retreat.

Oh you who have an inner life
 Beyond this dismal day
With wars and evil rumours rife,
 Go blessedly your way.
Your refuge hold inviolate;
 Unto yourself be true,
And shield serene from sordid fate
 The Real You.

Robert William Service

My Job

I've got a little job on 'and, the time is drawin' nigh;
At seven by the Captain's watch I'm due to go and do it;
I wants to 'ave it nice and neat, and pleasin' to the eye,
And I 'opes the God of soldier men will see me safely through it.
Because, you see, it's somethin' I 'ave never done before;
And till you 'as experience noo stunts is always tryin';
The chances is I'll never 'ave to do it any more:
At seven by the Captain's watch my little job is . . . dyin'.

I've got a little note to write; I'd best begin it now.
I ain't much good at writin' notes, but here goes: "Dearest Mother,
I've been in many 'ot old `do's'; I've scraped through safe some'ow,
But now I'm on the very point of tacklin' another.
A little job of hand-grenades; they called for volunteers.
They picked me out; I'm proud of it; it seems a trifle dicky.
If anythin' should 'appen, well, there ain't no call for tears,
And so . . . I 'opes this finds you well. -- Your werry lovin' Micky."

I've got a little score to settle wiv them swine out there.
I've 'ad so many of me pals done in it's quite upset me.
I've seen so much of bloody death I don't seem for to care,
If I can only even up, how soon the blighters get me.
I'm sorry for them perishers that corpses in a bed;
I only 'opes mine's short and sweet, no linger-longer-lyin';
I've made a mess of life, but now I'll try to make instead . . .
It's seven sharp. Good-bye, old pals! . . . a decent job in dyin'.

Robert William Service

My Library

Like prim Professor of a College
I primed my shelves with books of knowledge;
And now I stand before them dumb,
Just like a child that sucks its thumb,
And stares forlorn and turns away,
With dolls or painted bricks to play.

They glour at me, my tomes of learning.
"You dolt!" they jibe; "you undiscerning
Moronic oaf, you make a fuss,
With highbrow swank selecting us;
Saying: "I'll read you all some day' -
And now you yawn and turn away.

"Unwanted wait we with our store
Of facts and philosophic lore;
The scholarship of all the ages
Snug packed within our uncut pages;
The mystery of all mankind
In part revealed - but you are blind.

"You have no time to read, you tell us;
Oh, do not think that we are jealous
Of all the trash that wins your favour,
The flimsy fiction that you savour:
We only beg that sometimes you
Will spare us just an hour or two.

"For all the minds that went to make us
Are dust if folk like you forsake us,
And they can only live again
By virtue of your kindling brain;
In magice print they packed their best:
Come - try their wisdom to digest. . . ."

Said I: "Alas! I am not able;
I lay my cards upon the table,
And with deep shame and blame avow
I am too old to read you now;

So I will lock you in glass cases
And shun your sad, reproachful faces."

* * * * *

My library is noble planned,
Yet in it desolate I stand;
And though my thousand books I prize,
Feeling a witling in their eyes,
I turn from them in weariness
To wallow in the Daily Press.

For, oh, I never, never will
The noble field of knowledge till:
I pattern words with artful tricks,
As children play with painted bricks,
And realize with futile woe,
Nothing I know - nor want to know.

My library has windowed nooks;
And so I turn from arid books
To vastitude of sea and sky,
And like a child content am I
With peak and plain and brook and tree,
Crying: "Behold! the books for me:
Nature, be thou my Library!"

Robert William Service

My Madonna

I haled me a woman from the street,
Shameless, but, oh, so fair!
I bade her sit in the model's seat
And I painted her sitting there.

I hid all trace of her heart unclean;
I painted a babe at her breast;
I painted her as she might have been
If the Worst had been the Best.

She laughed at my picture and went away.
Then came, with a knowing nod,
A connoisseur, and I heard him say;
"Tis Mary, the Mother of God."

So I painted a halo round her hair,
And I sold her and took my fee,
And she hangs in the church of Saint Hillaire,
Where you and all may see.

Robert William Service

My Masterpiece

It's slim and trim and bound in blue;
Its leaves are crisp and edged with gold;
Its words are simple, stalwart too;
Its thoughts are tender, wise and bold.
Its pages scintillate with wit;
Its pathos clutches at my throat:
Oh, how I love each line of it!
That Little Book I Never Wrote.

In dreams I see it praised and prized
By all, from plowman unto peer;
It's pencil-marked and memorized,
It's loaned (and not returned, I fear);
It's worn and torn and travel-tossed,
And even dusky natives quote
That classic that the world has lost,
The Little Book I Never Wrote.

Poor ghost! For homes you've failed to cheer,
For grieving hearts uncomforted,
Don't haunt me now. . . . Alas! I fear
The fire of Inspiration's dead.
A humdrum way I go to-night,
From all I hoped and dreamed remote:
Too late . . . a better man must write
That Little Book I Never Wrote.

Robert William Service

My Masters

Of Poetry I've been accused,
But much more often I have not;
Oh, I have been so much amused
By those who've put me on the spot,
And measured me by rules above
Those I observe with equal love.

An artisan of verse am I,
Of simple sense and humble tone;
My Thesaurus is handy by,
A rhyming lexicon I own;
Without them I am ill at ease -
What bards would use such aids as these?

Bad poets make good verse, they say;
The Great have not distained to woo
The modest muse of every day;
Read Longfellow and Byron through,
The fabric test - much verse you'll see
Compared with what is poetry.

Small blame; one cannot always soar
To heights of hyaline sublime;
Melodious prose one must deplore,
And fetters of rebellious rhyme:
Keats, Browning - that's another tale,
But even Giants fail and fail.

I've worshipped Ryley, Harte and Field,
And though their minstrelsy I lack,
To them heart-homage here I yield,
And follow with my verseman's pack:
To them with gratitude I look,
For briefing me to make this book.

Robert William Service

My Mate

I've been sittin' starin', starin' at 'is muddy pair of boots,
And tryin' to convince meself it's 'im.
(Look out there, lad! That sniper -- 'e's a dysey when 'e shoots;
'E'll be layin' of you out the same as Jim.)
Jim as lies there in the dug-out wiv 'is blanket round 'is 'ead,
To keep 'is brains from mixin' wiv the mud;
And 'is face as white as putty, and 'is overcoat all red,
Like 'e's spilt a bloomin' paint-pot -- but it's blood.

And I'm tryin' to remember of a time we wasn't pals.
'Ow often we've played 'ookey, 'im and me;
And sometimes it was music-'alls, and sometimes it was gals,
And even there we 'ad no disagree.
For when 'e copped Mariar Jones, the one I liked the best,
I shook 'is 'and and loaned 'im 'arf a quid;
I saw 'im through the parson's job, I 'elped 'im make 'is nest,
I even stood god-farther to the kid.

So when the war broke out, sez 'e: "Well, wot abaht it, Joe?"
"Well, wot abaht it, lad?" sez I to 'im.
'Is missis made a awful fuss, but 'e was mad to go,
('E always was 'igh-sperrited was Jim).
Well, none of it's been 'eaven, and the most of it's been 'ell,
But we've shared our baccy, and we've 'alved our bread.
We'd all the luck at Wipers, and we shaved through Noove Chapelle,
And . . . that snipin' barstard gits 'im on the 'ead.

Now wot I wants to know is, why it wasn't me was took?
I've only got meself, 'e stands for three.
I'm plainer than a louse, while 'e was 'andsome as a dook;
'E always WAS a better man than me.
'E was goin' 'ome next Toosday; 'e was 'appy as a lark,
And 'e'd just received a letter from 'is kid;
And 'e struck a match to show me, as we stood there in the dark,
When . . . that bleedin' bullet got 'im on the lid.

'E was killed so awful sudden that 'e 'adn't time to die.
'E sorto jumped, and came down wiv a thud.
Them corpsy-lookin' star-shells kept a-streamin' in the sky,

And there 'e lay like nothin' in the mud.
And there 'e lay so quiet wiv no mansard to 'is 'ead,
And I'm sick, and blamed if I can understand:
The pots of 'alf and 'alf we've 'ad, and ZIP! like that -- 'e's dead,
Wiv the letter of 'is nipper in 'is 'and.

There's some as fights for freedom and there's some as fights for fun,
But me, my lad, I fights for bleedin' 'ate.
You can blame the war and blast it, but I 'opes it won't be done
Till I gets the bloomin' blood-price for me mate.
It'll take a bit o' bayonet to level up for Jim;
Then if I'm spared I think I'll 'ave a bid,
Wiv 'er that was Mariar Jones to take the place of 'im,
To sorter be a farther to 'is kid.

Robert William Service

My Neighbors

To rest my fagged brain now and then,
When wearied of my proper labors,
I lay aside my lagging pen
And get to thinking on my neighbors;
For, oh, around my garret den
There's woe and poverty a-plenty,
And life's so interesting when
A lad is only two-and-twenty.

Now, there's that artist gaunt and wan,
A little card his door adorning;
It reads: "Je ne suis pour personne",
A very frank and fitting warning.
I fear he's in a sorry plight;
He starves, I think, too proud to borrow,
I hear him moaning every night:
Maybe they'll find him dead to-morrow.

Robert William Service

My Picture

I made a picture; all my heart
I put in it, and all I knew
Of canvas-cunning and of Art,
Of tenderness and passion true.
A worshipped Master came to see;
Oh he was kind and gentle, too.
He studied it with sympathy,
And sensed what I had sought to do.

Said he: "Your paint is fresh and fair,
And I can praise it without cease;
And yet a touch just here and there
Would make of it a masterpiece."
He took the brush from out my hand;
He touched it here, he touched it there.
So well he seemed to understand,
And momentarily it grew more fair.

Oh there was nothing I could say,
And there was nothing I could do.
I thanked him, and he went his way,
And then - I slashed my picture through.
For though his brush with soft caress
Had made my daub a thing divine,
Oh God! I wept with bitterness,
. . . It wasn't mine, it wasn't mine.

Robert William Service

My Piney Wood

I have a tiny piney wood;
my trees are only fifty,
Yet give me shade and solitude
For they are thick and thrifty.
And every day to me they fling
With largess undenying,
Fat cones to make my kettle sing
And keep my pan a-frying.

Go buy yourself a piney wood
If you have gold for spending,
Where you can dream in mellow mood
With peace and joy unending;
Where you can cheerfully retreat
Beyond all churchly chiding,
And make yourself a temple sweet
Of rapturous abiding.

Oh silence has a secret voice
That claims the soul for portal,
And those who hear it may rejoice
Since they are more than mortal.
So sitting in my piney wood
When soft the owl is winging,
As still as Druid stone I brood . . .
For hark! the stars are singing.

Robert William Service

My Prisoner

We was in a crump-'ole, 'im and me;
Fightin' wiv our bayonets was we;
Fightin' 'ard as 'ell we was,
Fightin' fierce as fire because
 It was 'im or me as must be downed;
'E was twice as big as me;
I was 'arf the weight of 'e;
 We was like a terryer and a 'ound.

'Struth! But 'e was sich a 'andsome bloke.
Me, I'm 'andsome as a chunk o' coke.
Did I give it 'im? Not 'arf!
Why, it fairly made me laugh,
 'Cos 'is bloomin' bellows wasn't sound.
Couldn't fight for monkey nuts.
Soon I gets 'im in the guts,
 There 'e lies a-floppin' on the ground.

In I goes to finish up the job.
Quick 'e throws 'is 'ands above 'is nob;
Speakin' English good as me:
"Tain't no use to kill," says 'e;
 "Can't yer tyke me prisoner instead?"
"Why, I'd like to, sir," says I;
"But -- yer knows the reason why:
 If we pokes our noses out we're dead.

"Sorry, sir. Then on the other 'and
(As a gent like you must understand),
If I 'olds you longer 'ere,
Wiv yer pals so werry near,
 It's me 'oo'll 'ave a free trip to Berlin;
If I lets yer go away,
Why, you'll fight another day:
 See the sitooation I am in.

"Anyway I'll tell you wot I'll do,
Bein' kind and seein' as it's you,
Knowin' 'ow it's cold, the feel

Of a 'alf a yard o' steel,
I'll let yer 'ave a rifle ball instead;
Now, jist think yerself in luck. . . .
'Ere, ol' man! You keep 'em stuck,
Them saucy dooks o' yours, above yer 'ead."

'Ow 'is mits shot up it made me smile!
'Ow 'e seemed to ponder for a while!
Then 'e says: "It seems a shyme,
Me, a man wot's known ter Fyme:
Give me blocks of stone, I'll give yer gods.
Whereas, pardon me, I'm sure
You, my friend, are still obscure. . . ."
"In war," says I, "that makes no blurry odds."

Then says 'e: "I've painted picters too. . . .
Oh, dear God! The work I planned to do,
And to think this is the end!"
"Ere," says I, "my hartist friend,
Don't you give yerself no friskin' airs.
Picters, statoos, is that why
You should be let off to die?
That the best ye done? Just say yer prayers."

Once again 'e seems ter think awhile.
Then 'e smiles a werry 'aughty smile:
"Why, no, sir, it's not the best;
There's a locket next me breast,
Picters of a gel 'oo's eyes are blue.
That's the best I've done," says 'e.
"That's me darter, aged three. . . ."
"Blimy!" says I, "I've a nipper, too."

Straight I chucks my rifle to one side;
Shows 'im wiv a lovin' farther's pride
Me own little Mary Jane.
Proud 'e shows me 'is Elaine,
And we talks as friendly as can be;
Then I 'elps 'im on 'is way,
'Opes 'e's sife at 'ome to-day,
Wonders -- 'ow would eE 'Aave treated me?

My Rival

If she met him or he met her,
I knew that something must occur;
For they were just like flint and steel
To strike the spark of woe and weal;
Or like two splinters broken fine,
In perfect fitness to combine;
And so I ept them well apart,
For she was precious to my heart.
One time we all three met at church
I tried to give the lad the lurch,
But heard him say: "How like a rose!
is it your daughter , I suppose?"
"Why no," said I; "My wife to be,
And sic months gone wi' child is she."
He looked astonished and distraught:
My boy, that's one for you I thought.

The wife asked: "What a handsome lad!
A sailor . . ." Somehow she looked sad;
And then his memory grew dim,
For nevermore she mentioned him.
And as I be nigh twice her age
I've always thought it mighty sage,
Lest she might one day go astray,
To keep her in the breeding way.

Oh did she ever dream of Jack?
The boy who nevermore came back,
And never will, I heard that he
Was drowned in the China Sea.

I told her not, lest she be sad,
And me? It's mean, but I was glad;
For if he's come into my life
He would have robbed me of my wife.

But when at night by her I lie,
And in her sleep I hear her sigh,
I have a doubt if I did well

In separating Jack and Nell.
And though we have a brood of seven,
Yet marriage may be made in Heaven:
For Nell has cancer, Doctors state,
So maybe 'tis the way of fate
That in the end them two may mate.

Robert William Service

My Rocking-Chair

When I am old and worse for wear
I want to buy a rocking-chair,
And set it on a porch where shine
The stars of morning-glory vine;
With just beyond, a gleam of grass,
A shady street where people pass;
And some who come with time to spare,
To yarn beside my rocking-chair.
Then I will light my corn-cob pipe
And dose and dream and rarely gripe.
My morning paper on my knee
I won't allow to worry me.
For if I know the latest news
Is bad,--to read it I'll refuse,
Since I have always tried to see
The side of life that clicks with glee.

And looking back with days nigh done,
I feel I've had a heap of fun.
Of course I guess that more or less
It's you yourself make happiness
And if your needs are small and few,
Like me you may be happy too:
And end up with a hope, a prayer,
A chuckle in a rocking-chair.

Robert William Service

My Room

I think the things I own and love
 Acquire a sense of me,
That gives them value far above
 The worth that others see.
My chattels are of me a part:
 This chair on which I sit
Would break its overstuffed old heart
 If I made junk of it.

To humble needs with which I live,
 My books, my desk, my bed,
A personality I give
 They'll lose when I am dead.
Sometimes on entering my room
 They look at me with fear,
As if they had a sense of doom
 Inevitably near.

Yet haply, since they do not die,
 In them will linger on
Some of the spirit that was I,
 When I am gone.
And maybe some sweet soul will sigh,
 And stroke with tender touch
The things I loved, and even cry
 A little,--not too much.

Robert William Service

My Son

I must not let my boy Dick down,
 Knight of the air.
With wings of light he won renown
 Then crashed somewhere.
To fly to France from London town
 I do not dare.

Oh he was such a simple lad
 Who loved the sky;
A modern day Sir Galahad,
 No need to die:
Earthbound he might have been so glad,
 Yet chose to fly.

I ask from where his courage stemmed?
 I've never flown;
Air-travel I have oft condemned,--
 Now I'm alone,
Yet somehow hold the bright belief
 God gave his brief.

So now I must live up to him
 Who won on high
A lustre time will never dim;
 Though coward I,
Let me revere till life be done
 My hero son.

Robert William Service

My Suicide

I've often wondered why
Old chaps who choose to die
In evil passes,
Before themselves they slay,
Invariably they
Take off their glasses?

As I strolled by the Castle cliff
An oldish chap I set my eyes on,
Who stood so singularly stiff
And stark against the blue horizon;
A poet fashioning a sonnet,
I thought - how rapt he labours on it!

And then I blinked and stood astare,
And questioned at my sight condition,
For I was seeing empty air -
He must have been an apparition.
Amazed I gazed . . . no one was there:
My sanity roused my suspicion.

I strode to where I saw him stand
So solitary in the sun -
Nothing! just empty sea and land,
no smallest sign of anyone.
While down below I heard the roar
Of waves, five hundred feet or more.

I had been drinking, I confess;
There was confusion in my brain,
And I was feeling more or less
The fumes of overnight champagne.
So standing on that dizzy shelf:
"You saw no one," I told myself.

"No need to call the local law,
For after all it's not your business.
You just imagined what you saw . . ."
Then I was seized with sudden dizziness:

For at my feet, beyond denying,
A pair of spectacles were lying.

And so I simply let them lie,
And sped from that accursed spot.
No lover of the police am I,
And sooner would be drunk than not.
"I'll scam," said I, "and leave the locals
To find and trace them dam bi-focals."

Robert William Service

My Tails

I haven't worn my evening dress
For nearly twenty years;
Oh I'm unsocial, I confess,
A hermit, it appears.
So much moth-balled it's but away,
And though wee wifie wails,
Never unto my dimmest day
I'll don my tails.

How slim and trim I looked in them,
Though I was sixty old;
And now their sleekness I condemn
To lie in rigid fold.
I have a portrait of myself
Proud-printed in the Press,
In garb now doomed to wardrobe shelf,--
My evening dress.

So let this be my last request,
That when I come to die,
In tails I may be deftly drest,
With white waistcoat and tie.
No, not for me a vulgar shroud
My carcass to caress;--
Oh let me do my coffin proud
In evening dress!

Robert William Service

My Trinity

For all good friends who care to read,
here let me lyre my living creed . . .

One: you may deem me Pacifist,
For I've no sympathy with strife.
Like hell I hate the iron fist,
And shun the battle-ground of life.
The hope of peace is dear to me,
And I to Christian faith belong,
Holding that breath should sacred be,
And War is always wrong.

Two: Universalist am I
And dream a world that's frontier free,
With common tongue and common tie,
Uncurst by nationality;
Where colour, creed and class are one,
And lowly folk are lifted high;
Where every breed beneath the sun
Is equal in God's eye.

Three: you may call me Naturist,
For green glade is my quiet quest;
The path of progress I have missed,
And shun the city's sore unrest.
A world that's super-civilized
Is one of worry, want and woe;
In leafy lore let me be wised
And back to Nature go.

Well, though you may but half agree,
Behold my trusty Trinity

Robert William Service

My Twins

Of twin daughters I'm the mother -
Lord! how I was proud of them;
Each the image of the other,
Like two lilies on one stem;
But while May, my first-born daughter,
Was angelic from the first,
Different as wine and water,
Maude, my second, seemed accurst.

I'm a tender-hearted dame,
Military is my bent;
Thus my pretty dears can claim
For their Pa the Regiment.
As they say: to err is human;
But though lots of love I've had,
I'm an ordinary women,
Just as good as I am bad.

Good and bad should find their level,
So I often wonder why
May was angel, Maude was devil,
Yet between the two was I.
May, they say, has taken vows -
Sister Mary, pure and sweet;
Maudie's in a bawdy house,
Down in Mariposa Street.

It's not natural I'm thinking,
One should pray, the other curse;
I'm so worried I am drinking,
Which is making matters worse.
Yet my daughters love each other,
And I love them equal well;
Saint and sinner call me mother . . .
Ain't heredity just hell?

Robert William Service

My Typewriter

I used to think a pot of ink
Held magic in its fluid,
And I would ply a pen when I
Was hoary a a Druid;
But as I scratch my silver thatch
My battered old Corona
Calls out to me as plaintively
As dying Desdemona.

"For old time's sake give me a break:
To you I've been as loyal
As ever could an Underwood,
Or Remington or Royal.
The globe we've spanned together and
Two million words, maybe,
For you I've tapped - it's time you rapped
A rhyme or two for me.

"I've seen you sit and smoke and spit
With expletives profane,
Then tear with rage the virgin page
I tendered you in vain.
I've watched you glare in dull despair
Through hours of brooding thought,
Then with a shout bang gaily out
The 'word unique' you sought.

"I've heard you groan and grunt and moan
That rhyme's a wretched fetter;
That after all you're just a small
Fat-headed verse-begetter;
You'd balance me upon your knee
Like any lady friend,
Then with a sigh you'd lay me by
For weeks and weeks on end.

"I've known when you were mighty blue
And hammered me till dawn,
Dire poverty! But I would be

The last thing you would pawn.
Days debt-accurst! Then at its worst
The sky, behold, would clear;
A poem sold, the garret cold
Would leap to light and cheer.

"You've toted me by shore and sea
From Mexico to Maine;
From Old Cathay to Mandalay,
From Samarkand to Spain.
You've thumped me in the battle's din
And pounded me in peace;
By air and land you've lugged me and
Your shabby old valise.

"But now my keys no more with ease
To your two fingers yield;
With years of use my joints are loose,
With wear of flood and field.
And even you are slipping too:
You're puffy, stiff and grey:
Old Sport, we're done, our race is run -
Why not call it a day?"

Why not? You've been, poor old machine!
My tried and faithful friend.
With fingertip your keys I'll flip
Serenely to the end.
For even though you're stiff and slow,
No other will I buy.
And though each word be wan and blurred
I'll tap you till I die.

Robert William Service

My Vineyard

To me at night the stars are vocal.
They say: 'Your planet's oh so local!
A speck of dust in heaven's ceiling;
Your faith divine a foolish feeling.
What odds if you are chaos hurled,
Yours is a silly little world.'

For their derision, haply true,
I hate the stars, as wouldn't you?
But whether earth be great or little,
I do not care a fishwife's spittle;
I do not fret its where or why,--
Today's a day and I am I.

Serene, afar from woe and worry
I tend my vines and do not hurry.
I buss the lass and tip the bottle,
Fill up the glass and rinse my throttle.
Tomorrow though the earth should perish,
The lust of life today I cherish.

Ah no, the stars I will not curse:
Though things are bad they might be worse.
So when vast constellations shine
I drink to them in ruby wine;
For they themselves,--although it odd is,
Somehow give me a sense that God is.

Because we trust and realise
His love he steers us in the skies.
For faith however foolish can
Be mighty helpful to a man:
And as I tend my vines so He
With tenderness looks after me.

Robert William Service

My White Mouse

At dusk I saw a craintive mouse
That sneaked and stole around the house;
At first I took it for a ghost,
For it was snowy white - almost.

I've seen them in captivity,
But this white mouse was wild and free,
And every eye with stealth it stole
And foraged in the garbage hole.

I told the folks, yet wondered why
No one could see the mouse but I;
For it was really, truly white,
And not just silvered by moonlight.

And then there came a big black cat,
And thought I said: "Get out of that!"
It stared at me with savage eyes,
As big and yellow as moonrise.

And often times I wonder whether
They didn't just go off together,
In the bright moonlight, paw in paw,
For never more my mouse I saw.

Robert William Service

My Will

I've made my Will. I don't believe
 In luxury and wealth;
And to those loving ones who grieve
 My age and frailing health
I give the need to soothe their ways
 That they may happy be,
And pass serenely all their days
 In snug security.

That duty done, I leave behind
 The all I have to give
To crippled children and the blind
 Who lamentably live;
Hoping my withered hand may freight
 To happiness a few
Poor innocents whom cruel fate
 Has cheated of their due.

A am no grey philanthropist,
 Too humble is my lot
Yet how I'm glad to give the grist
 My singing mill has brought.
For I have had such lyric days,
 So rich, so full, so sweet,
That I with gratitude and praise
 Would make my life complete.

I'VE MADE MY WILL: now near the end,
 At peace with all mankind,
To children lame I would be friend,
 And brother to the blind . . .
And if there be a God, I pray
 He bless my last bequest,
And in His love and pity say:
 "Good servant,--rest!"

Robert William Service

Nature's Touch

In kindergarten classed
 Dislike they knew;
And as the years went past
 It grew and grew;
Until in maidenhood
 Each sought a mate,
Then venom in their mood
 Was almost hate.

The lure of love they learned
 And they were wed;
Yet when they met each turned
 Away a head;
Each went her waspish way
 With muted damns--
Until they met one day
 With baby prams.

Then lo! Away was swept
 The scorn of years;
Hands clasped they almost wept
 With gentle tears.
Forgetting hateful days,
 All mother mild,
Each took with tender praise
 The other's child.

And now they talk of milk,
 Of diapers and such;
Of baby bosoms silk
 And tender to the touch.
A gemlike girl and boy,--
 With hope unsaid,
Each thinks with mother joy:
 'May these two wed!'

Robert William Service

Nature's Way

To tribulations of mankind
Dame Nature is indifferent;
To human sorrow she is blind,
And deaf to human discontent.
Mid fear and fratricidal fray,
Mid woe and tyranny of toil,
She goes her unregarding way
 Of sky and sun and soil.

In leaf and blade, in bud and bloom
Exultantly her gladness glows,
And careless of Man's dreary doom
Around the palm she wreathes the rose;
Creating beauty everywhere,
With happy bird in holy song . . .
Please God, let us be unaware
 Like her of wrath and wrong.

Let us too be indifferent,
And in her hands our fate resign;
Aye, though the world with rage is rent
Let us be placid as the pine.
For if we turn from greed and guile
Maybe Dame Nature will relent,
And bless us with her lovely smile
 Of comfort and content.

Robert William Service

Navels

Men have navels more or less;
 Some are neat, some not
Being fat I must confess
 Mine is far from hot.
Woman's is a pearly ring,
 Lovely to my mind;
So of it to shyly sing
 I am inclined.

I believe in nudity.
 Female forms divine
Should be bared for all to see
 In colour and in line.
So dear ladies, recognise
 The dimpling of your waist
Has approval in my eyes,
 Favour in my taste.

Darlings, please you, paint them gold,
 Or some pastel hue;
Make them starry to behold,
 Witching to the view.
Though I know I never should
 Say such things as this:
How a rosebud navel would
 Be sweet to kiss!

Robert William Service

Negress In Notre Dame

When I attended Mass today
A coloured maid sat down by me,
And as I watched her kneel and pray,
Her reverence was good to see.
For whether there may be or no'
A merciful and mighty God,
The love for Him is like a glow
That glorifies the meanest clod.

And then a starched and snotty dame
Who sat the other side of me
Said: "Monsieur, is it not a shame
Such things should be allowed to be?
In my homeland, I'm proud to say,
We know to handle niggers right,
And wouldn't let a black wench pray
And worship God beside a white."

Her tone so tart bewilderd me,
For I am just a simple man.
A friend in every one I see,
Though yellow, brown or black and tan.
For I would father children five
With any comely coloured maid,
And lush with any man alive,
Of any race, of any shade.

Religion may be false or true,
The Churches may be wrong or right,
But if there be the Faith in you
It can be like a shining light.
And though I lack not piety
And pray my best, I'm sure that God
To that black wench and not to me
Would give his most approving nod.

Aye, you may scrub him day and night,
You'll never change a nigger's hide;
But maybe he is just as white,

(Or even more) than you...inside.

Robert William Service

Neighbours

My neighbour has a field of wheat
 And I a rood of vine;
And he will give me bread to eat,
 And I will give him wine.
And so we are a jolly pair,
 Contentedly unwed,
Singing with supper as we share
 Red wine and crusty bread.

Now venison is mighty meat
 And so is trout and hare;
A mallard duck is sweet to eat
 And quail is dainty fare.
But such are foods for festal day,
 And we will not repine
While on the table we can lay
 Crisp bread and rosy wine.

A will to till one's own of soil
 Is worth a kingly crown,
With bread to feed the belly need,
 And wine to wash it down.
So with my neighbour I rejoice
 That we are fit and free,
Content to praise with lusty voice
 Bread, Wine and Liberty.

Robert William Service

New Year's Eve

It's cruel cold on the water-front, silent and dark and drear;
Only the black tide weltering, only the hissing snow;
And I, alone, like a storm-tossed wreck, on this night of the glad New Year,
Shuffling along in the icy wind, ghastly and gaunt and slow.

They're playing a tune in McGuffy's saloon, and it's cheery and bright in there
(God! but I'm weak -- since the bitter dawn, and never a bite of food);
I'll just go over and slip inside -- I mustn't give way to despair --
Perhaps I can bum a little booze if the boys are feeling good.

They'll jeer at me, and they'll sneer at me, and they'll call me a whiskey soak;
("Have a drink? Well, thankee kindly, sir, I don't mind if I do.")
A drivelling, dirty, gin-joint fiend, the butt of the bar-room joke;
Sunk and sodden and hopeless -- "Another? Well, here's to you!"

McGuffy is showing a bunch of the boys how Bob Fitzsimmons hit;
The barman is talking of Tammany Hall, and why the ward boss got fired.
I'll just sneak into a corner and they'll let me alone a bit;
The room is reeling round and round . . . O God! but I'm tired, I'm tired. . . .

* * * * *

Roses she wore on her breast that night. Oh, but their scent was sweet!
Alone we sat on the balcony, and the fan-palms arched above;
The witching strain of a waltz by Strauss came up to our cool retreat,
And I prisoned her little hand in mine, and I whispered my plea of love.

Then sudden the laughter died on her lips, and lowly she bent her head;
And oh, there came in the deep, dark eyes a look that was heaven to see;
And the moments went, and I waited there, and never a word was said,
And she plucked from her bosom a rose of red and shyly gave it to me.

Then the music swelled to a crash of joy, and the lights blazed up like day,
And I held her fast to my throbbing heart, and I kissed her bonny brow.
"She is mine, she is mine for evermore!" the violins seemed to say,
And the bells were ringing the New Year in -- O God! I can hear them now.

Don't you remember that long, last waltz, with its sobbing, sad refrain?
Don't you remember that last good-by, and the dear eyes dim with tears?

Don't you remember that golden dream, with never a hint of pain,
Of lives that would blend like an angel-song in the bliss of the coming years?

Oh, what have I lost! What have I lost! Ethel, forgive, forgive!

The red, red rose is faded now, and it's fifty years ago.

'Twere better to die a thousand deaths than live each day as I live!

I have sinned, I have sunk to the lowest depths -- but oh, I have suffered so!

Hark! Oh, hark! I can hear the bells! . . . Look! I can see her there,

Fair as a dream . . . but it fades . . . And now -- I can hear the dreadful hum
Of the crowded court . . . See! the Judge looks down . . .

NOT GUILTY, my Lord, I swear . . .

The bells -- I can hear the bells again! . . . Ethel, I come, I come! . . .

* * * * *

"Rouse up, old man, it's twelve o'clock. You can't sleep here, you know.

Say! ain't you got no sentiment? Lift up your muddled head;

Have a drink to the glad New Year, a drop before you go --

You darned old dirty hobo . . . My God! Here, boys! He's DEAD!"

Robert William Service

No Lilies For Lisette

Said the Door: "She came in
With no shadow of sin;
Turned the key in the lock,
Slipped out of her frock,
The robe she liked best
When for supper she dressed.
Then a letter she tore . . .
What a wan look she wore!"
Said the Door.

Said the Chair: "She sat down
With a pitiful frown,
And then (oh, it's queer)
Just one lonely tear
Rolled down her pale cheek.
How I hoped she would speak
As she let down her hair,"
Said the Chair.

Said the Glass: "Then she gazed
Into me like one dazed;
As with delicate grace
She made up her face,
Her cheeks and her lips
With rose finger-tips,
So lovely - alas!
Then she turned on the gas."
Said the Glass.

Said the Bed: "Down she lay
In a weariful way,
Like an innocent child,
To her fate reconciled;
Hands clasped to her breast,
In prayer or in rest:
'Dear Mother,' she said,
Then pillowed her head,"
Said the Bed.

Said the Room: "Then the gleam
Of the moon like a dream,
Soft silvered my space,
And it fell on her face
That was never so sweet
As her heart ceased to beat . . .
Then the moon fled and gloom
Fell like funeral plume,"
Said the Room.

"Just a whore,"
Said the Door;
"Yet so fair,"
Said the Chair;
"Frail, alas!"
Said the Glass;
"Now she's dead,"
Said the Bed;
"Sorry doom,"
Said the Room. . . .

Then they all,
Floor and wall,
Quiet grew,
Ceiling too;
Like a tomb
Was the room;
With hushed breath
Hailing Death:
Soul's release,
Silence, Peace.

Robert William Service

No More Music

The Porch was blazoned with geranium bloom;
Myrtle and jasmine meadows lit the lea;
With rose and violet the vale's perfume
Languished to where the hyacinthine sea
Dreamed tenderly . . . "And I must go," said he.

He spoke in that dim, ghostly voice of his:
"I was a singer; then the Was . . . and GAS."
(I had to lean to him, no word to miss.)
"We bought this little café nigh to Grasse;
With sun and flowers my last few days will pass.

"And music too. I have my mandolin:
Say! Maybe you can strum on your guitar . . .
Come on - we two will make melodious din,
While Madame sings to us behind the bar:
You'll see how sweet Italian folk-songs are."

So he would play and I would thrum the while;
I used to there every lovely day;
His wife would listen with a sunny smile,
And when I left: "Please come again," she'd say.
"He seems quite sad when you have one away."

Alas! I had to leave without good-bye,
And lived in sooty cities for a year.
Oh, how my heart ached for that happy sky!
Then, then one day my café I drew near -
God! it was strange how I was gripped with fear.

So still it was; I saw no mandolin,
No gay guitar with ribbons blue and red;
Then all in black, stone-faced the wife came in . . .
I did not ask; I looked, she shook her head:
"La musique est fini," was all she said.

Robert William Service

No Neck-Tie Party

A prisoner speaks:

Majority of twenty-three,
I face the Judge with joy and glee;
For am I not a lucky chap -
No more hanging, no more cap;
A "lifer," yes, but well I know
In fifteen years they'll let me go;
For I'll be pious in my prison,
Sing with gusto: Christ Is Risen;
Serve the hymn-books out on Sunday,
Sweep the chapel clean on Monday:
Such a model lag I'll be
In fifteen years they'll set me free.

Majority of twenty three,
You've helped me cheat the gallows tree.
I'm twenty now, at thirty-five
How I will laugh to be alive!
To leap into the world again
And bless the fools miscalled "humane,"
Who say the gibbet's wrong and so
At thirty-five they let me go,
Tat I may sail the across the sea
A killer unsuspect and free,
To change my name, to darkly thrive
By hook or crook at thirty-five.

O silent dark and beastly wood
Where with my bloodied hands I stood!
O piteous child I raped and slew!
Had she been yours, would you and you
Have pardoned me and set me free,
Majority of twenty-three?
Yet by your solemn vote you willed
I shall not die though I have killed;
Although I did no mercy show,
In mercy you will let me go. . . .
That he who kills and does not pay

May live to kill another day.

*By a majority of twenty-three the House of Commons
voted the abolition of the death penalty.

Robert William Service

No Sourdough

To be a bony feed Sourdough
You must, by Yukon Law,
Have killed a moose,
And robbed a sluice,
AND BUNKED UP WITH A SQUAW. . . .

Alas! Sourdough I'll never be.
Oh, sad is my excuse:
My shooting's so damn bad, you see . . .
I've never killed a moose.

Robert William Service

No Sunday Chicken

I could have sold him up because
His rent was long past due;
And Grimes, my lawyer, said it was
The proper thing to do:
But how could I be so inhuman?
And me a gentle-woman.

Yet I am poor as chapel mouse,
Pinching to make ends meet,
And have to let my little house
To buy enough to eat:
Why, even now to keep agoing
I have to take in sewing.

Sylvester is a widowed man,
Clerk in a hardware store;
I guess he does the best he can
To feed his kiddies four:
It sure is hard,--don't think it funny,
I've lately loaned him money.

I want to wipe away a tear
Even to just suppose
Some monster of an auctioneer
Might sell his sticks and clothes:
I'd rather want for bread and butter
Than see them in the gutter.

A silly, soft old thing am I,
But oh them kiddies four!
I guess I'll make a raisin pie
And leave it at their door . . .
Some Sunday, dears, you'll share my dream,--
Fried chicken and ice-cream.

Robert William Service

Noctambule

Zut! it's two o'clock.
See! the lights are jumping.
Finish up your bock,
Time we all were humping.
Waiters stack the chairs,
Pile them on the tables;
Let us to our lairs
Underneath the gables.

Up the old Boul' Mich'
Climb with steps erratic.
Steady . . . how I wish
I was in my attic!
Full am I with cheer;
In my heart the joy stirs;
Couldn't be the beer,
Must have been the oysters.

In obscene array
Garbage cans spill over;
How I wish that they
Smelled as sweet as clover!
Charing women wait;
Cafes drop their shutters;
Rats perambulate
Up and down the gutters.

Down the darkened street
Market carts are creeping;
Horse with wary feet,
Red-faced driver sleeping.
Loads of vivid greens,
Carrots, leeks, potatoes,
Cabbages and beans,
Turnips and tomatoes.

Pair of dapper chaps,
Cigarettes and sashes,
Stare at me, perhaps

Desperate Apachès.

"Needn't bother me,
Jolly well you know it;
Parceque je suis
Quartier Latin poet.

"Give you villanelles,
Madrigals and lyrics;
Ballades and rondels,
Odes and panegyrics.
Poet pinched and poor,
Pricked by cold and hunger;
Trouble's troubadour,
Misery's balladmonger."

Think how queer it is!
Every move I'm making,
Cosmic gravity's
Center I am shaking;
Oh, how droll to feel
(As I now am feeling),
Even as I reel,
All the world is reeling.

Reeling too the stars,
Neptune and Uranus,
Jupiter and Mars,
Mercury and Venus;
Suns and moons with me,
As I'm homeward straying,
All in sympathy
Swaying, swaying, swaying.

Lord! I've got a head.
Well, it's not surprising.
I must gain my bed
Ere the sun be rising;
When the merry lark
In the sky is soaring,
I'll refuse to hark,
I'll be snoring, snoring.

Strike a sulphur match . . .
Ha! at last my garret.
Fumble at the latch,
Close the door and bar it.
Bed, you graciously
Wait, despite my scorning . . .
So, bibaciously
Mad old world, good morning.

Robert William Service

O Lovely Lie

I told a truth, a tragic truth
 That tore the sullen sky;
A million shuddered at my sooth
 And anarchist was I.
Red righteousness was in my word
 To winnow evil chaff;
Yet while I swung crusading sword
 I heard the devil laugh.

I framed a lie, a rainbow lie
 To glorify a thought;
And none was so surprised as I
 When fast as fire it caught.
Like honey people lapped my lie
 And peddled it abroad,
Till in a lift of sunny sky
 I saw the smile of God.

If falsehood may be best, I thought,
 To hell with verity;
Dark truth may be a cancer spot
 'Twere better not to see.
Aye, let a lie be big and bold
 Yet ripe with hope and ruth,
Beshrew me! but its heart may hold
 More virtue than the truth.

Robert William Service

Obesity

With belly like a poisoned pup
Said I: 'I must give bacon up:
And also, I profanely fear,
I must abandon bread and beer
That make for portliness they say;
Yet of them copiously today
I ate with an increasingly sense
Of grievous corpulence.

I like a lot of thinks I like.
Too bad that I must go on strike
Against pork sausages and mash,
Spaghetti and fried corn-beef hash.
I deem he is a lucky soul
Who has no need of girth control;
For in the old of age: 'Il faut
Souffrir pour etre bean.'

Yet let me not be unconsoled:
So many greybeards I behold,
Distinguished in affairs of state,
In culture counted with the Great,
Have tummies with a shameless bulge,
And so I think I'll still indulge
In eats I like without a qualm,
And damn my diaphragm!'

Robert William Service

Oh, It Is Good

Oh, it is good to drink and sup,
And then beside the kindly fire
To smoke and heap the faggots up,
And rest and dream to heart's desire.

Oh, it is good to ride and run,
To roam the greenwood wild and free;
To hunt, to idle in the sun,
To leap into the laughing sea.

Oh, it is good with hand and brain
To gladly till the chosen soil,
And after honest sweat and strain
To see the harvest of one's toil.

Oh, it is good afar to roam,
And seek adventure in strange lands;
Yet oh, so good the coming home,
The velvet love of little hands.

So much is good. . . . We thank Thee, God,
For all the tokens Thou hast given,
That here on earth our feet have trod
Thy little shining trails of Heaven.

Robert William Service

Old Bob

I guess folks think I'm mighty dumb
 Since Jack and Jim and Joe
Have hit the trail to Kingdom Come
 And left me here below:
Since Death, the bastard, bowled them out,
 And left me faced with--Doubt.

My pals have all passed out on me
 And I am by my lone;
Old Bill was last, and now I see
 His name cut on a stone;
A marble slab, but not as fine
 As I have picked for mine.

I nurse and curse rheumatic pain
 As on the porch I sit;
With nothing special in my brain
 I rock and smoke and spit:
When one is nearing to the end
 One sorely needs a friend.

My Pals have gone,--in God's good earth
 I guess they're packed up snug,
And since I have no guts for mirth
 I zipper to my mug:
The question that I ponder on
 Is--where the heck they've gone?

Robert William Service

Old Boy Scout

A bonny bird I found today
Mired in a melt of tar;
Its silky breast was silver-grey,
Its wings were cinnabar.
So still it lay right in the way
Of every passing car.

Yet as I gently sought to pry
It loose, it glared at me;
You would have thought its foe was I,
It pecked so viciously;
So fiercely fought, as soft I sought
From death to set it free.

Its pinions pitifully frail
I wrested from the muck;
I feared the feathers of its tail
Would never come unstuck.
. . . The jewel-bright it flashed in flight -
Oh how I wished it luck!

With happiness my heart was light,
To see how fair it flew;
To do my good deed I delight,
As grey-haired scouts should do;
Yet oh my bright reward's to write
This simple rhyme for you!

Robert William Service

Old Codger

Of garden truck he made his fare,
As his bright eyes bore witness;
Health was his habit and his care,
His hobby human fitness.
He sang the praise of open sky,
The gladth of Nature's giving;
And when at last he came to die
It was of too long living.

He held aloof from hate and strife,
Drank peace in dreamful doses;
He never voted in his life,
Loved children, dogs and roses.
Let tyrants romp in gory glee,
And revolutions roister,
He passed his days as peacefully
As friar in a cloister.

So fellow sinners, should you choose
Of doom to be a dodger,
At eighty be a bland recluse
Like this serene old codger,
Who turned his back on fear and fret,
And died nigh eighty-seven . . .
His name was--Robert Service: let
Us hope he went to Heaven

Robert William Service

Old Crony

I had a friend, a breezy friend
I liked an awful lot;
And in his company no end
Of happiness I got.
We clicked in temper, taste and mood,
We gypsied side by side,--
And then, as no pal ever should,
He upped and died.

A score of years have since gone by,
Yet I bemoan him still;
He used to call me Bob and I
Was wont to call him Bill.
Oh how I wish that he were here,
How we would bravely walk
On heather hills to tavern cheer,
And talk and talk!

If as he always used to do,
He'd just drop in to tea,
To rest awhile and jest awhile,
How chirpy I would be!
Then he would puff his pipe of briar
And I my cigarette,
And we would yarn beside the fire,
And time forget.

Old Pal, come back a little while,
If just to let me say
How much I miss your jolly smile
Now you have gone away.
Ah, when in life's allotted span
We near our journey's end,
What greater treasure is there than
A Golden Friend!

Robert William Service

Old David Smail

He dreamed away his hours in school;
He sat with such an absent air,
The master reckoned him a fool,
And gave him up in dull despair.

When other lads were making hay
You'd find him loafing by the stream;
He'd take a book and slip away,
And just pretend to fish . . . and dream.

His brothers passed him in the race;
They climbed the hill and clutched the prize.
He did not seem to heed, his face
Was tranquil as the evening skies.

He lived apart, he spoke with few;
Abstractedly through life he went;
Oh, what he dreamed of no one knew,
And yet he seemed to be content.

I see him now, so old and gray,
His eyes with inward vision dim;
And though he faltered on the way,
Somehow I almost envied him.

At last beside his bed I stood:
"And is Life done so soon?" he sighed;
"It's been so rich, so full, so good,
I've loved it all . . ." -- and so he died.

Robert William Service

Old Ed

Our cowman, old Ed, hadn't much in his head,
And lots of folks though him a witling;
But he wasn't a fool, for he always kept cool,
And his sole recreation was whittling.
When I'd spill him my woes (ifantile, I suppose),
He'd harken and whittle and whittle;
then when I had done, turn his quid and say: "Son,
Ye're a-drownin' yerself in yer spittle."

He's gone to his grave, but the counsel he gave
I've proved in predicaments trying;
When I got in a stew, feeling ever so blue,
My failures and faults magnifying,
I'd think of old Ed as he sniffed and he said:
"Shaw! them things don't mater a tittle.
Ye darned little cuss, why make such a full?
Ye're a-drownin' yerself in yer spittle."

When you're tangled with care till you're up in the air,
And worry and fear have you quaking,
When each tiny trouble seems bigger than double,
Till mountains of mole-hills you're making:
Go easy, my friend, things click in the end,
But maybe 'twill help you a little,
If you take Ed's advise (though it may not sound nice):
Ye're a-drownin' yerself in yer spittle."

Robert William Service

Old Engine Driver

For five and twenty years I've run
 A famous train;
But now my spell of speed is done,
 No more I'll strain
My sight along the treadless tracks,
 The gleamy rails:
My hand upon the throttle slacks,
 My vision fails.

No more I'll urge my steed of steel
 Through hostile nights;
No more the mastery I'll feel
 Of monster might.
I'll miss the hiss of giant steam,
 The clank, the roar;
The agony of brakes that scream
 I'll hear no more.

Oh I have held within my hand
 A million lives;
And now my son takes command
 And proudly drives;
While from my cottage wistfully
 I watch his train,
And wave and wave and seem to see
 Myself again.

Robert William Service

Old Scout

Is it because I'm bent and grey,
 Though wearing rather well,
That I can slickly get away
 With all the yarns I tell?

Is it because my bleary eye
 No longer beams with youth
That I can plant a whopping lie,
 And flout the truth?

I wonder why folks hark to me
 Where once they would have laughed?
They treat my yarns respectfully,
 No matter how they're daft.
They count the notches on my gun
 And stroke its polished butt,
Wanting to know why every one
 Of them was cut.

Indeed were I to stick to fact
 Their interest would flag;
Dramatically I must act
 The rôle of scalliwag;
A battle veteran to be,
 A frozen argonaut,
A castaway in coral sea,--
 Such a tommyrot!

And so with unction I conceive
 Invention wild and new,
Until I'm coming to believe
 My taradiddles true . . .
Is it because I'm old and sage,
 I draw a bow that's risky?
Or can it be--that lies with age
 Improve like whisky?

Robert William Service

Old Sweethearts

Oh Maggie, do you mind the day
 We went to school together,
And as we stoppit by the way
 I rolled you in the heather?
My! but you were the bonny lass
 And we were awfu' late for class.

Your locks are now as white as snow,
 And you are ripe and wrinkled,
A grandmother ten times or so,
 Yet how your blue eyes twinkled
At me above your spectacles,
 Recalling naughty neck-tickles!

It must be fifty years today
 I left you for the Yukon;
You haven't changed - your just as gay
 And just as sweet to look on.
But can you see in this old fool
 The lad who made you late for school?

Oh Maggie, ask me in to tea
 And we can talk things over,
And contemplate the nuptial state,
 For I am still your lover:
And though the bell be slow to chime
 We'll no be grudgin' o' the time

Robert William Service

Old Tom

The harridan who holds the inn
At which I toss a pot,
Is old and uglier than sin,--
I'm glad she knows me not.
Indeed, for me it's hard to think,
Although my pow's like snow,
She was the lass so fresh and pink
I courted long ago.

I wronged her, yet it's sadly true
She wanted to be wronged:
They mostly do, although 'tis you,
The male bloke who is thonged.
Well, anyway I left her then
To sail across the sea,
And no doubt she had other men,
And soon lost sight of me.

So now she is a paunchy dame
And mistress of the inn,
With temper tart and tounge to blame,
Moustache and triple chin.
And though I have no proper home
Contentedly I purr,
And from my whiskers wipe the foam,
--Glad I did not wed her.

Yet it's so funny sitting here
To stare into her face;
And as I raise my mug of beer
I dream of our disgrace.
And so I come and come each day
To more and more enjoy
The joke--that fifty years away
I was her honey boy.

Robert William Service

Old Trouper

I was Mojeska's leading man
And famous parts I used to play,
But now I do the best I can
To earn my bread from day to day;
Here in this Burg of Breaking Hears,
Where one wins as a thousand fail,
I play a score of scurvy parts
Till Time writes Finis to my tale.

My wife is dead, my daughter wed,
With heaps of trouble of their own;
And though I hold aloft my head
I'm humble, scared and all alone . . .
To-night I burn each photograph,
Each record of my former fame,
And oh, how bitterly I laugh
And feed them to the hungry flame!

Behold how handsome I was then -
What glowing eye, what noble mien;
I towered above my fellow men,
And proudly strode the painted scene.
Ah, Vanity! What fools are we,
With empty ends and foolish aims . . .
There now, I fling with savage glee
My David Garrick to the flames.

"Is this a dagger that I see":
Oh, how I used to love that speech;
We were old-fashioned - "hams" maybe,
Yet we Young Arrogance could teach.
"Out, out brief candle!" There are gone
My Lear, my Hamlet and MacBeth;
And now by ashes cold and wan
I wait my cue, my prompter Death.

This life of ours is just a play;
Its end is fashioned from the start;
Fate writes each word we have to say,

And puppet-like we strut our part.
Once I wore laurels on my brow,
But now I wait, a sorry clown,
To make my furtive, farewell bow . . .
Haste Time! Oh, ring the Curtain down.

Robert William Service

Omission

What man has not betrayed
 Some sacred trust?
If haply you are made
 Of honest dust,
Vaunt not of glory due,
 Of triumph won:
Think, think of duties you
 Have left undone.

But if in mercy hope,
 Despite your sin,
The gates of Heaven ope'
 To let you in:
Pray, pray that when God reads
 Your judgement due,
He may forget good deeds
 You did not do.

Omission sins may be
 The bitterest,
And wring in memory
 A heart opprest;
So when sweet pity pleads,
 Let us not rue
Too late, too late Kind Deeds
 We did not do.

Robert William Service

On The Boulevard

Oh, it's pleasant sitting here,
Seeing all the people pass;
You beside your bock of beer,
I behind my demi-tasse.
Chatting of no matter what.
You the Mummer, I the Bard;
Oh, it's jolly, is it not? --
Sitting on the Boulevard.

More amusing than a book,
If a chap has eyes to see;
For, no matter where I look,
Stories, stories jump at me.
Moving tales my pen might write;
Poems plain on every face;
Monologues you could recite
With inimitable grace.

(Ah! Imagination's power)
See yon demi-mondaine there,
Idly toying with a flower,
Smiling with a pensive air . . .
Well, her smile is but a mask,
For I saw within her muff
Such a wicked little flask:
Vitriol -- ugh! the beastly stuff.

Now look back beside the bar.
See yon curled and scented beau,
Puffing at a fine cigar --
Sale espèce de maquereau.
Well (of course, it's all surmise),
It's for him she holds her place;
When he passes she will rise,
Dash the vitriol in his face.

Quick they'll carry him away,
Pack him in a Red Cross car;
Her they'll hurry, so they say,

To the cells of St. Lazare.
What will happen then, you ask?
What will all the sequel be?
Ah! Imagination's task
Isn't easy . . . let me see . . .

She will go to jail, no doubt,
For a year, or maybe two;
Then as soon as she gets out
Start her bawdy life anew.
He will lie within a ward,
Harmless as a man can be,
With his face grotesquely scarred,
And his eyes that cannot see.

Then amid the city's din
He will stand against a wall,
With around his neck a tin
Into which the pennies fall.
She will pass (I see it plain,
Like a cinematograph),
She will halt and turn again,
Look and look, and maybe laugh.

Well, I'm not so sure of that --
Whether she will laugh or cry.
He will hold a battered hat
To the lady passing by.
He will smile a cringing smile,
And into his grimy hold,
With a laugh (or sob) the while,
She will drop a piece of gold.

"Bless you, lady," he will say,
And get grandly drunk that night.
She will come and come each day,
Fascinated by the sight.
Then somehow he'll get to know
(Maybe by some kindly friend)
Who she is, and so . . . and so
Bring my story to an end.

How his heart will burst with hate!
He will curse and he will cry.
He will wait and wait and wait,
Till again she passes by.
Then like tiger from its lair
He will leap from out his place,
Down her, clutch her by the hair,
Smear the vitriol on her face.

(Ah! Imagination rare)
See . . . he takes his hat to go;
Now he's level with her chair;
Now she rises up to throw. . . .
God! and she has done it too . . .
Oh, those screams; those hideous screams!
I imagined and . . . it's true:
How his face will haunt my dreams!

What a sight! It makes me sick.
Seems I am to blame somehow.
Garcon, fetch a brandy quick . . .
There! I'm feeling better now.
Let's collaborate, we two,
You the Mummer, I the Bard;
Oh, what ripping stuff we'll do,
Sitting on the Boulevard!

Robert William Service

On The Wire

O God, take the sun from the sky!
It's burning me, scorching me up.
God, can't You hear my cry?
Water! A poor, little cup!
It's laughing, the cursed sun!
See how it swells and swells
Fierce as a hundred hells!
God, will it never have done?
It's searing the flesh on my bones;
It's beating with hammers red
My eyeballs into my head;
It's parching my very moans.
See! It's the size of the sky,
And the sky is a torrent of fire,
Foaming on me as I lie
Here on the wire . . . the wire. . . .

Of the thousands that wheeze and hum
Heedlessly over my head,
Why can't a bullet come,
Pierce to my brain instead,
Blacken forever my brain,
Finish forever my pain?
Here in the hellish glare
Why must I suffer so?
Is it God doesn't care?
Is it God doesn't know?
Oh, to be killed outright,
Clean in the clash of the fight!
That is a golden death,
That is a boon; but this . . .
Drawing an anguished breath
Under a hot abyss,
Under a stooping sky
Of seething, sulphurous fire,
Scorching me up as I lie
Here on the wire . . . the wire. . . .

Hasten, O God, Thy night!

Hide from my eyes the sight
Of the body I stare and see
Shattered so hideously.
I can't believe that it's mine.
My body was white and sweet,
Flawless and fair and fine,
Shapely from head to feet;
Oh no, I can never be
The thing of horror I see
Under the rifle fire,
Trussed on the wire . . . the wire. . . .

Of night and of death I dream;
Night that will bring me peace,
Coolness and starry gleam,
Stillness and death's release:
Ages and ages have passed, --
Lo! it is night at last.
Night! but the guns roar out.
Night! but the hosts attack.
Red and yellow and black
Geysers of doom upspout.
Silver and green and red
Star-shells hover and spread.
Yonder off to the right
Fiercely kindles the fight;
Roaring near and more near,
Thundering now in my ear;
Close to me, close . . . Oh, hark!
Someone moans in the dark.
I hear, but I cannot see,
I hear as the rest retire,
Someone is caught like me,
Caught on the wire . . . the wire. . . .

Again the shuddering dawn,
Weird and wicked and wan;
Again, and I've not yet gone.
The man whom I heard is dead.
Now I can understand:
A bullet hole in his head,
A pistol gripped in his hand.

Well, he knew what to do, --
Yes, and now I know too. . . .

Hark the resentful guns!
Oh , how thankful am I
To think my beloved ones
Will never know how I die!
I've suffered more than my share;
I'm shattered beyond repair;
I've fought like a man the fight,
And now I demand the right
(God! how his fingers cling!)
To do without shame this thing.
Good! there's a bullet still;
Now I'm ready to fire;
Blame me, God, if You will,
Here on the wire . . . the wire. . . .

Robert William Service

Only A Boche

We brought him in from between the lines: we'd better have let him lie;
For what's the use of risking one's skin for a tyke that's going to die?
What's the use of tearing him loose under a gruelling fire,
When he's shot in the head, and worse than dead, and all messed up on the wire?

However, I say, we brought him in. Diable! The mud was bad;
The trench was crooked and greasy and high, and oh, what a time we had!
And often we slipped, and often we tripped, but never he made a moan;
And how we were wet with blood and with sweat! but we carried him in like our own.

Now there he lies in the dug-out dim, awaiting the ambulance,
And the doctor shrugs his shoulders at him, and remarks, "He hasn't a chance."
And we squat and smoke at our game of bridge on the glistening, straw-packed floor,
And above our oaths we can hear his breath deep-drawn in a kind of snore.
For the dressing station is long and low, and the candles gutter dim,
And the mean light falls on the cold clay walls and our faces bristly and grim;
And we flap our cards on the lousy straw, and we laugh and jibe as we play,
And you'd never know that the cursed foe was less than a mile away.
As we con our cards in the rancid gloom, oppressed by that snoring breath,
You'd never dream that our broad roof-beam was swept by the broom of death.

Heigh-ho! My turn for the dummy hand; I rise and I stretch a bit;
The fetid air is making me yawn, and my cigarette's unlit,
So I go to the nearest candle flame, and the man we brought is there,
And his face is white in the shabby light, and I stand at his feet and stare.
Stand for a while, and quietly stare: for strange though it seems to be,
The dying Boche on the stretcher there has a queer resemblance to me.

It gives one a kind of a turn, you know, to come on a thing like that.
It's just as if I were lying there, with a turban of blood for a hat,
Lying there in a coat grey-green instead of a coat grey-blue,
With one of my eyes all shot away, and my brain half tumbling through;
Lying there with a chest that heaves like a bellows up and down,
And a cheek as white as snow on a grave, and lips that are coffee brown.

And confound him, too! He wears, like me, on his finger a wedding ring,
And around his neck, as around my own, by a greasy bit of string,

A locket hangs with a woman's face, and I turn it about to see:
Just as I thought . . . on the other side the faces of children three;
Clustered together cherub-like, three little laughing girls,
With the usual tiny rosebud mouths and the usual silken curls.
"Zut!" I say. "He has beaten me; for me, I have only two,"
And I push the locket beneath his shirt, feeling a little blue.

Oh, it isn't cheerful to see a man, the marvellous work of God,
Crushed in the mutilation mill, crushed to a smeary clod;
Oh, it isn't cheerful to hear him moan; but it isn't that I mind,
It isn't the anguish that goes with him, it's the anguish he leaves behind.
For his going opens a tragic door that gives on a world of pain,
And the death he dies, those who live and love, will die again and again.

So here I am at my cards once more, but it's kind of spoiling my play,
Thinking of those three brats of his so many a mile away.
War is war, and he's only a Boche, and we all of us take our chance;
But all the same I'll be mighty glad when I'm hearing the ambulance.
One foe the less, but all the same I'm heartily glad I'm not
The man who gave him his broken head, the sniper who fired the shot.

No trumps you make it, I think you said? You'll pardon me if I err;
For a moment I thought of other things . . . Mon Dieu! Quelle vache de gueerre.

Robert William Service

Orphan School

Full fifty merry maids I heard
 One summer morn a-singing;
And each was like a joyous bird
 With spring-clear not a-ringing.
It was an old-time soldier song
 That held their happy voices:
Oh how it's good to swing along
 When youth rejoices!

Then lo! I dreamed long years had gone,
 They passed again ungladly.
Their backs were bent, their cheeks were wan,
 Their eyes were staring sadly.
Their ranks were thinned by full a score
 From death's remorseless reaping
Their steps were slow, they sang no more,--
 Nay, some were weeping.

Dark dream! I saw my maids today
 Singing so innocently;
Their eyes with happiness were gay,
 They looked at me so gently.
Thought I: Be merry in your youth
 With hearts unrueing:
Thank God you do not know the truth
 Of Life's Undoing!

Robert William Service

Our Daily Bread

"Give me my daily bread.
It seems so odd,
When all is done and said,
This plea to God.
To pray for cake might be
The thing to do;
But bread, it seems to me,
Is just our due.

"Give me my daily toil,"
I ought to say -
(If from life's cursed coil
I'd time to pray.)
Give me my daily sweat,
My body sore,
So that bread I may get
To toil for more.

"Give me my daily breath,"
Through half a sob,
Until untimely death
Shall end my job.
A crust for my award,
I cry in dread:

"Grant unto me. Oh Lord,
My daily bread!"

Robert William Service

Our Hero

"Flowers, only flowers -- bring me dainty posies,
 Blossoms for forgetfulness," that was all he said;
So we sacked our gardens, violets and roses,
 Lilies white and bluebells laid we on his bed.
Soft his pale hands touched them, tenderly caressing;
 Soft into his tired eyes came a little light;
Such a wistful love-look, gentle as a blessing;
 There amid the flowers waited he the night.

"I would have you raise me; I can see the West then:
 I would see the sun set once before I go."
So he lay a-gazing, seemed to be at rest then,
 Quiet as a spirit in the golden glow.
So he lay a-watching rosy castles crumbling,
 Moats of blinding amber, bastions of flame,
Rugged rifts of opal, crimson turrets tumbling;
 So he lay a-dreaming till the shadows came.

"Open wide the window; there's a lark a-singing;
 There's a glad lark singing in the evening sky.
How it's wild with rapture, radiantly winging:
 Oh it's good to hear that when one has to die.
I am horror-haunted from the hell they found me;
 I am battle-broken, all I want is rest.
Ah! It's good to die so, blossoms all around me,
 And a kind lark singing in the golden West.

"Flowers, song and sunshine, just one thing is wanting,
 Just the happy laughter of a little child."
So we brought our dearest, Doris all-enchanting;
 Tenderly he kissed her; radiant he smiled.
"In the golden peace-time you will tell the story
 How for you and yours, sweet, bitter deaths were ours. . . .
God bless little children!" So he passed to glory,
 So we left him sleeping, still amid the flow'rs.

Robert William Service

Our Pote

A pote is sure a goofy guy;
He ain't got guts like you or I
 To tell the score;
He ain't goy gumption 'nuff to know
The game of life's to get the dough,
 Then get some more.
Take Brother Bill, he used to be
The big shot of the family,
 The first at school;
But since about a year ago,
Through readin' Longfeller and Poe,
 He's most a fool.

He mopes around with dimwit stare;
You might as well jest not be there,
 The way he looks;
You'd think he shuns the human race,
The how he buries down his face
 In highbrow books.
I've seen him stand for near an hour,
Jest starin' at a simple flower -
 Sich waste o' time;
The scribblin' on an envelope . . .
Why, most of all his silly dope
 Don't even rhyme.

Now Brother's Jim's an engineer,
And Brother Tim's a bank cashier,
 While I keep store;
Yet Bill, the brightest of the flock,
Might be a lawyer or a doc,
 And then some more.
But no, he moons and loaf's about,
As if he tried to figger out
 Why skies are blue;
Instead o' gittin' down to grips
Wi' life an' stackin' up the chips
 Like me an' you.

* * * * *

Well, since them final lines I wrote,
We're mournin' for our Brother Pote:
 Bill crossed the sea
And solved his problem with the beat,
For now he lies in peace and rest
 In Normandie.
He died the bravest of the brave,
And here I'm standin' by his grave
 So far from home;
With just a wooden cross to tell
How in the blaze of battle hell
As gloriously there he fell -
 Bill wrote his "pome".

Robert William Service

Over The Parapet

All day long when the shells sail over
I stand at the sandbags and take my chance;
But at night, at night I'm a reckless rover,
And over the parapet gleams Romance.
Romance! Romance! How I've dreamed it, writing
Dreary old records of money and mart,
Me with my head chuckful of fighting
And the blood of vikings to thrill my heart.

But little I thought that my time was coming,
Sudden and splendid, supreme and soon;
And here I am with the bullets humming
As I crawl and I curse the light of the moon.
Out alone, for adventure thirsting,
Out in mysterious No Man's Land;
Prone with the dead when a star-shell, bursting,
Flares on the horrors on every hand.

There are ruby stars and they drip and wiggle;
And the grasses gleam in a light blood-red;
There are emerald stars, and their tails they wriggle,
And ghastly they glare on the face of the dead.
But the worst of all are the stars of whiteness,
That spill in a pool of pearly flame,
Pretty as gems in their silver brightness,
And etching a man for a bullet's aim.

Yet oh, it's great to be here with danger,
Here in the weird, death-pregnant dark,
In the devil's pasture a stealthy ranger,
When the moon is decently hiding. Hark!
What was that? Was it just the shiver
Of an eerie wind or a clammy hand?
The rustle of grass, or the passing quiver
Of one of the ghosts of No Man's Land?

It's only at night when the ghosts awaken,
And gibber and whisper horrible things;
For to every foot of this God-forsaken

Zone of jeopardy some horror clings.
Ugh! What was that? It felt like a jelly,
That flattish mound in the noisome grass;
You three big rats running free of its belly,
Out of my way and let me pass!

But if there's horror, there's beauty, wonder;
The trench lights gleam and the rockets play.
That flood of magnificent orange yonder
Is a battery blazing miles away.
With a rush and a singing a great shell passes;
The rifles resentfully bicker and brawl,
And here I crouch in the dew-drenched grasses,
And look and listen and love it all.

God! What a life! But I must make haste now,
Before the shadow of night be spent.
It's little the time there is to waste now,
If I'd do the job for which I was sent.
My bombs are right and my clippers ready,
And I wriggle out to the chosen place,
When I hear a rustle . . . Steady! . . . Steady!
Who am I staring slap in the face?

There in the dark I can hear him breathing,
A foot away, and as still as death;
And my heart beats hard, and my brain is seething,
And I know he's a Hun by the smell of his breath.
Then: "Will you surrender?" I whisper hoarsely,
For it's death, swift death to utter a cry.
"English schwein-hund!" he murmurs coarsely.
"Then we'll fight it out in the dark," say I.

So we grip and we slip and we trip and wrestle
There in the gutter of No Man's Land;
And I feel my nails in his wind-pipe nestle,
And he tries to gouge, but I bite his hand.
And he tries to squeal, but I squeeze him tighter:
"Now," I say, "I can kill you fine;
But tell me first, you Teutonic blighter!
Have you any children?" He answers: "Nein."

Nine! Well, I cannot kill such a father,
So I tie his hands and I leave him there.
Do I finish my little job? Well, rather;
And I get home safe with some light to spare.
Heigh-ho! by day it's just prosy duty,
Doing the same old song and dance;
But oh! with the night -- joy, glory, beauty:
Over the parapet -- Life, Romance!

Robert William Service

Pantheist

Lolling on a bank of thyme
Drunk with Spring I made this rhyme. . . .

Though peoples perish in defeat,
And races suffer to survive,
The sunshine never was so sweet,
So vast the joy to be alive;
The laughing leaves, the glowing grass
Proclaim how good it is to be;
The pines are lyric as I pass,
The hills hosannas sing to me.

Pink roses ring yon placid palm,
Soft shines the blossom of the peach;
The sapphire sea is satin calm,
With bell-like tinkle on the beach;
A lizard lazes in the sun,
A bee is bumbling to my hand;
Shy breezes whisper: "You are one
With us because you understand."

Yea, I am one with all I see,
With wind and wave, with pine and palm;
Their very elements in me
Are fused to make me what I am.
Through me their common life-stream flows,
And when I yield this human breath,
In leaf and blossom, bud and rose,
Live on I will . . . There is no Death.

Oh, let me flee from woeful things,
And listen to the linnets' song;
To solitude my spirit clings,
To sunny woodlands I belong.
O foolish men! Yourselves destroy.
But I from pain would win surcease. . . .
O Earth, grant me eternal joy!
O Nature - everlasting peace!

Amen.

Robert William Service

Patches

Mother focused with a frown
The part of me where I sit down.
Said she: "Your pants are wearing through;
Let me sew on a patch for you."
And so she did,--of azure blue.
My britches were of sober grey,
And when I went to school next day,
The fellows said: "Excuse our smile:
We saw your patch 'way off a mile."
Said I: "Sure, it's the latest style."

So each boy asked his Ma to match
With bluer blue my super-patch,
And when to school they came en masse,
It was the emblem of our class,
Admired by every bonnie lass.

Now when I'm old and in my dotage,
I hope I'll have a humble cottage,
And sit me by a hive of bees,
A patchwork quilt accross my knees,
Warming my worn hands in the sun,
All ropey with the work they've done.

The work they've done to give me this
Brief bit of comfort, ease and bliss;
My pathway edged with cockle shells,
And bright with Canterbury bells,
That leads to where my humble thatch is,
It, too, adorned with straw-bright patches.

Robert William Service

Pavement Poet

God's truth! these be the bitter times.
In vain I sing my sheaf of rhymes,
And hold my battered hat for dimes.

And then a copper collars me,
Barking: "It's begging that you be;
Come on, dad; you're in custody."

And then the Beak looks down and says:
"Sheer doggerel I deem your lays:
I send you down for seven days."

So for the week I won't disturb
The peace by singing at the curb.
I don't mind that, but oh it's hell
To have my verse called doggerel.

Robert William Service

Pedlar

Pedlar's coming down the street,
Housewives beat a swift retreat.
Don't you answer to the bell;
Heedless what she has to sell.
Just discreetly go inside.
We must hang a board, I fear:
PEDLARS NOT PERMITTED HERE.

I'm trying to sell what nobody wants to buy;
They turn me away, but still I try and try.
My arms are aching and my feet are sore;
Heartsick and worn I drag from door to door.
I ring bells, meekly knock, hold out my tray,
But no one answers, so I go away.
I am so weary; oh, I want to cry,
Trying to sell what no one wants to buy.

I do not blame them. Maybe in their place
I'd slam the door shut in a pedlar's face.
I don't know; perhaps I'd raise their hopes
By looking at their pens and envelopes,
Their pins and needles, pencils, spools of thread,
Cheap tawdry stuff, before I shake my head
And go back to my cosy kitchen nook
Without another thought or backward look.
I would not see their pain nor hear their sigh,
Trying to sell what no one wants to buy.

I know I am a nuisance. I can see
They only buy because they pity me.
They may . . . I've had a cottage of my own,
A husband, children - now I am alone,
Friendless in all the world. The bitter years
Have crushed me, robbed me of my dears.
All, all I've lost, my only wish to die,
Selling my trash that no one wants to buy.

Pedlar's beating a retreat -
Poor old thing, her face is sweet,

her figure frail, her hair snow-white;
Dogone it! Every door's shut tight. . . .
"Say, Ma, how much for all you've got?
Hell, here's ten bucks . . . I'll take the lot.
Go, get yourself a proper feed,
A little of the rest you need.
I've got a mother looks like you -
I'd hate her doing what you do. . . .
No, don't get sloppy, can the mush,
Praying for me - all that slush;
But please don't come again this way,
Ten bucks is all I draw a day."

Robert William Service

Perfection

If I could practise what I preach,
Of fellows there would few be finer;
If I were true to what I teach
My life would be a lot diviner.
If I would act the way I speak,
Of halo I might be a winner:
The spirit wills, the flesh is weak,--
 I'm just a simple sinner.

Six days I stray,--on number seven
I try to be a little better,
And stake a tiny claim on Heaven
By clinging close to gospel letter.
My pew I occupy on Sunday,
And though I draw the line at snoring,
I must admit I long for Monday,
 And find the sermon boring.

Although from godly grace I fall,
For sensed with sin my every act is,
'Twere better not to preach at all,
Then I would have no need to practice.
So Sabbath day I'll sneak away,
And though the Church grieve my defection,
In sunny woodland I will pray:
 "God save us from Perfection!"

Robert William Service

Periods

My destiny it is tonight
To sit with pensive brow
Beside my study fire and write
This verse I'm making now.
This Period, this tiny dot
My pencil has defined,
By centuries of human thought
Was predestined.

And my last period of all
With patience now I see;
The final point so very small,
That locks my life for me.
Yet in eternity of time
They relatively seem
So like,--the dot that rounds my rhyme
Or ends my dream.

For each was preordained by Fate
Since human life began;
So are the little and the great
Linked in the life of man.
And as I wait without heartache
The pencil-point of God,
To pattern predestined I make
This-----.

Robert William Service

Picture Dealer

There were twin artists A. and B.
Who painted pictures two,
And hung them in my galley
For everyone to view;
The one exhibited by A.
The name "A Sphere" did bear,
While strangely brother B's display
Was catalogued: "A Square".

Now although A. (and this is queer)
Could squeeze a pretty tube,
The picture that he called a Sphere
Was blocky as a cube;
While B. (though no hint he disclosed
To pull the public leg)
The Square he placidly exposed
Was oval as an egg.

Thought I: To sell these pictures two
I never will be able;
There's only one thing I can do,
That's change around the label.
The rotund one I called a Sphere,
The cornered one a Square . . .
And yet, I thought: It's very queer,
Unbought they linger there.

Then strange as it may well appear,
Derision did I bare,
And blandly dubbed the Square a Sphere
And tabbed the Sphere a Square.
Behold the answer I had found,
For to my glad dismay
The curious came crowding round:
A sold the daubs next day.

Well, maybe A. and B. were right,
Not mugs like you and me,
With something missing in our sight

That only artists see.
So what it is and what it ain't
I'll never more discuss . . .
These guys believe in what they paint,
Or . . . are they spoofing us?

Robert William Service

Pilgrims

For oh, when the war will be over
 We'll go and we'll look for our dead;
We'll go when the bee's on the clover,
 And the plume of the poppy is red:
We'll go when the year's at its gayest,
 When meadows are laughing with flow'rs;
And there where the crosses are greyest,
 We'll seek for the cross that is ours.

For they cry to us: Friends, we are lonely,
 A-weary the night and the day;
But come in the blossom-time only,
 Come when our graves will be gay:
When daffodils all are a-blowing,
 And larks are a-thrilling the skies,
Oh, come with the hearts of you glowing,
 And the joy of the Spring in your eyes.

But never, oh, never come sighing,
 For ours was the Splendid Release;
And oh, but 'twas joy in the dying
 To know we were winning you Peace!
So come when the valleys are sheening,
 And fledged with the promise of grain;
And here where our graves will be greening,
 Just smile and be happy again.

And so, when the war will be over,
 We'll seek for the Wonderful One;
And maiden will look for her lover,
 And mother will look for her son;
And there will be end to our grieving,
 And gladness will gleam over loss,
As -- glory beyond all believing!
 We point . . . to a name on a cross.

Robert William Service

Pipe Smoker

Because I love the soothing weed
 And am of sober type,
I'd choose me for a friend in need
 A man who smokes a pipe.
A cove who hasn't much to say,
 And spits into the fire,
Puffing like me a pipe of clay,
 Corn-cob or briar.

A chap original of thought,
 With cheery point of view,
Who has of gumption quite a lot,
 And streaks of humour too.
He need not be a whiskered sage,
 With wisdom over-ripe:
Just give me in the old of age
 A pal who smokes a pipe.

A cigarette may make for wit,
 Although I like it not;
A good cigar, I must admit,
 Gives dignity to thought.
But as my glass of grog I sip
 I never, never gripe
If I have for companionship
 A guy who smokes a pipe.

Robert William Service

Playboy

I greet the challenge of the dawn
 With weary, bleary eyes;
Into the sky so ashen wan
 I wait the sun to rise;
Then in the morning's holy hush,
 With heart of shame I hear
A robin from a lilac bush
 Pipe pure and clear.

All night in dive and dicing den,
 With wantons and with wine
I've squandered on wild, witless men
 The fortune that was mine;
The gold my father fought to save
 In folly I have spent;
And now to fill a pauper's grave
 My steps are bent.

See! how the sky is amber bright!
 The thrushes thrill their glee.
The dew-drops sparkle with delight,
 And yonder smiles the sea.
Oh let me plunge to drown the pain
 Of love and faith forgot:
Then purged I may return again,
 --Or I may not.

Robert William Service

Plebeian Plutocrat

I own a gorgeous Cadillac,
A chauffeur garbed in blue;
And as I sit behind his back
His beefy neck I view.
Yet let me whisper, though you may
Think me a queer old cuss,
From Claude I often sneak away
To board a bus.

A democrat, I love the crowd,
The bustle and the din;
The market wives who gab aloud
As they go out and in.
I chuckle as I pay my dime,
With mien meticulous:
You can't believe how happy I'm;
Aboard a bus.

The driver of my Cadillac
Has such a haughty sneer;
I'm sure he would give me the sack
If he beheld me here.
His horror all my friends would share
Could they but see me thus:
A gleeful multi-millionaire
Aboard a bus.

Robert William Service

Poet And Peer

They asked the Bard of Ayr to dine;
The banquet hall was fit and fine,
 With gracing it a Lord;
The poet came; his face was grim
To find the place reserved for him
 Was at the butler's board.

So when the gentry called him in,
He entered with a knavish grin
 And sipped a glass of wine;
But when they asked would he recite
Something of late he'd chanced to write
 He ettled to decline.

Then with a sly, sardonic look
He opened up a little book
 Containing many a gem;
And as they sat in raiment fine,
So smug and soused with rosy wine,
 This verse he read to them.

'You see yon birkie caw'ed a Lord,
 Who struts and stares an' a' that,
Though hundreds worship at his word
 He's but a coof for a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
 A man's a man for a' that.

He pointed at that portly Grace
Who glared with apoplectic face,
 While others stared with gloom;
Then having paid them all he owed,
Burns, Bard of Homespun, smiled and strode
 Superbly from the room.

Robert William Service

Poet's Path

My garden hath a slender path
With ivy overgrown,
A secret place where once would pace
A poet all alone;
I see him now with fretted brow,
Plunged deep in thought;
And sometimes he would write maybe,
And sometimes he would not.

A verse a day he used to say
Keeps worry from the door;
Without the stink of printer's ink
How life would be a bore!
And so from chime of breakfast time
To supper he would beat
The pathway flat, a mossy mat
For his poetic feet.

He wrote, I'm told, of gods of old
And mythologic men;
Far better he had sung, maybe,
Of plain folks now and then;
With bitterness he would confess
Too lofty was his aim. . . .
And then with woe I saw him throw
His poems to the flame.

He went away one bitter day
When death was in the sky;
No further word I ever heard
Beyond his last goodbye.
Did battle grim take toll of him
In heaven-rocking wrath?
Oh did he write in starry flight
His name in flame on hell-brewed night?
... Well, there's my poet's path.

Robert William Service

Politeness

The English and the French were met
Upon the field of future battle;
The foes were formidably set
And waiting for the guns to rattle;
When from the serried ranks of France
The English saw with woeful presage
Under a flaming flag advance
A trumpeter who bore a message.

'Twas from their Marshal, quite polite,
Yet made the English leader shiver.
"We're perched," said he, "upon the height,
While you're exposed beside the river.
We have the vantage, you'll agree,
And your look-out is melancholy;
But being famed for courtesy
We'll let you fire the starting volley."

The English General was moved,
In fact his eyes were almost tearful;
Then he too his politeness proved
By writing back: "We are not fearful.
Our England is too proud to take
The privilege you thrust upon her;
So let your guns in thunder break:
To you, M'sieu, shall be the honour."

Again a note the Marshall sent
By envoy for his battle station:
"Your spirit wins my compliment,
Your courage my appreciation.
Yet you are weak and we are strong,
And though your faith is most inspiring,
Don't let us linger all day long -
Mon General, begin the firing."

"How chivalrous the soul of France."
The English General reflected.
"I hate to take this happy chance,

But I suppose it's what's expected.
Politeness is a platitude
In this fair land of gallant foemen."
So with a heart of gratitude
He primed his guns and cried: "Let's go men!"

The General was puzzled when
No answer came, said he: "What is it?
Why don't they give us hell?" And then
The herald paid another visit.
The Marshall wrote: "to your salute
Please pardon us for not replying;
To shatter you we cannot shoot . . .
My men are dead and I am dying."

Robert William Service

Pooch

Nurse, won't you let him in?
He's barkin' an' scratchen' the door,
Makin' so dreffel a din
I jest can't sleep any more;
Out there in the dark an' the cold,
Hark to him scrape an' whine,
Breakin' his heart o' gold,
Poor little pooch o' mine.

Nurse, I was sat in ma seat
In front o' the barber shop,
When there he was lickin' ma feet
As if he would never stop;
Then all of a sudden I see
That dog-catcher moseyin' by:
"Whose mongrel is that?" says he;
"It's ma pedigree pup," says I.

Nurse, he was starved an' a-stray,
But his eyes was plumbful o' trust.
How could I turn him away?
I throwed him a bit o' a crust,
An' he choked as he gluped it up,
Then down at ma feet he curled:
Poor little pitiful pup!
Hadn't a friend in the world.

Nurse, I was friendless too,
So we was makin' a pair.
I'm black as a cast-off shoe,
But that li'le dog didn't care.
He loved me as much as though
Ma skin was pearly an' white:
Somehow dogs seem to know
When a man's heart's all right.

Nurse, we was thick as thieves;
Nothin' could pry us apart,
An' now to hear how he grieves

Is twistin' a knife in ma heart.
As I worked at ma shoe-shine stand
He'd watch me wi' eyes o' love,
A-wigglin' an' lickin' ma hand
Like I was a god above.

Nurse, I sure had no luck
That night o' the rain an' then fog;
There was that thunderin' truck,
And right in the way - ma dog.
Oh, I was a fool, I fear;
It's harder to think than to feel . . .
I dashed in, flung the pup clear,
But - I went under the wheel. . . .

Nurse, it's a-gittin' dark;
Guess ma time's about up:
Don't seem to hear him bark,
Poor, broken-hearted pup! . . .
Why, here he is, darn his skin!
Lickin' ma face once more:
How did the cuss get in?
Musta' busted the door.

God, I'm an ol' black coon,
But You ain't conscious o' race.
I gotta be goin' soon,
I'll be meetin' You face to face.
I'se been sinful, dice an' hooch,
But Lordy, before I die
I'se a-prayin': "Be good to ma pooch" . . .
That's all - little mutt, good-bye.

Robert William Service

Poor Cock Robin

My garden robin in the Spring
Was rapturous with glee,
And followed me with wistful wing
From pear to apple tree;
His melodies the summer long
He carolled with delight,
As if he could with jewelled song
Find favour in my sight.

And now that Autumn's in the air
He's singing singing still,
And yet somehow I cannot bear
The frenzy of his bill;
The keen wind ruffs his ruddy breast
As to bare boughs he clings;
The sun is sullen in the West
Yet still he sings and sings.

Soon, soon the legions of the snow
Will pitch their tents again,
And round my window-sill I know
He'll call for crumbs in vein;
The pulsing passion of his throat
Has hint of Winter woe;
The piercing sweetness of his note
entreats me not to go.

In vein, in vain, Oh valiant one,
You sing to bid me stay!
For all my life is in the sun
And I must fly away.
yet by no gold or orange glow
Will I be comforted,
Seeing blood-bright in bitter snow -
A robin dead.

Robert William Service

Poor Kid

Mumsie and Dad are raven dark
And I am lily blonde.
"Tis strange,' I once heard nurse remark,
'You do not correspond.'
And yet they claim me as their own,
Born of their flesh and bone.

To doubt their parenthood I dread,
But now to girlhood grown,
The thought is haunting in my head
That I am not their own:
If so, my radiant bloom of youth
Would wither in the truth.

'Twould give me anguish deep to know
A fondling babe was I;
And that a maid in wedless woe
Left me to live or die:
I'd rather Mother lied and lied
To save my pride.

I love them both and they love me;
I am their all, they say.
Yet though the sweetest home have we,
To know I'm theirs I pray.
If not, please dear ones, never tell . . .
The truth would be of hell.

Robert William Service

Poor Peter

Blind Peter Piper used to play
All up and down the city;
I'd often meet him on my way,
And throw a coin for pity.
But all amid his sparkling tones
His ear was quick as any
To catch upon the cobble-stones
The jingle of my penny.

And as upon a day that shone
He piped a merry measure:
"How well you play!" I chanced to say;
Poor Peter glowed with pleasure.
You'd think the words of praise I spoke
Were all the pay he needed;
The artist in the player woke,
The penny lay unheeded.

Now Winter's here; the wind is shrill,
His coat is thin and tattered;
Yet hark! he's playing trill on trill
As if his music mattered.
And somehow though the city looks
Soaked through and through with shadows,
He makes you think of singing brooks
And larks and sunny meadows.

Poor chap! he often starves, they say;
Well, well, I can believe it;
For when you chuck a coin his way
He'll let some street-boy thief it.
I fear he freezes in the night;
My praise I've long repented,
Yet look! his face is all alight . . .
Blind Peter seems contented.

Robert William Service

Poor Poet

'A man should write to please himself,'
He proudly said.
Well, see his poems on the shelf,
Dusty, unread.

When he came to my shop each day,
So peaked and cold,
I'd sneak one of his books away
And say 'twas sold.

And then by chance he looked below,
And saw a stack
Of his own work,--speechless with woe
He came not back.

I hate to think he took to drink,
And passed away;
I have not heard of him a word
Unto this day.

A man must write to please himself,
Of all it's true;
But happy they who spurning self--
Please people too.

Robert William Service

Portent

Courage mes gars:
La guerre est proche.

I plant my little plot of beans,
I sit beneath my cyprus tree;
I do not know what trouble means,
I cultivate tranquillity . . .
But as to-day my walk I made
In all serenity and cheer,
I saw cut in an agave blade:
"Courage, my comrades, war is near!"

Seward I went, my feet were slow,
Awhile I dowsed upon the shore;
And then I roused with fear for lo!
I saw six grisly ships of war.
A grim, grey line of might and dread
Against the skyline looming sheer:
With horror to myself I said:
"Courage, my comrades, war is near!"

I saw my cottage on the hill
With rambling roses round the door;
It was so peaceful and so still
I sighed . . . and then it was no more.
A flash of flame, a rubble heap;
I cried aloud with woe and fear . . .
And wok myself from troubled sleep -
My home was safe, war was not near.

Oh, I am old, my step is frail,
My carcass bears a score of scars,
And as I climbed my homeward trail
Sadly I thought of other wars.
And when that agave leaf I saw
With vicious knife I made a blear
Of words clean-cut into the raw:
"Courage, my comrades, war is near!"

Who put hem there I do not know -
One of these rabid reds, no doubt;
But I for freedom struck my blow,
With bitter blade I scraped them out.
There now, said I, I will forget,
And smoke my pipe and drink my beer -
Yet in my mind these words were set:
"Courage, my comrades, war is near!"

"Courage, my comrades, war is near!"
I hear afar its hateful drums;
Its horrid din assails my ear:
I hope I die before it comes. . . .
Yet as into the town I go,
And listen to the rabble cheer,
I think with heart of weary woe:
War is not coming - WAR IS HERE.

Robert William Service

Portrait

Because life's passing show
 Is little to his mind,
There is a man I know
 Indrawn from human kind.
His dearest friends are books;
 Yet oh how glad he talks
To birds and trees and brooks
 On lonely walks.
He takes the same still way
 By grove and hill and sea;
He lives that each new day
 May like the last one be.
He hates all kinds of change;
 His step is sure and slow:
Though life has little range
 He loves it so.

He makes it his one aim
 His pleasure to repeat;
To always do the same,
 Since sameness is so sweet;
In simple things to find
 The dearest to his mood.
His true life in his mind
 Is oh so good!

Please leave him to his dream,
 This old, unwearied man,
Who shuns the busy stream
 And has outlived his span.
Just leave him on his shelf
 To watch the world go by . . .
Because he is--myself:
 Yea, such be I.

Robert William Service

Post Office Romance

The lady at the corner wicket
Sold me a stamp, I stooped to lick it,
And on the envelope to stick it;
A spinster lacking girlish grace,
Yet sweetly sensitive, her face
Seemed to en-star that stodgy place.

Said I: "I've come from o'er the sea
To ask you if you'll marry me -
That is to say, if you are free.
I see your gentle features freeze;
'I do not like such jokes as these,'
You seem to say . . . Have patience, please.

I saw you twenty years ago;
Just here you sold me stamps, and Oh
Your image seemed to haunt me so.
For you were lovely as a rose,
But I was poor, and I suppose
At me you tilted dainty nose.

Ah, well I knew love could not be,
So sought my fortune o'er the sea,
Deeming that you were lost to me.
Of sailing ships a mate was I,
From oriental ports to ply . . .
Ten years went past of foreign sky.

But always in the starry night
I steered my course with you in sight,
My dream of you a beacon light.
Then after a decade had sped
I cam again: 'What luck? I said,
'Will she be here and free to wed?'

Oh it was on a morn of Spring,
And I had in my purse a ring
I bought in Eastern voyaging,
With thought of you and only you;

For I to my love dream was true . . .
And here you were, your eyes of blue.

The same sun shining on your brow
Lustered you hair as it does now,
My heart was standing still, I vow.
I bought a stamp, my eyes were bent
Upon a ring you wore - I went
Away as if indifferent.

Again I sailed behind the mast,
And yet your image held me fast,
For once again ten years have passed.
And I am bronzed with braid of gold;
The rank of Captain now I hold,
And fifty are my years all told.

Yet still I have that ruby ring
I bought for you that morn of Spring -
See, here it is, a pretty thing. . . .
But now you've none upon your finger;
Why? I don't know - but as I linger
I'm thinking : Oh what can I bring her.

Who all my life have ploughed the ocean,
A lonely man with one devotion -
Just you? Ah, if you'd take the notion
To try the thing you ought to wear,
It fits so well. Do leave it there.

And here's a note addressed to you.
Ah yes, quite strangers are we two,
But - well, please answer soon . . . Adieu!

* * * * *

Oh no, you never more will see
Her selling stamps at Wicket Three:
Queen of my home, she's pouring tea.

Robert William Service

Pragmatic

When young I was an Atheist,
 Yea, pompous as a pigeon
No opportunity I missed
 To satirize religion.
I sneered at Scripture, scoffed at Faith,
 I blasphemed at believers:
Said I: "There's nothing after Death,--
 Your priests are just deceivers."

In middle age I was not so
 Contemptuous and caustic.
Thought I: "There's much I do not know:
 I'd better be agnostic.
The hope of immortality
 'Tis foolish to be flouting."
So in the end I came to be
 A doubter of my doubting.

Now I am old, with steps inclined
 To hesitate and falter;
I find I get such peace of mind
 Just sitting by an altar.
So Friends, don't scorn the family pew,
 The preachments of the kirks:
Religion may be false or true,
 But by the Lord!--it works.

Robert William Service

Prayer

You talk o' prayer an' such -
Well, I jest don't know how;
I guess I got as much
Religion as a cow.
I fight an' drink an' swear;
Red hell I often raise,
But never said a prayer
 In all my days.

I'm honest, right enough;
Don't take no stock in crimes;
I'm jest a dockside tough,
An' yet . . . an' yet sometimes,
If I should happen by
A church-door open wide
The chances are that I
 Will sneak inside.

It's kin o' peaceful there,
Jest sittin' in a pew;
There's sompin' in the air
That rests me through an' through;
It does me heaps o' good
To see them candles glow,
So soothin' to the mood . . .
 Why? - I don't know.

Unless that sittin' still
Can be a kind o' prayer;
My heart jest seems to fill
Wi' peace . . . Oh, God don't care
For guys the likes o' me;
I just ain't in His line:
But when the Cross I see,
 I make the sign.

Robert William Service

Prelude

To smite Apollo's lyre I am unable;
Of loveliness, alas! I cannot sing.
My lot it is, across the tavern table,
To start a chorus to the strumming string.
I have no gift to touch your heart to pity;
I have no power to ring the note of pain:
All I can do is pipe a pot-house ditty,
Or roar a Rabelaisian refrain.

Behold yon minstrel of the empty belly,
Who seeks to please the bored and waiting throng,
Outside the Opera with ukulele,
And raucous strains of syncopated song.
His rag-time mocks their eager hearts a-hunger
For golden voices, melody divine:
Yet . . . throw a penny to the ballad-monger;
Yet . . . listen idly to this song of mine.

For with a humble heart I clank rhyme's fetters,
And bare my buttocks to the critic knout;
A graceless hobo in the Land of Letters,
Piping my ditties of the down-and-out.
A bar-room bard . . . so if a coin you're flinging,
Pay me a pot, and let me dream and booze;
To stars of scorn my dour defiance ringing,
With battered banjo and a strumpet Muse.

Robert William Service

Premonition

'Twas a year ago and the moon was bright
 (Oh, I remember so well, so well);
I walked with my love in a sea of light,
 And the voice of my sweet was a silver bell.
 And sudden the moon grew strangely dull,
 And sudden my love had taken wing;
I looked on the face of a grinning skull,
 I strained to my heart a ghastly thing.

'Twas but fantasy, for my love lay still
 In my arms, with her tender eyes aglow,
And she wondered why my lips were chill,
 Why I was silent and kissed her so.
 A year has gone and the moon is bright,
 A gibbous moon, like a ghost of woe;
I sit by a new-made grave to-night,
 And my heart is broken -- it's strange, you know.

Robert William Service

Priscilla

Jerry MacMullen, the millionaire,
Driving a red-meat bus out there --
How did he win his Croix de Guerre?
Bless you, that's all old stuff:
Beast of a night on the Verdun road,
Jerry stuck with a woeful load,
Stalled in the mud where the red lights glowed,
Prospect devilish tough.

"Little Priscilla" he called his car,
Best of our battered bunch by far,
Branded with many a bullet scar,
Yet running so sweet and true.
Jerry he loved her, knew her tricks;
Swore: "She's the beat of the best big six,
And if ever I get in a deuce of a fix
Priscilla will pull me through."

"Looks pretty rotten right now," says he;
"Hanged if the devil himself could see.
Priscilla, it's up to you and me
To show 'em what we can do."
Seemed that Priscilla just took the word;
Up with a leap like a horse that's spurred,
On with the joy of a homing bird,
Swift as the wind she flew.

Shell-holes shoot at them out of the night;
A lurch to the left, a wrench to the right,
Hands grim-gripping and teeth clenched tight,
Eyes that glare through the dark.
"Priscilla, you're doing me proud this day;
Hospital's only a league away,
And, honey, I'm longing to hit the hay,
So hurry, old girl. . . . But hark!"

Howl of a shell, harsh, sudden, dread;
Another . . . another. . . . "Strike me dead
If the Huns ain't strafing the road ahead

So the convoy can't get through!
A barrage of shrap, and us alone;
Four rush-cases -- you hear 'em moan?
Fierce old messes of blood and bone. . . .
Priscilla, what shall we do?"

Again it seems that Priscilla hears.
With a rush and a roar her way she clears,
Straight at the hell of flame she steers,
Full at its heart of wrath.
Fury of death and dust and din!
Havoc and horror! She's in, she's in;
She's almost over, she'll win, she'll win!
Woof! Crump! right in the path.

Little Priscilla skids and stops,
Jerry MacMullen sways and flops;
Bang in his map the crash he cops;
Shriek from the car: "Mon Dieu!"
One of the bless's hears him say,
Just at the moment he faints away:
"Reckon this isn't my lucky day,
Priscilla, it's up to you."

Sergeant raps on the doctor's door;
"Car in the court with couch's four;
Driver dead on the dashboard floor;
Strange how the bunch got here."
"No," says the Doc, "this chap's alive;
But tell me, how could a man contrive
With both arms broken, a car to drive?
Thunder of God! it's queer."

Same little bless; makes a spiel;
Says he: "When I saw our driver reel,
A Strange Shape leapt to the driving wheel
And sped us safe through the night."
But Jerry, he says in his drawling tone:
"Rats! Why, Priscilla came in on her own.
Bless her, she did it alone, alone. . . ."
Hanged if I know who's right.

Privacy

Oh you who are shy of the popular eye,
(Though most of us seek to survive it)
Just think of the goldfish who wanted to die
Because she could never be private.
There are pebbles and reeds for aquarium needs
Of eel and of pike who are bold fish;
But who gives a thought to a sheltering spot
For the sensitive soul of a goldfish?

So the poor little thing swam around in a ring,
In a globe of a crystalline crudity;
Swam round and swam round, but no refuge she found
From the public display of her nudity;
No weedy retreat for a cloister discreet,
From the eye of the mob to exempt her;
Can you wonder she paled, and her appetite failed,
Till even a fly couldn't tempt her?

I watched with dismay as she faded away;
Each day she grew slimmer and slimmer.
From an amber hat burned, to a silver she turned
Then swiftly was dimmer and dimmer.
No longer she gleamed, like a spectre she seemed,
One morning I anxiously sought her:
I only could stare - she no longer was there . . .
She'd simply dissolved in the water.

So when you behold bright fishes of gold,
In globes of immaculate purity;
Just think how they'd be more contented and free
If you gave them a little obscurity.
And you who make laws, get busy because
You can brighten the lives of untold fish,
If its sadness you note, and a measure promote
To Ensure Private Life For The Goldfish.

Robert William Service

Procreation

It hurts my pride that I should be
 The issue of a night of lust;
Yet even Bishops, you'll agree,
 Obey the biologic 'must';
Though no doubt with more dignity
 Than we of layman dust.

I think the Lord made a mistake
 When he designed the human race,
That man and angel in the make
 Should have brutality for base.
Jehovah might have planned at least
 Not to confound us with the beast.

So with humiliation I
 Think of my basic origin;
And yet with some relief I sigh,--
 I might have been conceived in sin;
Instead of being, I believe,
 The offspring of a nuptial eve.

So when I look in beauty's face,
 Or that of king or saint or sage,
It seems to me I darkly trace
 Their being to a rutting rage . . .
Had I been Deity's adviser
 Meseems I might have planned it wiser.

Robert William Service

Profane Poet

Oh how it would enable me
 To titillate my vanity
If you should choose to label me
 A Poet of Profanity!
For I've been known with vulgar slang
 To stoke the Sacred Fire,
And even used a word like 'hang',
 Suggesting ire.

Yea, I've been slyly told, although
 It savours of inanity,
In print the ladies often show
 A failing for profanity.
So to delight the dears I try,
 And often in the past
In fabricating sonnets I
 Have fulminated: 'Blast!'

I know I shock the sober folk
 Who doubt my lyric sanity,
And readers of my rhyme provoke
 By publishing profanity,
But oh a hale and hearty curse
 Is very dear to me,
And so I end this bit of verse
 With d-- and d-- and d--!

Robert William Service

Property

The red-roofed house of dream design
Looks three ways on the sea;
For fifty years I've made it mine,
And held it part of me.
The pines I planted in my youth
Triumphantly are tall . . .
Yet now I know with sorry sooth
I have to leave it all.

Hard-hewn from out the living rock
And salty from the tide,
My house has braved the tempest shock
With hardihood and pride.
Each nook is memoried to me;
I've loved its every stone,
And cried to it exultantly:
"My own, my very own!"

Poor fool! To think that I possess.
I have but cannot hold;
And all that's mine is less and less
My own as I grow old.
My home shall ring with childish cheers
When I shall leave it lone;
My house will bide a hundred years
When I am in the bone.

Alas! No thing can be my own:
At most a life-long lease
Is all I hold, a little loan
From Time, that soon will cease.
For now by faint and failing breath
I feel that I must go . . .
Old House! You've never known a death,--
Well, now's your hour to know.

Robert William Service

Pullman Porter

The porter in the Pullman car
Was charming, as they sometimes are.
He scanned my baggage tags: "Are you
The man who wrote of Lady Lou?"
When I said "yes" he made a fuss -
Oh, he was most assiduous;
And I was pleased to think that he
Enjoyed my brand of poetry.

He was forever at my call,
So when we got to Montreal
And he had brushed me off, I said:
"I'm glad my poems you have read.
I feel quite flattered, I confess,
And if you give me your address
I'll send you (autographed, of course)
One of my little books of verse."

He smiled - his teeth were white as milk;
He spoke - his voice was soft as silk.
I recognized, despite his skin,
The perfect gentleman within.
Then courteously he made reply:
"I thank you kindly, Sir, but I
With many other cherished tome
Have all your books of verse at home.

"When I was quite a little boy
I used to savour them with joy;
And now my daughter, aged three,
Can tell the tale of Sam McGee;
While Tom, my son, that's only two
Has heard the yarn of Dan McGrew. . . .
Don't think your stuff I'm not applaudin' -
My taste is Eliot and Auden."

So we gravely bade adieu
I felt quite snubbed - and so would you,
And yet I shook him by the hand,

Impressed that he could understand
The works of those two tops I mention,
So far beyond my comprehension -
A humble bard of boys and barmen,
Disdained, alas! by Pullman carmen.

Robert William Service

Quatrains

One said: Thy life is thine to make or mar,
To flicker feebly, or to soar, a star;
 It lies with thee -- the choice is thine, is thine,
To hit the ties or drive thy auto-car.

I answered Her: The choice is mine -- ah, no!
We all were made or marred long, long ago.
 The parts are written; hear the super wail:
"Who is stage-managing this cosmic show?"

Blind fools of fate and slaves of circumstance,
Life is a fiddler, and we all must dance.
 From gloom where mocks that will-o'-wisp, Free-will
I heard a voice cry: "Say, give us a chance."

Chance! Oh, there is no chance! The scene is set.
Up with the curtain! Man, the marionette,
 Resumes his part. The gods will work the wires.
They've got it all down fine, you bet, you bet!

It's all decreed -- the mighty earthquake crash,
The countless constellations' wheel and flash;
 The rise and fall of empires, war's red tide;
The composition of your dinner hash.

There's no haphazard in this world of ours.
Cause and effect are grim, relentless powers.
 They rule the world. (A king was shot last night;
Last night I held the joker and both bowers.)

From out the mesh of fate our heads we thrust.
We can't do what we would, but what we must.
 Heredity has got us in a cinch --
(Consoling thought when you've been on a "bust".)

Hark to the song where spherical voices blend:
"There's no beginning, never will be end."
 It makes us nutty; hang the astral chimes!
The tables spread; come, let us dine, my friend.

Robert William Service

Ragetty Doll

Rosemary has of dolls a dozen,
 Yet she disdains them all;
While Marie Rose, her pauper cousin
 Has just an old rag doll.
But you should see her mother it,
 And with her kisses smother it.

A twist of twill, a hank of hair,
 Fit for the rubbish bin;
How Rosemary with scorn would stare
 At its pathetic grin!
Yet Marie Rose can lover it,
 And with her kisses cover it.

Rosemary is a pampered pet;
 She sniffs a dainty nose
Of scorn at ragged dolls, and yet
 My love's with Marie Rose,
In garret corner shy and sweet,
 With rag doll Marguerite.

Though kin they are, a gulf will grow
 Between them with the years;
For one a life of love will know,
 The other toil and tears:
Perhaps that shabby rag doll knows
 The rue of Marie Rose.

Robert William Service

Raising The Flag

Behold! the Spanish flag they're raising
Before the Palace courtyard gate;
To watch its progress bold and blazing
Two hundred patient people wait.
Though bandsmen play the anthem bravely
The silken emblem seems to lag;
Two hundred people watch it gravely -
But only two salute the flag.

Fine-clad and arrogant of manner
The twain are like dark dons of old,
And to that high and haughty banner
Uplifted palms they proudly hold.
The others watch them glumly, grimly;
No sullen proletariat these,
but middle-class, well clad though dimly,
Who seem to live in decent ease.

Then sadly they look at each other,
And sigh and shrug and turn away.
What is the feeling that they smother?
I wonder, but it's none too gay.
And as with puzzlement I bide me,
Beneath that rich, resplendent rag,
I hear a bitter voice beside me:
"It isn't ours - it's Franco's flag.

"I'm Right: I have no Left obsession.
I hate the Communists like hell,
But after ten years of oppression
I hate our Franco twice as well.
And hush! I keep (do not reprove me)
His portrait in a private place,
And every time my bowels move me
I - spit in El Caudillo's face."

These were the words I heard, I swear,
But when I turned around to stare,
Believe me - there was no one there.

Robert William Service

Red-Tiled Roof

Poets may praise a wattle thatch
Doubtfully waterproof;
Let me uplift my lowly latch
Beneath a rose-tiled roof.
Let it be gay and rich in hue,
Soft bleached by burning days,
Where skies ineffably are blue,
And seas a golden glaze.

But set me in the surly North
Beneath a roof of slate,
And as I sourly sally forth
My heart will hum with hate;
And I will brood beneath a pine
Where Nature seldom smiles,
Heart-longing for a starry vine
And roof of ruddy tiles.

For oh the South's a bonny clime
And sunshine is its life;
So there I'll finish up my time
A stranger unto strife.
And smoke my pipe and sit aloof
From care by miles and miles,
Sagaciously beneath a roof,
Geranium-gay and panic proof,
Of ruby tinted tiles.

Robert William Service

Regret

It's not for laws I've broken
That bitter tears I've wept,
But solemn vows I've spoken
And promises unkept;
It's not for sins committed
My heart is full of rue,
but gentle acts omitted,
Kind deeds I did not do.

I have outlived the blindness,
The selfishness of youth;
The canker of unkindness,
The cruelty of truth;
The searing hurt of rudeness . . .
By mercies great and small,
I've come to reckon goodness
The greatest gift of all.

Let us be helpful ever
to those who are in need,
And each new day endeavour
To do some gentle deed;
For faults beyond our grieving,
What kindness atone;
On earth by love achieving
A Heaven of our own.

Robert William Service

Relativity

I looked down on a daisied lawn
To where a host of tiny eyes
Of snow and gold from velvet shone
And made me think of starry skies.

I looked up to the vasty night
Where stars were very small indeed,
And in their galaxy of light
They made me think of daised mead.

I took a daisy in my hold;
Its snowy rays were tipped with rose,
And with its tiny boss of gold
I thought--how like a star it glows!

I dreamt I plucked from Heaven's field
A star and held it in my hand.
Said I: "The might of God I wield,
The Great and Small I understand."

For when the All is said and done,
In Time and Space I seem to see
A daisy equal to a sun,
Between heart-beats--Eternity

Robert William Service

Relax

Do you recall that happy bike
 With bundles on our backs?
How near to heaven it was like
 To blissfully relax!
In cosy tavern of good cheer
 To doff our heavy packs,
And with a mug of foamy beer
 Relax.

Learn to relax: to clean the mind
 Of fear and doubt and care,
And in vacuity to find
 The perfect peace that's there.
With lassitude of heart and hand,
 When every sinew slacks,
How good to rest the old bean and
 Relax, relax.

Just sink back in an easy chair
 For forty winks or so,
And fold your hands as if in prayer,
 --That helps a lot, you know.
Forget that you are you awhile,
 And pliable as wax,
Just beatifically smile . . .
 Relax, relax, relax.

Robert William Service

Remorse

That scathing word I used in scorn
(Though half a century ago)
Comes back to me this April morn,
Like boomerang to work me woe;
Comes back to me with bitter blame
(Though apple boughs are blossoming),
And oh! the anguish of my shame
Is sharper than a serpent's sting!

Age sensitizes us to pain,
And when remembrance of some word
We spoke in wrath return again,
It stab is like a driven sword. . . .
And if in some celestial span
Our hearts in penitence may bleed
For all the hurt we've done to man -
Ah, that would be a hell indeed!

So friends, be careful of your words,
Though other breasts may meet their steel,
Lest they return like vengeful swords,
Till yours the wounds that never heal,
For Age the heart to mercy mellows;
Foul memories haunt like evil elves:
let us be gentle to our fellows,
And win God's mercy for ourselves.

Robert William Service

Repentance

"If you repent," the Parson said,"
Your sins will be forgiven.
Aye, even on your dying bed
You're not too late for heaven."

That's just my cup of tea, I thought,
Though for my sins I sorrow;
Since salvation is easy bought
I will repent . . . to-morrow.

To-morrow and to-morrow went,
But though my youth was flying,
I was reluctant to repent,
having no fear of dying.

'Tis plain, I mused, the more I sin,
(To Satan's jubilation)
When I repent the more I'll win
Celestial approbation.

So still I sin, and though I fail
To get snow-whitely shriven,
My timing's good: I home to hail
The last bus up to heaven.

Robert William Service

Reptiles And Roses

So crystal clear it is to me
That when I die I cease to be,
All else seems sheer stupidity.

All promises of Paradise
Are wishful thinking, preacher's lies,
Dogmatic dust flung in our eyes.

Yea, life's immortal, swift it flows
Alike in reptile and in rose,
But as it comes, so too it goes.

Dead roses will not bloom again;
The lifeless lizard writhes in vain;
Cups shattered will not hold champagne.

Our breath is brief, and being so
Let's make our heaven here below,
And lavish kindness as we go.

For when our Death shall close the door
There will be darkness evermore;
So let us kneel in prayer before

Each day and let our duty be
To fight that mankind may be free . . .
There is our Immortality.

Robert William Service

Resignation

I'd hate to be centipede (of legs I've only two),
For if new trousers I should need (as oftentimes I do),
The bill would come to such a lot 'twould tax an Astorbilt,
Or else I'd have to turn a Scot and caper in a kilt.

I'm jolly glad I haven't got a neck like a giraffe.
I'd want to tie it in a knot and shorten it by half.
or, as I wear my collars high, how laundry men would gloat!
And what a lot of beer I'd buy to lubricate my throat!

I'd hate to be a goldfish, snooping round a crystal globe,
A naughty little bold fish, that distains chemise of robe.
The public stare I couldn't bear, if naked as a stone,
And when my toilet I prepare, I'd rather be alone.

I'd hate to be an animal, an insect or a fish.
To be the least like bird or beast I've not the slightest wish.
It's best I find to be resigned, and stick to Nature's plan:
Content am I to live and die, just - Ordinary MAN.

Robert William Service

Resolutions

Each New Year's Eve I used to brood
On my misdoings of the past,
And vowed: "This year I'll be so good -
Well, haply better than the last."
My record of reforms I read
To Mum who listened sweetly to it:
"Why plan all this, my son?" she said;
"Just do it."

Of her wise words I've often thought -
Aye, sometimes with a pang of pain,
When resolutions come to naught,
And high resolves are sadly vain;
The human heart from failure bleeds;
Hopes may be wrecked so that we rue them . . .
Don't let us dream of lovely deeds -
Just do them.

And so, my son, uphold your pride.
Believe serenely in your soul.
Just take things in a steady stride,
Until behold! you've gained your goal.
But if, perchance, you frame a plan
Of conduct, let it be a free one:
Don't try to make yourself a man -
Just be one.

Robert William Service

Retired

I used to sing, when I was young,
The joy of idleness;
But now I'm grey I hold my tongue,
For frankly I confess
If I had not some job to do
I would be bored to death;
So I must toil until I'm through
With this asthmatic breath.

Where others slothfully would brood
beg for little chores,
To peel potatoes, chop the wood,
And even scrub the floors.
When slightly useful I can be,
I'm happy as a bboy;
Dish-washing is a boon to me,
And brushing boots a joy.

The young folks tell me: "Grandpa, please,
Don't be so manual;
You certainly have earned your ease -
Why don't you rest a spell?"
Say I: I'll have a heap of rest
On my sepulchral shelf;
So now please let me do my best
 To justify myself."

For one must strive or one will die,
And work's our dearest friend;
God meant it so, and that is why
I'll toil unto the end.
I thank the Lord I'm full of beans,
So let me heft a hoe,
And I will don my garden jeans
And help the beans to grow.

Robert William Service

Retired Shopman

He had the grocer's counter-stoop,
That little man so grey and neat;
His moustache had a doleful droop,
He hailed me in the slushy street.
"I've sold my shop," he said to me,
Cupping his hand behind his ear.
"My deafness got so bad, you see,
Folks had to shout to make me hear."

He sighed and sadly shook his head;
The hand he gave was chill as ice.
"I sold out far too soon," he said;
"To-day I'd get ten times the price.
But then how was a man to know,
(The War, the rising cost of life.)
We have to pinch to make things go:
It's tough - I'm sorry for the wife.

"She looks sometimes at me with tears.
'You worked so hard,' I hear her say.
'You had your shop for forty years,
And you were honest as the day.'
Ah yes, I loved my shop, it's true;
My customers I tried to please;
But when one's deaf and sixty-two
What can one do in times like these?

"My savings, that I fondly thought
Would keep me snug when we were old,
Are melting fast - what once I bought
For silver, now is sought with gold.
The cost of life goes up each day;
I wonder what will be the end?"
He sighed, I saw him drift away
And thought: Alas for you, my friend!

and every day I see him stop
And look and look with wistful eye
At what was once his little shop,

Whose goods he can no longer buy.
Then homeward wearily he goes
To where his wife bed-ridden lies,
A driblet dangling from his nose. . . .
But Oh the panic in his eyes!

Robert William Service

Reverence

I saw the Greatest Man on Earth,
Aye, saw him with my proper eyes.
A loin-cloth spanned his proper girth,
But he was naked otherwise,
Excepting for his grey sombrero;
And when his domelike head he bared,
With reverence I stared and stared,
As mummified as any Pharaoh.

He leaned upon a little cane,
A big cigar was in his mouth;
Through spectacles of yellow stain
He gazed and gazed toward the South;
And then he dived into the sea,
As if to Corsica to swim;
His side stroke was so strong and free
I could not help but envy him.

A fitter man than I, I said,
Although his age is more than mine;
And I was strangely comforted
To see him battle in the brine.
Thought I: We have no cause for sorrow;
For one so dynamic to-day
Will gird him for the future fray
And lead us lion-like to-morrow.

The Greatest Man in all the world
Lay lazing like you or me,
Within a flimsy bathrobe curled
Upon a mattress by the sea:
He reached to pat a tou-tou's nose,
And scratched his torso now and then,
And scribbled with a fountain pen
What I assumed was jewelled prose.

And then methought he looked at me,
And hailed me with a gesture grand;
His fingers made the letter "V,"

So I, too, went to raise my hand; -
When nigh to me the barman glided
With liquid gold, and then I knew
He merely called for cock-tails two,
And so abjectly I subsided.

Yet I have had my moment's glory,
A-squatting nigh that Mighty Tory,
Proud Hero of our Island Story.

Robert William Service

Rhyme Builder

I envy not those gay galoots
Who count on dying in their boots;
For that, to tell the sober truth
Sould be the privilege of youth;
But aged bones are better sped
To heaven from a downy bed.

So prop me up with pillows two,
And serve me with the barley brew;
And put a pencil in my hand,
A copy book at my command;
And let my final effort be
To ring a rhyme of homely glee.

For since I've loved it oh so long,
Let my last labour be in song;
And when my pencil falters down,
Oh may a final couplet crown
The years of striving I have made
To justify the jinglers trade.

Let me surrender with a rhyme
My long and lovely lease of time;
Let me be grateful for the gift
To couple words in lyric lift;
Let me song-build with humble hod,
My last brick dedicate to God.

Robert William Service

Rhyme For My Tomb

Here lyeth one
Who loved the sun;
Who lived with zest,
Whose work was done,
Reward, dear Lord,
Thy weary son:
May he be blest
With peace and rest,
Nor wake again,
Amen.

Robert William Service

Rhyme-Smith

Oh, I was born a lyric babe
(That last word is a bore -
It's only rhyme is astrolabe,"
Whose meaning I ignore.)
From cradlehood I lisped in numbers,
Made jingles even in my slumbers.
Said Ma: "He'll be a bard, I know it."
Said Pa: "let's hoe he will outgrow it."

Alas! I never did and so
A dreamer and a drone was I,
Who persevered in want and woe
His misery to versify.
Yea, I was doomed to be a failure
(Old Browning rhymes that last with "pale lure"):
And even starving in the gutter,
My macaronics I would utter.

Then in a poor, cheap book I crammed,
And to the public maw I tossed
My bitter Dirges of the Damned,
My Lyrics of the Lost.
"Let carping critic flay and flout
My Ditties of the Down and Out -
"There now," said I, "I've done with verse,
My love, my weakness and my curse."

Then lo! (As I would fain believe,
Before they crown, the fates would shame us)
I went to sleep one bitter eve,
And woke to find that I was famous. . . .
And so the sunny sequels were a
Gay villa on the Riviera,
A bank account, a limousine, a
Life patterned dolce e divina.

Oh, yes, my lyric flight is flighty;
My muse is much more mite than mighty:
But poetry has been my friend,

And rhyming's saved me in the end.

Robert William Service

Rich Poor Man

We pitied him because
He lived alone;
His tiny cottage was
His only own.
His little garden had
A wall around;
Yet never was so glad
A bit of ground.

It seemed to fair rejoice
With flowers and fruit;
With blooms it found a voice
When ours was muts.
It smiled without a pause
In gracious glow:
I think it was because
He loved it so.

He had no news to read,
No rent to pay;
His vegetable need
He plucked each day.
His grateful garden gave
Him ample fare;
He lived without a crave,
Without a care.

His bread and milk and tea
Were all he bought;
To us he seemed to be
A sorry lot . . .
But when we're dead and gone,
With all our fuss,
I guess he'll carry on,
And laugh at us.

Robert William Service

Ripe Fruit

Through eyelet holes I watched the crowd
Rain of confetti fling;
Their joy is lush, their laughter loud,
For Carnival is King.
Behind his chariot I pace
To ean my petty pay;
They laugh to see my monster face:
"Ripe Fruit," I hear them say.

I do not laugh: my shoulders sag;
No heart have I for glee,
Because I hold aloft a hag
Who grins enough for me;
A hideous harridan who bears
In crapulous display,
Like two grub-eaten mouldy pears
Her bubbies on a tray.

Ripe Fruit! Oh, God! It's hell to think
How I have drifted down
Through vice and dice and dope and drink
To play the sordid clown;
That I who held the golden key
To operatic fame,
Should gnaw the crust of misery
And drain the dregs of shame.

What matter! I'll get soused to-night,
And happy I will be,
To sit within a tavern bright,
A trollop on my knee. . . .
So let the crazy pipers pipe,
And let the rapture ring:
Ripe fruit am I - yea, rotten ripe,
And Carnival is King.

Robert William Service

Ripeness

With peace and rest
And wisdom sage,
Ripeness is best
Of every age.
With hands that fold
In pensive prayer,
For grave-yard mold
 Prepare.

From fighting free
With fear forgot,
Let ripeness be,
Before the rot.
With heart of cheer
At eighty odd,
How man grows near
 To God!

With passion spent
And life nigh run
Let us repent
The ill we've done.
And as we bless
With happy heart
Life's mellowness
 --Depart.

Robert William Service

Rivera Honeymoon

Beneath the trees I lounged at ease
And watched them speed the pace;
They swerved and swung, they clutched and clung,
They leapt in roaring chase;
The crowd was thrilled, a chap was killed:
It was a splendid race.

Two men, they say, went West that day,
But I knew only one;
Geranium-red his blood was spread
And blazoned in the sun;
A lighting crash . . . Lo! in a flash
His racing days were done.

I did not see - such sights to me
Appallingly are grim;
But for a girl of sunny curl
I would not mention him,
That English lad with grin so glad,
And racing togs so trim.

His motor bike was painted like
A postal box of red.
'Twas gay to view . . . "We bought it new,"
A voice beside me said.
"Our little bit we blew on it
The day that we were wed.

"We took a chance: through sunny France
We flashed with flaunting power.
With happy smiles a hundred miles
Or more we made an hour.
Like flame we hurled into a world
A-foam with fruit and flower.

"Our means were small; we risked them all
This famous race to win,
So we can take a shop and make
Our bread - one must begin.

We're not afraid; Jack has his trade:
He's bright as brassy pin.

"Hark! Here they come; uphill they hum;
My lad has second place;
They swing, they roar, they pass once more,
Now Jack sprints up the pace.
They're whizzing past . . . At last, at last
He leads - he'll win the race.

Another round . . . They leap, they bound,
But - where O where is he?"
And then the girl with sunny curl
Turned chalk-faced unto me,
Within her eyes a wild surmise
It was not good to see.

They say like thunder-bold he crashed
Into a wall of stone;
To bloody muck his face was mashed,
He died without a moan;
In borrowed black the girl went back
To London Town alone.

Beneath the trees I longed at ease
And saw them pep the pace;
They swerved and swung, they clutched and clung
And roaring was the chase:
Two men, they say, were croaked that day -
It was a glorious race.

Robert William Service

Romance

In Paris on a morn of May
I sent a radio transatlantic
To catch a steamer on the way,
But oh the postal fuss was frantic;
They sent me here, they sent me there,
They were so courteous yet so canny;
Then as I wilted in despair
A Frenchman flipped me on the fanny.

'Twas only juts a gentle pat,
Yet oh what sympathy behind it!
I don't let anyone do that,
But somehow then I didn't mind it.
He seemed my worry to divine,
With kindly smile, that foreign mannie,
And as we stood in waiting line
With tender touch he tapped my fanny.

It brought a ripple of romance
Into that postal bureau dreary;
He gave me such a smiling glance
That somehow I felt gay and cheery.
For information on my case
The postal folk searched nook and cranny;
He gently tapped, with smiling face,
His reassurance on my fanny.

So I'll go back to Tennessee,
And they will ask: "How have you spent your
Brief holiday in gay Paree?"
But I'll not speak of my adventure.
Oh say I'm spectacled and grey,
Oh say I'm sixty and a grannie -
But say that morn of May
A Frenchman flipped me on the fanny!

Robert William Service

Room 4: The Painter Chap

He gives me such a bold and curious look,
That young American across the way,
As if he'd like to put me in a book
(Fancies himself a poet, so they say.)
Ah well! He'll make no "document" of me.
I lock my door. Ha! ha! Now none shall see. . . .

Pictures, just pictures piled from roof to floor,
Each one a bit of me, a dream fulfilled,
A vision of the beauty I adore,
My own poor glimpse of glory, passion-thrilled . . .
But now my money's gone, I paint no more.

For three days past I have not tasted food;
The jeweled colors run . . . I reel, I faint;
They tell me that my pictures are no good,
Just crude and childish daubs, a waste of paint.
I burned to throw on canvas all I saw --
Twilight on water, tenderness of trees,
Wet sands at sunset and the smoking seas,
The peace of valleys and the mountain's awe:
Emotion swayed me at the thought of these.
I sought to paint ere I had learned to draw,
And that's the trouble. . . .

Ah well! here am I,
Facing my failure after struggle long;
And there they are, my croutes that none will buy
(And doubtless they are right and I am wrong);
Well, when one's lost one's faith it's time to die. . . .

This knife will do . . . and now to slash and slash;
Rip them to ribands, rend them every one,
My dreams and visions -- tear and stab and gash,
So that their crudeness may be known to none;
Poor, miserable daubs! Ah! there, it's done. . . .

And now to close my little window tight.
Lo! in the dusking sky, serenely set,
The evening star is like a beacon bright.

And see! to keep her tender tryst with night
How Paris veils herself in violet. . . .

Oh, why does God create such men as I? --
All pride and passion and divine desire,
Raw, quivering nerve-stuff and devouring fire,
Foredoomed to failure though they try and try;
Abortive, blindly to destruction hurled;
Unfound, unfit to grapple with the world. . . .

And now to light my wheezy jet of gas;
Chink up the window-crannies and the door,
So that no single breath of air may pass;
So that I'm sealed air-tight from roof to floor.
There, there, that's done; and now there's nothing more. . . .

Look at the city's myriad lamps a-shine;
See, the calm moon is launching into space . . .
There will be darkness in these eyes of mine
Ere it can climb to shine upon my face.
Oh, it will find such peace upon my face! . . .

City of Beauty, I have loved you well,
A laugh or two I've had, but many a sigh;
I've run with you the scale from Heav'n to Hell.
Paris, I love you still . . . good-by, good-by.
Thus it all ends -- unhappily, alas!
It's time to sleep, and now . . . blow out the gas. . . .

Now there's that little midinette
Who goes to work each morning daily;
I choose to call her Blithe Babette,
Because she's always humming gaily;
And though the Goddess "Comme-il-faut"
May look on her with prim expression,
It's Pagan Paris where, you know,
The queen of virtues is Discretion.

Robert William Service

Room 5: The Concert Singer

I'm one of these haphazard chaps
Who sit in cafes drinking;
A most improper taste, perhaps,
Yet pleasant, to my thinking.
For, oh, I hate discord and strife;
I'm sadly, weakly human;
And I do think the best of life
Is wine and song and woman.

Now, there's that youngster on my right
Who thinks himself a poet,
And so he toils from morn to night
And vainly hopes to show it;
And there's that dauber on my left,
Within his chamber shrinking --
He looks like one of hope bereft;
He lives on air, I'm thinking.

But me, I love the things that are,
My heart is always merry;
I laugh and tune my old guitar:
Sing ho! and hey-down-derry.
Oh, let them toil their lives away
To gild a tawdry era,
But I'll be gay while yet I may:
Sing tira-lira-lira.

I'm sure you know that picture well,
A monk, all else unheeding,
Within a bare and gloomy cell
A musty volume reading;
While through the window you can see
In sunny glade entrancing,
With cap and bells beneath a tree
A jester dancing, dancing.

Which is the fool and which the sage?
I cannot quite discover;
But you may look in learning's page

And I'll be laughter's lover.
For this our life is none too long,
And hearts were made for gladness;
Let virtue lie in joy and song,
The only sin be sadness.

So let me troll a jolly air,
Come what come will to-morrow;
I'll be no cabotin of care,
No souteneur of sorrow.
Let those who will indulge in strife,
To my most merry thinking,
The true philosophy of life
Is laughing, loving, drinking.

And there's that weird and ghastly hag
Who walks head bent, with lips a-mutter;
With twitching hands and feet that drag,
And tattered skirts that sweep the gutter.
An outworn harlot, lost to hope,
With staring eyes and hair that's hoary
I hear her gibber, dazed with dope:
I often wonder what's her story.

Robert William Service

Room 6: The Little Workgirl

Three gentlemen live close beside me --
A painter of pictures bizarre,
A poet whose virtues might guide me,
A singer who plays the guitar;
And there on my lintel is Cupid;
I leave my door open, and yet
These gentlemen, aren't they stupid!
They never make love to Babette.

I go to the shop every morning;
I work with my needle and thread;
Silk, satin and velvet adorning,
Then luncheon on coffee and bread.
Then sewing and sewing till seven;
Or else, if the order I get,
I toil and I toil till eleven --
And such is the day of Babette.

It doesn't seem cheerful, I fancy;
The wage is unthinkably small;
And yet there is one thing I can say:
I keep a bright face through it all.
I chaff though my head may be aching;
I sing a gay song to forget;
I laugh though my heart may be breaking --
It's all in the life of Babette.

That gown, O my lady of leisure,
You begged to be "finished in haste."
It gives you an exquisite pleasure,
Your lovers remark on its taste.
Yet . . . oh, the poor little white faces,
The tense midnight toil and the fret . . .
I fear that the foam of its laces
Is salt with the tears of Babette.

It takes a brave heart to be cheery
With no gleam of hope in the sky;
The future's so utterly dreary,

I'm laughing -- in case I should cry.
And if, where the gay lights are glowing,
I dine with a man I have met,
And snatch a bright moment -- who's going
To blame a poor little Babette?

And you, Friend beyond all the telling,
Although you're an ocean away,
Your pictures, they tell me, are selling,
You're married and settled, they say.
Such happiness one wouldn't barter;
Yet, oh, do you never regret
The Springtide, the roses, Montmartre,
Youth, poverty, love and -- Babette?

That blond-haired chap across the way
With sunny smile and voice so mellow,
He sings in some cheap cabaret,
Yet what a gay and charming fellow!
His breath with garlic may be strong,
What matters it? his laugh is jolly;
His day he gives to sleep and song:
His night's made up of song and folly.

Robert William Service

Room 7: The Coco-Fiend

I look at no one, me;
I pass them on the stair;
Shadows! I don't see;
Shadows! everywhere.
Haunting, taunting, staring, glaring,
Shadows! I don't care.
Once my room I gain
Then my life begins.
Shut the door on pain;
How the Devil grins!
Grin with might and main;
Grin and grin in vain;
Here's where Heav'n begins:
Cocaine! Cocaine!

A whiff! Ah, that's the thing.
How it makes me gay!
Now I want to sing,
Leap, laugh, play.
Ha! I've had my fling!
Mistress of a king
In my day.
Just another snuff . . .
Oh, the blessed stuff!
How the wretched room
Rushes from my sight;
Misery and gloom
Melt into delight;
Fear and death and doom
Vanish in the night.
No more cold and pain,
I am young again,
Beautiful again,
Cocaine! Cocaine!

Oh, I was made to be good, to be good,
For a true man's love and a life that's sweet;
Fireside blessings and motherhood.
Little ones playing around my feet.

How it all unfolds like a magic screen,
Tender and glowing and clear and glad,
The wonderful mother I might have been,
The beautiful children I might have had;
Romping and laughing and shrill with glee,
Oh, I see them now and I see them plain.
Darlings! Come nestle up close to me,
You comfort me so, and you're just . . . Cocaine.

It's Life that's all to blame:
We can't do what we will;
She robes us with her shame,
She crowns us with her ill.
I do not care, because
I see with bitter calm,
Life made me what I was,
Life makes me what I am.
Could I throw back the years,
It all would be the same;
Hunger and cold and tears,
Misery, fear and shame,
And then the old refrain,
Cocaine! Cocaine!

A love-child I, so here my mother came,
Where she might live in peace with none to blame.
And how she toiled! Harder than any slave,
What courage! patient, hopeful, tender, brave.
We had a little room at Lavilette,
So small, so neat, so clean, I see it yet.
Poor mother! sewing, sewing late at night,
Her wasted face beside the candlelight,
This Paris crushed her. How she used to sigh!
And as I watched her from my bed I knew
She saw red roofs against a primrose sky
And glistening fields and apples dimmed with dew.
Hard times we had. We counted every sou,
We sewed sacks for a living. I was quick . . .
Four busy hands to work instead of two.
Oh, we were happy there, till she fell sick. . . .

My mother lay, her face turned to the wall,

And I, a girl of sixteen, fair and tall,
Sat by her side, all stricken with despair,
Knelt by her bed and faltered out a prayer.
A doctor's order on the table lay,
Medicine for which, alas! I could not pay;
Medicine to save her life, to soothe her pain.
I sought for something I could sell, in vain . . .
All, all was gone! The room was cold and bare;
Gone blankets and the cloak I used to wear;
Bare floor and wall and cupboard, every shelf --
Nothing that I could sell . . . except myself.

I sought the street, I could not bear
To hear my mother moaning there.
I clutched the paper in my hand.
'Twas hard. You cannot understand . . .
I walked as martyr to the flame,
Almost exalted in my shame.
They turned, who heard my voiceless cry,
"For Sale, a virgin, who will buy?"
And so myself I fiercely sold,
And clutched the price, a piece of gold.
Into a pharmacy I pressed;
I took the paper from my breast.
I gave my money . . . how it gleamed!
How precious to my eyes it seemed!
And then I saw the chemist frown,
Quick on the counter throw it down,
Shake with an angry look his head:
"Your louis d'or is bad," he said.

Dazed, crushed, I went into the night,
I clutched my gleaming coin so tight.
No, no, I could not well believe
That any one could so deceive.
I tried again and yet again --
Contempt, suspicion and disdain;
Always the same reply I had:
"Get out of this. Your money's bad."

Heart broken to the room I crept,
To mother's side. All still . . . she slept . . .

I bent, I sought to raise her head . . .
"Oh, God, have pity!" she was dead.

That's how it all began.
Said I: Revenge is sweet.
So in my guilty span
I've ruined many a man.
They've groveled at my feet,
I've pity had for none;
I've bled them every one.
Oh, I've had interest for
That worthless louis d'or.

But now it's over; see,
I care for no one, me;
Only at night sometimes
In dreams I hear the chimes
Of wedding-bells and see
A woman without stain
With children at her knee.
Ah, how you comfort me,
Cocaine! . . .

Robert William Service

Room Ghost

Though elegance I ill afford,
My living-room is green and gold;
The former tenant was a lord
Who died of drinking, I am told.
I fancy he was rather bored;
I don't think he was over old.

And where on books I dully browse,
And gaze in rapture at the sea,
My predecessor world carouse
In lavish infidelity
With ladies amoral as cows;
But interesting, you'll agree.

I'm dull as water in a ditch,
Making these silly bits of rhyme;
My Lord, I'm told, was passing rich
And must have had a lovely time;
With champagne and a pretty bitch
No need to heed the church-bell chime.

My living-room is marble floored,
And on its ceiling cherubs play;
But like my lord I'm often bored
And put my sullen books away;
And though my people say I snored,
I dream of indiscretions gay.

And often in the niggard night,
When sweet sleep I fail to drown,
I seem to see that noble sprite
In monocle and dressing-gown:
A glass of brandy to the light
He holds and winks and drinks it down.

When life's so beautifully planned,
Dear reader, can you understand
Why men should die be their own hand?

Rose Leaves

When they shall close my careless eyes
And look their last upon my face,
I fear that some will say: "her lies
 A man of deep disgrace;
His thoughts were bare, his words were brittle,
He dreamed so much, he did so little.

When they shall seal y coffin lid
And this worn mask I know as ME,
Shall from the sight of man be hid
 To all eternity -
Some one may say: "His sins were many,
His virtues - really, had he any?"

When I shall lie beneath my tomb,
Oh do not grave it with my name
But let one rose-bush o'er me bloom,
 And heedless of my shame,
With velvet shade and loving laugh,
In petals write my epitaph.

Robert William Service

Rosy-Kins

As home from church we two did plod,
"Grandpa," said Rosy, "What is God?"
Seeking an answer to her mind,
This is the best that I could find. . . .

God is the Iz-ness of our Cosmic Biz;
The high, the low, the near, the far,
The atom and the evening star;
The lark, the shark, the cloud, the clod,
The whole darned Universe - that's God.

Some deem that others there be,
And to them humbly bend the knee;
To Mumbo Jumbo and to Joss,
To Bud and Allah - but the Boss
Is mine . . . While there are suns and seas
MY timeless God shall dwell in these.

In every glowing leaf He lives;
When roses die His life he gives;
God is not outside and apart
From Nature, but her very heart;
No Architect (as I of verse)
He is Himself the Universe.

Said Rosy-kins: "Grandpa, how odd
Is your imagining of God.
To me he's always just appeared
A huge Grandfather with a beard.

Robert William Service

Roulette

I'll wait until my money's gone
Before I take the sleeping pills;
Then when they find me in the dawn,
Remote from earthly ails and ills
They'll say: "She's broke, the foreign bitch!"
And dump me in the common ditch.

So thought I, of all hope bereft,
And by my evil fate obsessed;
A thousand franks was all I'd left
Of that fair fortune I possessed.
...I throw it on the table there,
And wait, with on my lips a prayer.

I fear my very life's at stake;
My note is lying on the Red . . .
I know I'll lose it, then I'll take
My pills and sleep until I'm dead . . .
Oh God of mercy, understand!
In pity guide the croupier's hand.

My heart beats hard, my lips are dry;
I feel I cannot bear to look.
I dread to hear the croupier's cry,
I'll sit down in this quiet nook.
The lights go dim, my senses reel . . .
See! Jesus Christ is at the wheel.

* * * * *

Kind folks arouse me from my trance.
"The Red has come ten times," they say.
"Oh do not risk another chance;
Please, Lady, take your gains away,
And to the Lord of Luck give thanks -
You've won nigh half a million franks."

Aye, call me just a daft old dame;
I knit and sew to make my bread,

And nevermore I'll play that game,
For I've a glory in my head. . . .
Ah well I know, to stay my fall,
'Twas our dear Lord who spun the ball.

Robert William Service

Rover's Rest

By parents I would not be pinned,
 Nor in my home abide,
For I was wanton as the wind
 And tameless as the tide;
So scornful of domestic hearth,
 And bordered garden path,
I sought the wilder ways of earth,
 The roads of wrath.

It scares me now to think of how
 Foolhardily I fared;
Though mighty scarred of pelt and pow
 A dozen deaths I've dared;
Yet there are trails I would explore,
 And wilds that for me wait . . .
Alas! I'll wander nevermore,--
 The hour's too late.

The folks are at my picture show,
 I smoke my pipe and sigh.
Soft-slippered by the ember's glow
 A baby-sitter I.
Behold! In dressing-gown of mauve,
 To comfort reconciled,
A rover rocks the cradle of
 His new grand-child.

Robert William Service

Ruins

Ruins in Rome are four a penny,
And here along the Appian Way
I see the monuments of many
Esteemed almighty in their day. . . .
Or so he makes me understand -
My glib guide of the rubber bus,
And tells me with a gesture grand:
"Behold! the tomb of Romulus."

Whereat I stared with eyes of awe,
And yet a whit dismayed was I,
When on its crumbling wall I saw
A washing hanging out to dry;
Yea, that relict of slow decay,
With peristyle and gnarly frieze,
Was garnished with a daft display
Of bifurcation and chemise.

But as we went our Southward way
Another ruin soon I saw;
No antique tower, gaunt and grey,
But modern manor rubbled raw;
And on its sill a maiden sat,
And told me in a tone of rue:
It was your allied bombs did that . . .
But do not think we're blaming you."

Thought I: Time is more kind than we
Who blot out beauty with a blow;
And truly it was sad to see
A gracious mansion levelled low . . .
While moulderings of ancient Rome
Still serve the peasants for their swine,
We do not leave a lovely home
A wall to hang a washing line.

Robert William Service

Sacrifice

I gave an eye to save from night
 A babe born blind;
And now with eager semi-sight
 Vast joy I find
To think a child can share with me
 Earth ecstasy!

Delight of dawn with dewy gleam
 On damask rose;
Crimson and gold as pennons stream
 Where sunset flows;
And sight most nigh to paradise,
 Star-studded skies.

Ah! How in old of age I feel,
 E'er end my days,
Could I star-splendoured sky reveal
 To childish gaze,
Not one eye would I give, but two,--
 Well, wouldn't you?

Robert William Service

Sailor Son

When you come home I'll not be round
 To welcome you.
They'll take you to a grassy mound
 So neat and new;
Where I'll be sleeping--O so sound!
 The ages through.

I'll not be round to broom the hearth,
 To feed the chicks;
And in the wee room of your birth
 Your bed to fix;
Rose room that knew your baby mirth
 Your tiny tricks.

I'll not be round . . . The garden still
 With bees will hum;
To cheerful you the throstle's bill
 Will not be dumb;
The rambler rose will overspill
 When you will come.

Bird, bee and bloom, they'll greet you all
 With scented sound;
Yet though the joy of your footfall
 Will thrill the ground
Your mother with her old grey shawl--
 Will not be round.

Robert William Service

Sailor's Sweetheart

He sleeps beside me in the bed;
Upon my breast I hold his head;
Oh how I would that we were wed,
 For he sails in the morning.

I wish I had not been so kind;
But love is fain and passion blind,
While out of sight is out of mind,
 And he ships in the morning.

I feel his bairn stir in my womb;
Poor wee one, born to bitter doom;
How dreary dark will be the gloom,
 When he goes in the morning!

A sailor lad has need to court
A loving lass in every port;
To him it's just a bit of sport . . .
 My heart-break's in the morning.

Robert William Service

Schizophrenic

Each morning as I catch my bus,
A-fearing I'll be late,
I think: there are in all of us
Two folks quite separate;
As one I greet the office staff
With grim, official mien;
The other's when I belly-laugh,
And Home Sweet Home's the scene.

I've half a hundred men to boss,
And take my job to heart;
You'll never find me at a loss,
So well I play my part.
My voice is hard, my eye is cold,
My mouth is grimly set;
They all consider me, I'm told,
A "bloody martinet."

But when I reach my home at night
I'm happy as a boy;
My kiddies kiss me with delight,
And dance a jig of joy.
I slip into my oldest cloths,
My lines of care uncrease;
I mow the lawn, unhook the hose,
And glow with garden peace.

It's then I wonder which I am,
the boss with hard-boiled eye,
Or just the gay don't care-a-damn
Go-lucky garden guy?
Am I the starchy front who rants
As round his weight he throws,
or just old Pop with patchy pants,
Who sings and sniffs a rose?

Robert William Service

Sea Change

I saw a Priest in beetle black
Come to our golden beach,
And I was taken sore aback
Lest he should choose to preach
And chide me for my only wear,
A "Gee" string and a brassiere.

And then I saw him shyly doff
And fold his grim soutane,
And one by one his clothes take off,
Until like any man
He stood in bathing trunks, a sight
To thrill a maiden with delight.

For he was framed and fashioned like
Apollo Belvedere;
I felt my heart like cymbal strike
Beneath my brassiere.
And then the flounce of foam he broke,
And disappeared with flashing stroke.

We met. 'Twas in the billows roll.
Oh how he sang with joy;
But not a hymn, - a merry troll
With gusto of a boy.
I looked, and lo! the priest was gone,
And in his place a laughing faun. . . .

Today confession I have made.
The Father's face was stern,
And I was glad that in the shade
Mine he could not discern . . .
He gave me grace - but oh the bliss,
The salty passion of his kiss!

Robert William Service

Sea Sorcery

Oh how I love the laughing sea,
 Sun lances splintering;
Or with a virile harmony
 In salty caves to sing;
Or mumbling pebbles on the shore,
 Or roused to monster might:
By day I love the sea, but more
 I love it in the night.

High over ocean hangs my home
 And when the moon is clear
I stare and stare till fairy foam
 Is music in my ear;
Till glamour dances to a tune
 No mortal man could make;
And there bewitched beneath the moon
 To beauty I awake.

Then though I seek my bed again
 And close the shutters tight,
Still, still I hear that wild refrain
 And see that mystic light . . .
Oh reckon me a crazy loon,
 But blessed I will be
If my last seeing be the moon,
 My last sound--the Sea.

Robert William Service

Second Childhood

Some deem I'm gentle, some I'm kind:
It may be so,--I cannot say.
I know I have a simple mind
And see things in a simple way;
And like a child I love to play.

I love to toy with pretty words
And syllable them into rhyme;
To make them sing like sunny birds
In happy droves with silver chime,
In dulcet groves in summer time.

I pray, with hair more white than grey,
And second childhood coming on,
That yet with wonderment I may
See life as in its lucent dawn,
And be by beauty so beguiled
 I'll sing as sings a child.

Robert William Service

Second Childhood

When I go on my morning walk,
Because I'm mild,
If I be in the mood to talk
I choose a child.
I'd rather prattle with a lass
Of tender age
Than converse in the high-brow class
With college sage.

I love the touch of silken hand
That softly clings;
In old of age I understand
Life's little things.
I love the lisp of tiny tongue
And trusting eyes;
These are the joys that keep me young
As daylight dies.

For as to second childhood I
Draw gently near,
With happy heart I see the why
Children are dear.
So wise Professor, go your way,-
I am beguiled
To wistful loving by the gay
Laugh of a child.

Robert William Service

Secretary

My Master is a man of might
 With manners like a hog;
He makes me slave from morn to night
 And treats me like a dog.
He thinks there's nothing on this earth
 His money cannot buy,
And claims to get full wages worth
 From hirelings such as I.

But does he? Though a Man of State,
 And fabulously rich,
He little guesses that his mate
 Is just a bonny bitch.
For he is grey and gross and fat,
 While I am tall and slim,
And when he's gone it happens that
 I take the place of him.

Oh God! The beauty of the blow
 When I will blast his life;
When I will laugh and let him know
 My mistress is his wife.
Today a doormat for his feet,
 He loves to see me squirm . . .
Tomorrow,--how revenge is sweet!
 The turning of the worm.

Robert William Service

Security

There once was a limpet puffed with pride
Who said to the ribald sea:
"It isn't I who cling to the rock,
It's the rock that clings to me;
It's the silly old rock who hugs me tight,
Because he loves me so;
And though I struggle with all my might,
He will not let me go."

Then said the sea, who hates the rock
That defies him night and day:
"You want to be free - well, leave it to me,
I'll help you get away.
I know such a beautiful silver beach,
Where blissfully you may bide;
Shove off to-night when the moon is bright,
And I'll swig you thee on my tide."

"I'd like to go," said the limpet low,
"But what's a silver beach?"
"It's sand," said the sea, "bright baby rock,
And you shall be lord of each."
"Righto!" said the limpet; "Life allures,
And a rover I would be."
So greatly bold she slacked her hold
And launched on the laughing sea.

But when she got to the gelid deep
Where the waters swish and swing,
She began to know with a sense of woe
That a limpet's lot is to cling.
but she couldn't cling to a jelly fish,
Or clutch at a wastrel weed,
So she raised a cry as the waves went by,
but the waves refused to heed.

Then when she came to the glaucous deep
Where the congers coil and leer,
The flesh in her shell began to creep,

And she shrank in utter fear.
It was good to reach that silver beach,
That gleamed in the morning light,
Where a shining band of the silver sand
Looked up with with a welcome bright.

Looked up with a smile that was full of guile,
Called up through the crystal blue:
"Each one of us is a baby rock,
And we want to cling to you."
Then the heart of the limpet leaped with joy,
For she hated the waters wide;
So down she sank to the sandy bank
That clung to her under-side.

That clung so close she couldn't breath,
So fierce she fought to be free;
But the silver sand couldn't understand,
While above her laughed the sea.
Then to each wave that wimpled past
She cried in her woe and pain:
"Oh take me back, let me rivet fast
To my steadfast rock again."

She cried till she roused a taxi-crab
Who gladly gave her a ride;
But I grieve to say in his crabby way
He insisted she sit inside. . . .
So if of the limpet breed ye be,
Beware life's brutal shock;
Don't take the chance of the changing sea,
But - cling like hell to your rock.

Robert William Service

Segregation

I stood beside the silken rope,
 Five dollars in my hand,
And waited in my patient hope
 To sit anear the Band,
And hear the famous Louie play
 The best hot trumpet of today.

And then a waiter loafing near
 Says in a nasty tone:
"Old coon, we don't want darkies here,
 Beat it before you're thrown."
So knowin' nothin' I could do
 I turned to go and--there was Lou.

I think he slapped that Dago's face;
 His voice was big an' loud;
An' then he leads me from my place
 Through all that tony crowd.
World-famous Louie by the hand
 Took me to meet his famous Band.

"Listen, you folks," I heard him say.
 "Here's Grand-papa what's come.
Savin' he teached me how to play,
 I mighta been a bum.
Come on, Grand-pop, git up an' show
 How you kin trumpet Ol' Black Joe."

Tremblin' I played before his Band:
 You should have heard the cheers.
Them swell folks gave me such a hand
 My cheeks was wet wi' tears . . .
An' now I'm off to tell the wife
 The proudest night o' all ma life.

Robert William Service

Self-Made Man

A hundred people I employed,
But when they struck for higher pay,
I was so damnably annoyed
I told them they could stay away.
I simply shut my business down;
I closed my doors and locked them out,
And now you'll find all round the town
A lot of idle men about.

Of course I know it is my loss,
And I their point of view can see,
But I must show them I'm the boss,
And any raise must come from ME.
But when they claim it as a right,
And send their Union leaders round,
Why then, by God, I'm out to fight,
Or burn my workshop to the ground.

I've risen from the ranks myself;
By brawn and brain I've made my way.
Had I bet, beered and blown my pelf,
I would have been as poor as they.
Had I wed young to thrift's unheed,
I might have been a toiler now,
With rent to pay and kids to feed,
And bloody sweat upon my brow.

Ah there's the point! "I might have been."
I might have been as peeved as they,
And know what misery can mean,
And ask like them a raise of pay.
I see myself. . . . "The telephone!"
. . . Had I not been so bloody wise -
(A poor old rich man all alone) . . .
"Hullo! Strike's off. I grant the rise."

Robert William Service

Sensibility

I

Once, when a boy, I killed a cat.
I guess it's just because of that
A cat evokes my tenderness,
And takes so kindly my caress.
For with a rich, resonant purr
It sleeks an arch or ardent fur
So vibrantly against my shin;
And as I tickle tilted chin
And rub the roots of velvet ears
Its tail in undulation rears.
Then trembling with all its might,
In blissful sensuous delight,
It looks aloft with lambent eyes,
Mystic, Egyptianly wise,
And O so eloquently tries
In every fibre to express
Consummate trust and friendliness.

II

I think the longer that we live
The more do we grow sensitive
Of hurt and harm to man and beast,
And learn to suffer at the least
Surmise of other's suffering;
Till pity, lie an eager spring
Wells up, and we are over-fain
To vibrate to the chords of pain.

For look you - after three-score yeas
I see with anguish nigh to tears
That starveling cat so sudden still
I set my terrier to to kill.
Great, golden memories pale away,
But that unto my dying day
Will haunt and haunt me horribly.
Why, even my poor dog felt shame

And shrank away as if to blame
of that poor mangled mother-cat
Would ever lie at his doormat.

III

What's done is done. No power can bring
To living joy a slaughtered thing.
Aye, if of life I gave my own
I could not for my guilt atone.
And though in stress of sea and land
Sweet breath has ended at my hand,
That boyhood killing in my eyes
A thousand must epitomize.
Yet to my twilight steals a thought:
Somehow forgiveness may be bought;
Somewhere I'll live my life again
So finely sensitized to pain,
With heart so rhymed to truth and right
That Truth will be a blaze of light;
All all the evil I have wrought
Will haggardly to home be brought. . . .
Then will I know my hell indeed,
And bleed where I made others bleed,
Till purged by penitence of sin
To Peace (or Heaven) I may win.

Well, anyway, you know the why
We are so pally, cats and I;
So if you have the gift of shame,
O Fellow-sinner, be the same.

Robert William Service

Sensitive Burglar

Selecting in the dining-room
 The silver of his choice,
The burglar heard from chamber gloom
 A female voice.
As cold and bitter as a toad,
 She spat a nasty name,
So even as his swag he stowed
 He blushed for shame.

'You dirty dog!' he heard her say,
 'I sniff your whisky stench.
I bet you've gambled half your pay,
 Or blown it on a wench.
Begone from here, you rakehell boor!
 You shame the human race.
What wife would pillow-share with your
 Disgusting face!'

A tear the tender burglar shed,
 Then indignation rose,
And swiftly striding to her bed
 He said: 'I'm none of those.
I am a connoisseur in crime
 And felonies I plan . . .
But otherwise, believe me I'm
 A GENTLEMAN.'

Robert William Service

Sentimental Hangman

'Tis hard to hang a husky lad
When larks are in the sky;
It hurts when daffydills are glad
To wring a neck awry,
When joy o' Spring is in the sap
And cheery in the sun,
'Tis sad to string aloft a chap,
No matter what he done.

And sittin' in the pub o' night
I hears that prison bell,
And wonders if it's reely right
To haste a man to hell,

For doin' what he had to do,
Through greed, or lust, or hate . . .
Aye, them seem rightful words to you,
But me, I calls it - Fate.

Lots more would flout the gallows tree,
But that they are afraid;
And so to save society,
I ply my grisly trade.
Yet as I throttle eager breath
And plunge to his hell-home
Some cringin' cove, to me his death
Seems more like martyrdom.

For most o' us have held betime
Foul murder in the heart;
And them sad blokes I swung for crime
Were doomed right from the start.
Of wilful choosing they had none,
For freedom's most a fraud,
And maybe in the end the one
Responsible is - God.

Robert William Service

Sentimental Shark

Give me a cabin in the woods
Where not a human soul intrudes;
Where I can sit beside a stream
Beneath a balsam bough and deam,
And every morning see arise
The sun like bird of paradise;
Then go down to the creek and fish
A speckled trout for breakfast dish,
And fry it in an ember fire -
Ah! there's the life of my desire.

Alas! I'm tied to Wall Street where
They reckon me a millionaire,
And sometimes in a day alone
I gain a fortune o'er the 'phone.
Yet I to be a man was made,
And here I ply this sorry trade
Of Company manipulation,
Of selling short and stock inflation:
I whom God meant to rope a steer,
Fate mad a Wall Street buccaneer.

Old Time, how I envy you
Who do the things I long to do.
Oh, I would swap you all my riches
To step into your buckskin britches.
Your ragged shirt and rugged health
I'd take in trade for all my wealth.
Then shorn of fortune you would see
How drunk with freedom I would be;
I'd kick so hard, I'd kick so high,
I'd kick the moon clean from the sky.

Aye, gold to me is less than brass,
And jewels mean no more than glass.
My gold is sunshine and my gems
The glint of dew on grassy stems . . .
Yet though I hate my guts its true
Time sorta makes you used to you;

And so I will not gripe too much
Because I have the Midas touch,
But doodle on my swivel chair,
Resigned to be a millionaire.

Robert William Service

Seven

If on water and sweet bread
Seven years I'll add to life,
For me will no blood be shed,
No lamb know the evil knife;
Excellently will I dine
On a crust and Adam's wine.

If a bed in monkish cell
Well mean old of age to me,
Let me in a convent dwell,
And from fellow men be free;
Let my mellow sunset days
Pass in piety and praise.

For I love each hour I live,
Wishing it were twice as long;
Dawn my gratitude I give,
Laud the Lord with evensong:
Now that moons are sadly few
How I grudge the grave its due!

Yet somehow I seem to know
Seven Springs are left to me;
Seven Mays may cherry tree
Will allume with sudden snow . . .
Then let seven candles shine
Silver peace above my shrine.

Robert William Service

Seville

My Pa and Ma their honeymoon
Passed in an Andulasian June,
And though produced in Drury Lane,
I must have been conceived in Spain.
Now having lapsed from fair estate,
A coster's is my sorry fate;
Yet on my barrow lo! I wheel
The golden harvest of Saville.

"Sweet Spanish oranges!" I cry.
Ah! People deem not as they buy,
That in a dream a steel guitar
I strum beside the Alcázar,
And at the Miralda I meet
A signorita honey sweet,
And stroll beneath the silver moon
Like Pa and Ma that magic June.

Alack-a-day! I fear I'll never
Behold the golden Guadalquivir;
Yet here in Brixton how I feel
My spiritual home's Saville;
And hold the hope that some day I
Will visit there, if just to die;
Feeling I have not lived in vain
To crown my days in sunny Spain.

Robert William Service

Shakespeare And Cervantes

Obit 23rd April 1616

Is it not strange that on this common date,
Two titans of their age, aye of all Time,
Together should renounce this mortal state,
And rise like gods, unsullied and sublime?
Should mutually render up the ghost,
And hand n hand join Jove's celestial host?

What wondrous welcome from the scribes on high!
Homer and Virgil would be waiting there;
Plato and Aristotle standing nigh;
Petrarch and Dante greet the peerless pair:
And as in harmony they make their bow,
Horace might quip: "Great timing, you'll allow."

Imagine this transcendant team arrive
At some hilarious banquet of the gods!
Their nations battled when they were alive,
And they were bitter foes - but what's the odd?
Actor and soldier, happy hand in hand,
By death close-linked, like loving brothers stand.

But how diverse! Our Will had gold and gear,
Chattels and land, the starshine of success;
The bleak Castilian fought with casque and spear,
Passing his life in prisons - more or less.
The Bard of Avon was accounted rich;
Cervantes often bedded in a ditch.

Yet when I slough this flesh, if I could meet
By sweet, fantastic fate one of these two,
In languorous Elysian retreat,
Which would I choose? Fair reader, which would you?
Well, though our William more divinely wrote,
By gad! the lousy Spaniard has my vote.

Robert William Service

Shiela

When I played my penny whistle on the braes above Lochgyle
The heather bloomed about us, and we heard the peewit call;
As you bent above your knitting something fey was in your smile,
And fine and soft and slow the rain made silver on your shawl.
Your cheeks were pink like painted cheeks, your eyes a pansy blue . . .
My heart was in my playing, but my music was for you.

And now I play the organ in this lordly London town;
I play the lovely organ with a thousand folks in view.
They're wearing silk and satin, but I see a woolen gown,
And my heart's not in my music, for I'm thinking, lass, of you;
When you listened to a barefoot boy, who piped of ancient pain,
And your ragged shawl was pearly in the sweet, shy rain.

I'll play them mighty music - O I'll make them stamp and cheer;
I'll give the best that's in me, but I'll give it all for you.
I'll put my whole heart in it, for I feel that you are near,
Not yonder, sleeping always, where the peat is white with dew.
But I'll never live the rapture of the shepherd boy the while
I trilled for you my whistle on the braes above Lochgyle.

Robert William Service

Silence

When I was cub reporter I
Would interview the Great,
And sometimes they would make reply,
And sometimes hesitate;
But often they would sharply say,
With bushy eyebrows bent:
"Young man, your answer for to-day
Is - No Comment."

Nigh sixty years have called the tune,
And silver is my pate;
No longer do I importune
Important men of state;
But time has made me wise, and so
When button-holed I shake
My head and say: "To-day, I've no
Comment to make."

Oh, silence is a mighty shield,
Verbosity is vain;
let others wordy warfare wield,
From arguments abstain;
When faced with dialectic foes
Just shrug and turn away:
Be sure your wisest words are those
You do not say.

Yea, Silence is a gleaming sword
Whose wounds are hard to heal;
Its quiet stuns the spoken word
More than a thunder peal;
Against it there is no defense,
For like the grave-yard sod
Its hush is Heaven's eloquence,
The VOICE OF GOD.

Robert William Service

Simplicity

What I seek far yet seldom find
Is large simplicity of mind
 In fellow men;
For I have sprouted from the sod,
Like Bobbie Burns, my earthly god,
 --From plough to pen.

So I refuse my brain to vex
With problems prosy and complex,
 Beyond my scope;
To me simplicity is peace,
So I persue it without cease,
 And growing hope.

"The world is too much with us," wrote
Wise Wordsworth, whom I love to quote,
 When rhymes are coy;
And simple is the world I see,
With bud and bloom and brook and tree
 To give me joy.

So blissfully I slip away
From brazen and dynamic day
 To dingle cool . . .
Now tell me friend, if in your eyes,
By being simple I am wise,--
 Or just a fool?

Robert William Service

Sinister Sooth

You say I am the slave of Fate
Bound by unalterable laws.
I harken, but your words I hate,
Your damnable Effect and Cause.
If there's no hope for happy Chance
Give me the bliss of ignorance.

You say my life ends with the tomb;
This brain, my mind machine, will rot;
Its many million cells that room
My personality and thought
Will in the Dark Destroyer's term
Provide a banquet for the worm.

You say--yet though your wisdom wells,
To it I am unreconciled;
My mind admits, my heart rebels . . .
O let me listen like a child
To Him who spoke with blessed breath
From bench of toil in Nazareth!

Robert William Service

Six Feet Of Sod

This is the end of all my ways,
My wanderings on earth,
My gloomy and my golden days,
My madness and my mirth.
I've bought ten thousand blades of grass
To bed me down below,
And here I wait the days to pass
Until I go.

Until I bid good bye to friend,
To feast and fast goodbye,
And in a stint of soil the end
I seek of sun and sky.
My farings far on land and sea,
My trails of global girth
Sum up to this,--to cover me
Six feet of earth.

My home of homes I hold in fee
For centuries to pass,
When snug my skeleton will be
And grin up through the grass;
When my grey ghost will bend above,
And grieve to gracious God
This endless end of life and love,--
Six feet of sod.

Robert William Service

Slugging Saint

'Twas in a pub in Battersea
They call the "Rose and Crown,"
Quite suddenly, it seemed to me,
The Lord was looking down;
The Lord was looking from above,
And shiny was His face,
And I was filled with gush of love
For all the human race.

Anon I saw three ancient men
Who reckoned not of bliss,
And they looked quite astonished when
I gave them each a kiss.
I kissed each on his balding spot
With heart of Heaven grace . . .
And then it seemed there was a lot
Of trouble round the place.

They had me up before the beak,
But though I told my tale,
He sentenced me to spend a week
In Yard of Scotland Gaol.
So when they kindly set me free
Please don't think it amiss,
If Battling Bill of Battersea,
For love of all humanity
Gives you a kiss.

Robert William Service

Soldier Boy

My soldier boy has crossed the sea
 To fight the foeman;
But he'll come back to make of me
 And honest woman.
So I am singing all day long,
 Despite blood-shedding;
For though I know he's done me wrong,
 We'll end by wedding.

My soldier boy is home again,
 So bold and scathless;
But oh, my heart is numb with pain
 Because he's faithless.
He's brought with him a French Mam'selle;
 They plan a marriage;
Maybe I'll go - no one will know
 Of my miscarriage.

My soldier boy has made his choice,
 She'll hold him to it;
I tell myself that I rejoice,
 May he not rue it.
But oh, that starry month of May,
 Love-words wild spoken!
I stand alone and make no moan...
 My heart is broken.

Robert William Service

Someone's Mother

Someone's Mother trails the street
Wrapt in rotted rags;
Broken slippers on her feet
Drearly she drags;
Drifting in the bitter night,
Gnawing gutter bread,
With a face of tallow white,
Listless as the dead.

Someone's Mother in the dim
Of the grey church wall
Hears within a Christmas hymn,
One she can recall
From the h so long ago,
When divinely far,
in the holy alter glow
She would kneel in prayer.

Someone's Mother, huddled there,
Had so sweet a dream;
Seemed the sky was Heaven's stair,
Golden and agleam,
Robed in gown Communion bright,
Singly she trod
Up and up the stair of light,
And thee was waiting - God.

Someone's Mother cowers down
By the old church wall;
Soft above the sleeping town
Snow begins to fall;
Now her rags are lily fair,
but unproud is she:
Someone's Mother is not there...
Lo! she climbs the starry stair
Only angels see.

Robert William Service

Son

He hurried away, young heart of joy, under our Devon sky!
And I watched him go, my beautiful boy, and a weary woman was I.
For my hair is grey, and his was gold; he'd the best of his life to live;
And I'd loved him so, and I'm old, I'm old; and he's all I had to give.

Ah yes, he was proud and swift and gay, but oh how my eyes were dim!
With the sun in his heart he went away, but he took the sun with him.
For look! How the leaves are falling now, and the winter won't be long. . . .
Oh boy, my boy with the sunny brow, and the lips of love and of song!

How we used to sit at the day's sweet end, we two by the firelight's gleam,
And we'd drift to the Valley of Let's Pretend, on the beautiful river of Dream.
Oh dear little heart! All wealth untold would I gladly, gladly pay
Could I just for a moment closely hold that golden head to my grey.

For I gaze in the fire, and I'm seeing there a child, and he waves to me;
And I run and I hold him up in the air, and he laughs and shouts with glee;
A little bundle of love and mirth, crying: "Come, Mumsie dear!"
Ah me! If he called from the ends of the earth I know that my heart would hear.

Yet the thought comes thrilling through all my pain: how worthier could he die?
Yea, a loss like that is a glorious gain, and pitiful proud am I.
For Peace must be bought with blood and tears, and the boys of our hearts must
pay;
And so in our joy of the after-years, let us bless them every day.

And though I know there's a hasty grave with a poor little cross at its head,
And the gold of his youth he so gladly gave, yet to me he'll never be dead.
And the sun in my Devon lane will be gay, and my boy will be with me still,
So I'm finding the heart to smile and say: "Oh God, if it be Thy Will!"

Robert William Service

Song Of The Sardine

A fat man sat in an orchestra stall and his cheeks were wet with tears,
As he gazed at the primadonna tall, whom he hadn't seen in years.
"Oh don't you remember" he murmured low "that Spring in Montparnasse,
When hand in hand we used to go to our nightly singing class.
Ah me those days so gay and glad, so full of hope and cheer.
And that little super that we had of tinned sardines and beer.
When you looked so like a little queen with your proud and haughty air,
That I took from the box the last sardine and I twined it in your hair."

Alas I am only a stockbroker now while you are high and great,
The laurels of fame adorn your brow while on you Princes wait.
And as I sit so sadly here and list to your thrilling tones,
You cannot remember I sadly fear if my name is Smith or Jones.
Yet Oh those days of long ago, when I had scarce a sou.
And as my bitter tears down flow I think again of you.
And once again I seem to see that mad of sweet sixteen,
Within whose tresses tenderly I twined that bright sardine.

Chorus:

Oh that sardine in your hair, I can see it shining there,
As I took it from its box, And I twined it in your locks.
Silver sardine in your hair. Like a jewel rich and rare,
Oh that little silver sardine in your hair.

Robert William Service

Spanish Men

The Men of Seville are, they say,
The laziest of Spain.
Consummate artists in delay,
Allergical to strain;
Fr if you have a job for them,
And beg them to be spry,
They only look at you with phlegm:
"Mañana," they reply.

The Men of gay Madrid, I'm told,
Siesta's law revere;
The custom is so ages old,
And to tradition dear;
So if you want a job done soon,
And shyly ask them: "When?"
They say: "Come back this afternoon:
We'll hope to do it them."

The Men of Barcelona are
Such mostly little caps,
That when you see them from afar
They make you think of Japs;
Yet they can take life on the run,
Quite peppy, I'll allow,
For when there's something to be done,
They shout: "We'll do it NOW."

Robert William Service

Spanish Peasant

We have no aspiration vain
For paradise Utopian,
And here in our sun-happy Spain,
Though man exploit his fellow man,
To high constraint we humbly yield,
And turn from politics to toil,
Content to till a kindly field
And bring forth bounty from the soil.

They tell us wars will never cease;
They say the world is out of joint.
How well we know! But peace is peace
Even imposed at pistol point.
And we have learnt our lesson well,
By many a death, by many a tear;
So let us live a feudal spell, -
The cost of freedom is too dear.

Let us be the cattle kind,
Praying the goad be not a sword;
In servitude obeying blind
The tyrant ruling of our Lord.
His army can be swift to slay,
His Church teach us humility . . .
But never never will we pay
Again blood-price for Liberty.

Robert William Service

Spanish Women

The Spanish women don't wear slacks
Because their hips are too enormous.
'Tis true each bulbous bosom lacks
No inspiration that should warm us;
But how our ardor seems to freeze
When we behold their bulgy knees!

Their starry eyes and dusky hair,
Their dazzling teeth in smile so gracious,
I love, but oh I wish they were
Not so confoundedly curvacious.
I'm sure I would prefer them willowy,
Instead of obviously pillowy.

It may be that they're plump because
The caballeros like them that way;
Since men are lean and Nature's laws
Of contrast sway them to the fat way:
For few their dames as much adore, as
The señors love their sleek señoras.

Well, each according to his taste.
The dons prefer their women lardy,
But me, I likes a tiny waist,
And breast that fits a hand that's hardy:
In short, my bottom money backs
The baby who looks well in slacks.

Robert William Service

Spartan Mother

My mother loved her horses and
Her hounds of pedigree;
She did not kiss the baby hand
I held to her in glee.
Of course I had a sweet nou-nou
Who tended me with care,
And mother reined her nag to view
Me with a critic air.

So I went to a famous school,
But holidays were short;
My mother thought me just a fool,
Unfit for games and sport.
For I was fond of books and art,
And hated hound and steed:
Said Mother, 'Boy, you break my heart!
You are not of our breed.'

Then came the War. The Mater said:
'Thank God, a son I give
To King and Country,'--well, I'm dead
Who would have loved to live.
'For England's sake,' said she, 'he died.
For that my boy I bore.'
And now she talks of me with pride.
A hero of the War.

Mother, I think that you are glad
I ended up that way.
Your horses and your dogs you had,
And still you have today.
Your only child you say you gave
Your Country to defend . . .
Dear Mother, from a hero's grave
I--curse you in the end.

Robert William Service

Spats

When young I was a Socialist
 Despite my tender years;
No blessed chance I ever missed
 To slam the profiteers.
Yet though a fanatic I was,
 And cursed aristocrats,
The Party chucked me out because
 I sported Spats.

Aye, though on soap boxes I stood,
 And spouted in the parks,
They grizzled that my foot-wear would
 Be disavowed my Marx.
It's buttons of a pearly sheen
 Bourgeois they deemed and thus
They told me; 'You must choose between
 Your spats and us.'

Alas! I loved my gaitered feet
 Of smoothly fitting fawn;
They were so snappy and so neat,
 A gift from Uncle John
Who had a fortune in the Bank
 That one day might be mine:
'Give up my spats!' said I, 'I thank
 You--but resign.'

Today when red or pink I see
 In stripy pants of state,
I think of how they lost in me
 A demon of debate.
I muse as leaders strut about
 In frock-coats and high hats . . .
The bloody party chucked me out
 Because of Spats.

Robert William Service

Stamp Collector

My worldly wealth I hoard in albums three,
My life collection of rare postage stamps;
My room is cold and bare as you can see,
My coat is old and shabby as a tramp's;
Yet more to me than balances in banks,
My albums three are worth a million francs.

I keep them in that box beside my bed,
For who would dream such treasures it could hold;
But every day I take them out and spread
Each page, to gloat like miser o'er his gold:
Dearer to me than could be child or wife,
I would defend them with my very life.

They are my very life, for every night
over my catalogues I pore and pore;
I recognize rare items with delight,
Nothing I read but philatelic lore;
And when some specimen of choice I buy,
In all the world there's none more glad than I.

Behold my gem, my British penny black;
To pay its price I starved myself a year;
And many a night my dinner I would lack,
But when I bought it, oh, what radiant cheer!
Hitler made war that day - I did not care,
So long as my collection he would spare.

Look - my triangular Cape of Good Hope.
To purchase it I had to sell my car.
Now in my pocket for some sous I grope
To pay my omnibus when home is far,
And I am cold and hungry and footsore,
In haste to add some beauty to my store.

This very day, ah, what a joy was mine,
When in a dingy dealer's shop I found
This franc vermillion, eighteen forty-nine . . .
How painfully my heart began to pound!

(It's weak they say), I paid the modest price
And tremblingly I vanished in a trice.

But oh, my dream is that some day of days,
I might discover a Mauritius blue,
poking among the stamp-bins of the quais;
Who knows! They say there are but two;
Yet if a third one I should spy,
I think - God help me! I should faint and die. . . .

Poor Monsieur Pns, he's cold and dead,
One of those stamp-collecting cranks.
His garret held no crust of bread,
But albums worth a million francs.
on them his income he would spend,
By philatelic frenzy driven:
What did it profit in the end. . .
You can't take stamps to Heaven.

Robert William Service

Stowaway

We'd left the sea-gulls long behind,
And we were almost in mid-ocean;
The sky was soft and blue and kind,
The boat had scarcely any motion;
Except that songfully it sped,
And sheared the foam swift as an arrow . . .
There fluttered down a city sparrow.

I stared with something of surprise;
The apparition mocked my seeming;
In fact I gently rubbed my eyes
And wondered if I were not dreaming.
It must, I mused, at Montreal
Have hopped abroad, somewhere to nestle,
And failed to hear the warning call
For visitors to leave the vessel.

Well, anyway a bird it was,
With winky eyes and wings a-twitter,
Unwise to migration Laws,
From Canada a hardy flitter;
And as it hopped about the deck
So happily I wondered whether
It wasn't scamming from Quebec
For London's mild and moister weather.

My rover's heart went out to it,
That vain, vivacious little devil;
And as I watched it hop and flit
I hoped it would not come to evil;
It planned above the plangent sea
(A foolish flight, I'd never risk it),
And then it circled back to me
And from my palm picked crumbs of biscuit.

Well, voyages come to an end
(WE make them with that understanding);
One morn I missed my feathered friend,
And hope it made a happy landing.

Oh may she ever happy be
(It 'twas a "she") with eggs to sit on,
And rest on our side of he sea,
A brave, brown, cheery, chirping Briton.

Robert William Service

Strip Teaser

My precious grand-child, aged two,
Is eager to unlace one shoe,
 And then the other;
Her cotton socks she'll deftly doff
Despite the mild reproaches of
 Her mother.

Around the house she loves to fare,
And with her rosy tootsies bare,
 Pit-pat the floor;
And though remonstrances we make
She presently decides to take
 Off something more.

Her pinafore she next unties,
And then before we realise,
 Her dress drops down;
Her panties and her brassiere,
Her chemise and her underwear
 Are round her strown.

And now she dances all about,
As naked as a new-caught trout,
 With impish glee;
And though she's beautiful like that,
(A cherubim, but not so fat),
 Quite shocked are we.

And so we dread with dim dismay
Some day she may her charms display
 In skimpy wear;
Aye, even in a gee-string she
May frolic on the stage of the
 Folies-Bèrgere

But e'er she does, I hope she'll read
This worldly wise and warning screed,
 That to conceal,
Unto the ordinary man

Is often more alluring than
To ALL reveal.

Robert William Service

Striving

Striving is life, yet life is striving;
I fight to live, yet live to fight;
The vital urge is in my driving,
Yet I must drive with all my might:
Each day a battle, and the fray
Stoutly renewed the coming day.

A am myself - yet when I strive
I build a self that's truer, higher;
I keep my bit of God alive
And forgive me in heroic fire:
What if my goal I never gain -
Better to toil than to attain.

It is not what I do or make,
It is the travail of my trying;
The aim, the effort and the ache
Is in the end my glorifying:
Through triumph I may never see,
The will to win is victory.

Striving is strength: with all that's in me
I will not falter in the fray;
And though no shining crown it win me,
I'll fight unto my latest day:
Strive on! - and though I win no place,
Uphold the spirit of the race.

Behold yon peaks that mock my climbing. . . .
I peer from out the dusty plain;
Dark falls, the mission bells are chiming
As on to starry heights I strain;
Despite the night up, up I plod
To gain the golden meads of God.

Robert William Service

Stupidity

Stupidity, woe's anodyne,
Be kind and comfort me in mine;
Smooth out the furrows of my brow,
Make me as carefree as a cow,
Content to sleep and eat and drink
And never think

Stupidity, let me be blind
To all the ills of humankind;
Fill me with simple sentiment
To walk the way my father went;
School me to sweat with robot folk
Beneath the yoke.

Stupidity, keep in their place
The moiling masses of my race,
And bid the lowly multitude
Be humble as a people should;
Learn us with patient hearts, I pray,
Lords to obey.

Stupidity and Ignorance,
Be you our buffers 'mid mischance;
Endoctrine us to do your will,
And other stupid people kill;
Fool us with hope of Life to be,
Great god to whom we bow the knee,
--STUPIDITY.

Robert William Service

Success

You ask me what I call Success -
It is, I wonder, Happiness?

It is not wealth, it is not fame,
Nor rank, nor power nor honoured name.
It is not triumph in the Arts -
Best-selling books or leading parts.
It is not plaudits of the crowd,
The flame of flags, processions proud.
The panegyrics of the Press
are but the mirage of Success.
You may have all of them, my friend,
Yet be a failure in the end.

I've know proud Presidents of banks
Who've fought their way up from the ranks,
And party leaders of renown
Who played as boys in Shantytown.
Strong, self-made men, yet seek to trace
Benignity in any face;
Grim purpose, mastery maybe,
Yet never sweet serenity;
Never contentment, thoughts that bless -
That mellow joy I deem Success.

The haply seek some humble hearth,
Quite poor in goods yet rich in mirth,
And see a man of common clay
Watching his little ones at play;
A laughing fellow full of cheer,
Health, strength and faith that mocks at fear;
Who for his happiness relies
On joys he lights in other eyes;
He loves his home and envies none. . . .
Who happier beneath the sun?

Aye, though he walk in lowly ways,
Shining Success has crowned his days.

Successful Failure

I wonder if successful men
 Are always happy?
And do they sing with gusto when
 Springtime is sappy?
Although I am of snow-white hair
 And nighly mortal,
Each time I sniff the April air
 I chortle.

I wonder if a millionaire
 Jigs with enjoyment,
Having such heaps of time to spare
 For daft employment.
For as I dance the Highland Fling
 My glee is muckle,
And doping out new songs to sing
 I chuckle.

I wonder why so soon forgot
 Are fame and riches;
Let cottage comfort be my lot
 With well-worn britches.
As in a pub a poor unknown,
 Brown ale quaffing,
To think of all I'll never own,--
 I'm laughing.

Robert William Service

Sunshine

I

Flat as a drum-head stretch the haggard snows;
The mighty skies are palisades of light;
The stars are blurred; the silence grows and grows;
Vaster and vaster vaults the icy night.
Here in my sleeping-bag I cower and pray:
"Silence and night, have pity! stoop and slay."

I have not slept for many, many days.
I close my eyes with weariness -- that's all.
I still have strength to feed the drift-wood blaze,
That flickers weirdly on the icy wall.
I still have strength to pray: "God rest her soul,
Here in the awful shadow of the Pole."

There in the cabin's alcove low she lies,
Still candles gleaming at her head and feet;
All snow-drop white, ash-cold, with closed eyes,
Lips smiling, hands at rest -- O God, how sweet!
How all unutterably sweet she seems. . . .
Not dead, not dead indeed -- she dreams, she dreams.

II

"Sunshine", I called her, and she brought, I vow,
God's blessed sunshine to this life of mine.
I was a rover, of the breed who plough
Life's furrow in a far-flung, lonely line;
The wilderness my home, my fortune cast
In a wild land of dearth, barbaric, vast.

When did I see her first? Long had I lain
Groping my way to life through fevered gloom.
Sudden the cloud of darkness left my brain;
A velvet bar of sunshine pierced the room,
And in that mellow glory aureoled
She stood, she stood, all golden in its gold.

Sunshine! O miracle! the earth grew glad;
Radiant each blade of grass, each living thing.
What a huge strength, high hope, proud will I had!
All the wide world with rapture seemed to ring.
Would she but wed me? YES: then fared we forth
Into the vast, unvintageable North.

III

In Muskrat Land the conies leap,
The waxies linger in their flight;
The jewelled, snakelike rivers creep;
The sun, sad rogue, is out all night;
The great wood bison paws the sand,
In Muskrat Land, in Muskrat Land.

In Muskrat Land dim streams divide
The tundras belted by the sky.
How sweet in slim canoe to glide,
And dream, and let the world go by!
Build gay camp-fires on greening strand!
In Muskrat Land, in Muskrat Land.

IV

And so we dreamed and drifted, she and I;
And how she loved that free, unfathomed life!
There in the peach-bloom of the midnight sky,
The silence welded us, true man and wife.
Then North and North invincibly we pressed
Beyond the Circle, to the world's white crest.

And on the wind-flailed Arctic waste we stayed,
Dwelt with the Huskies by the Polar sea.
Fur had they, white fox, marten, mink to trade,
And we had food-stuff, bacon, flour and tea.
So we made snug, chummed up with all the band:
Sudden the Winter swooped on Husky Land.

V

What was that ill so sinister and dread,

Smiting the tribe with sickness to the bone?
So that we waked one morn to find them fled;
So that we stood and stared, alone, alone.
Bravely she smiled and looked into my eyes;
Laughed at their troubled, stern, foreboding pain;
Gaily she mocked the menace of the skies,
Turned to our cheery cabin once again,
Saying: "'Twill soon be over, dearest one,
The long, long night: then O the sun, the sun!"

VI

God made a heart of gold, of gold,
Shining and sweet and true;
Gave it a home of fairest mould,
Blest it, and called it -- You.

God gave the rose its grace of glow,
And the lark its radiant glee;
But, better than all, I know, I know
God gave you, Heart, to me.

VII

She was all sunshine in those dubious days;
Our cabin beacons with defiant light;
We chattered by the friendly drift-wood blaze;
Closer and closer covered the hag-like night.
A wolf-howl would have been a welcome sound,
And there was none in all that stricken land;
Yet with such silence, darkness, death around,
Learned we to love as few can understand.
Spirit with spirit fused, and soul with soul,
There in the sullen shadow of the Pole.

VIII

What was that haunting horror of the night?
Brave was she; buoyant, full of sunny cheer.
Why was her face so small, so strangely white?
Then did I turn from her, heart-sick with fear;
Sought in my agony the outcast snows;

Prayed in my pain to that insensate sky;
Grovelled and sobbed and cursed, and then arose:
"Sunshine! O heart of gold! to die! to die!"

IX

She died on Christmas day -- it seems so sad
That one you love should die on Christmas day.
Head-bowed I knelt by her; O God! I had
No tears to shed, no moan, no prayer to pray.
I heard her whisper: "Call me, will you, dear?
They say Death parts, but I won't go away.
I will be with you in the cabin here;
Oh I will plead with God to let me stay!
Stay till the Night is gone, till Spring is nigh,
Till sunshine comes . . . be brave . . . I'm tired . . . good-bye. . . ."

X

For weeks, for months I have not seen the sun;
The minatory dawns are leprous pale;
The felon days malingering one by one;
How like a dream Life is! how vain! how stale!
I, too, am faint; that vampire-like disease
Has fallen on me; weak and cold am I,
Hugging a tiny fire in fear I freeze:
The cabin must be cold, and so I try
To bear the frost, the frost that fights decay,
The frost that keeps her beautiful always.

XI

She lies within an icy vault;
It glitters like a cave of salt.
All marble-pure and angel-sweet
With candles at her head and feet,
Under an ermine robe she lies.
I kiss her hands, I kiss her eyes:
"Come back, come back, O Love, I pray,
Into this house, this house of clay!
Answer my kisses soft and warm;
Nestle again within my arm.

Come! for I know that you are near;
Open your eyes and look, my dear.
Just for a moment break the mesh;
Back from the spirit leap to flesh.
Weary I wait; the night is black;
Love of my life, come back, come back!"

XII

Last night maybe I was a little mad,
For as I prayed despairful by her side,
Such a strange, antic visioning I had:
Lo! it did seem her eyes were open wide.
Surely I must have dreamed! I stared once more. . . .
No, 'twas a candle's trick, a shadow cast.
There were her lashes locking as before.
(Oh, but it filled me with a joy so vast!)
No, 'twas a freak, a fancy of the brain,
(Oh, but to-night I'll try again, again!)

XIII

It was no dream; now do I know that Love
Leapt from the starry battlements of Death;
For in my vigil as I bent above,
Calling her name with eager, burning breath,
Sudden there came a change: again I saw
The radiance of the rose-leaf stain her cheek;
Rivers of rapture thrilled in sunny thaw;
Cleft were her coral lips as if to speak;
Curved were her tender arms as if to cling;
Open the flower-like eyes of lucent blue,
Looking at me with love so pitying
That I could fancy Heaven shining through.
"Sunshine," I faltered, "stay with me, oh, stay!"
Yet ere I finished, in a moment's flight,
There in her angel purity she lay --
Ah! but I know she'll come again to-night.
Even as radiant sword leaps from the sheath
Soul from the body leaps--we call it Death.

XIV

Even as this line I write,
Do I know that she is near;
Happy am I, every night
Comes she back to bid me cheer;
Kissing her, I hold her fast;
Win her into life at last.

Did I dream that yesterday
On yon mountain ridge a glow
Soft as moonstone paled away,
Leaving less forlorn the snow?
Could it be the sun? Oh, fain
Would I see the sun again!

Oh, to see a coral dawn
Gladden to a crocus glow!
Day's a spectre dim and wan,
Dancing on the furtive snow;
Night's a cloud upon my brain:
Oh, to see the sun again!

You who find us in this place,
Have you pity in your breast;
Let us in our last embrace,
Under earth sun-hallowed rest.
Night's a claw upon my brain:
Oh, to see the sun again!

XV

The Sun! at last the Sun! I write these lines,
Here on my knees, with feeble, fumbling hand.
Look! in yon mountain cleft a radiance shines,
Gleam of a primrose -- see it thrill, expand,
Grow glorious. Dear God be praised! it streams
Into the cabin in a gush of gold.
Look! there she stands, the angel of my dreams,
All in the radiant shimmer aureoled;
First as I saw her from my bed of pain;
First as I loved her when the darkness passed.
Now do I know that Life is not in vain;

Now do I know God cares, at last, at last!
Light outlives dark, joy grief, and Love's the sum:
Heart of my heart! Sunshine! I come . . . I come. . . .

Robert William Service

Suppose?

It's mighty nice at shut of day
With weariness to hit the hey,
To close your eyes, tired through and through,
And just forget that "you are you."

It's mighty sweet to wake again
When sunshine floods the window pain;
I love in cosy couch to lie,
And re-discover "I am I."

It would be grand could we conceive
A heaven in which to believe,
And in a better life to be be,
Find out with joy "we still are we."

Though we assume with lapsing breath
Eternal is the sleep of death,
Would it not be divinely odd
To wake and find that - "God is God."

Robert William Service

Surtax

When I was young and Scottish I
Allergic was to spending;
I put a heap of bawbees by,
But now my life is ending,
Although I would my hoarded pelf
Impetuously scatter,
Each day I live I find myself
Financially fatter.

Though all the market I might buy,
There's nothing to my needing;
I only have one bed to lie,
One mouth for feeding.
So what's the good of all that dough
Accumulating daily?
I should have spent it long ago
In living gaily.

So take my tip, my prudent friend,
Without misgiving;
Don't guard your fortune to the end,
But blow it living.
Better on bubbly be it spent,
And chorus cuties,
Than pay it to the Government
For damned Death Duties.

Robert William Service

Susie

My daughter Susie, aged two,
Apes me in every way,
For as my household chores I do
With brooms she loves to play.
A scrubbing brush to her is dear;
Ah! Though my soul it vex,
My bunch of cuteness has, I fear,
Kitchen complex.

My dream was that she might go far,
And play or sing or dance;
Aye, even be a movie star
Of glamour and romance.
But no more with such hope I think,
For now her fondest wish is
To draw a chair up to the sink
And wash the dishes.

Yet when you put it to a test
In ups and downs of life,
A maiden's mission may be best
To make a good house-wife;
To bake, to cook, to knit, to lave:
And so I pray that Sue
Will keep a happy hearth and have
A baby too.

Robert William Service

Sympathy

My Muse is simple,--yet it's nice
To think you don't need to think twice

On words I write.

I reckon I've a common touch
And if you say I cuss too much

I answer: 'Quite!'

I envy not the poet's lot;
He has something I haven't got,

Alas, I know.

But I have something maybe he
Would envy just a mite in me,--

I'm rather low.

For I am cast of common clay,
And from a ditch I fought my way,

And that is why

The while the poet scans the skies,
My gaze is grimly gutterwise,

Earthy am I.

And yet I have a gift, perhaps
Denied to proud poetic chaps

Who scoff at me;

I know the hearts of humble folk;
I too have bowed beneath the yoke:

So let my verse for them evoke

Your sympathy.

Robert William Service

Take It Easy

When I was boxing in the ring
In 'Frisco back in ninety-seven,
I used to make five bucks a fling
To give as good as I was given.
But when I felt too fighting gay,
And tried to be a dinger-donger,
My second, Mike Muldoon. would say:
"Go easy, kid; you'll stay the longer."

When I was on the Yukon trail
The boys would warn, when things were bleakest,
The weakest link's the one to fail -
Said I: "by Gosh! I won't be weakest."
So I would strain with might and main,
Striving to prove I was the stronger,
Till Sourdough Sam would snap: "Goddam!
Go easy, son; you" last the longer."
So all you lads of eighty odd
Take my advice - you'll never rue it:
Be quite prepared to meet your God,
But don't stampede yourselves to do it.
Just cultivate a sober gait;
Don't emulate the lively conger;
No need to race, slow down the pace,
Go easy, Pals - you'll linger longer.

Robert William Service

Tea On The Lawn

It was foretold by sybils three
that in an air crash he would die.
"I'll fool their prophesy," said he;
"You won't get me to go on high.
Howe're the need for haste and speed,
I'll never, never, never fly."

It's true he traveled everywhere,
Afar and near, by land and sea,
Yet he would never go by air
And chance an evil destiny.
Always by ship or rail he went -
For him no sky-plane accident.

Then one day walking on the heath
He watched a pilot chap on high,
And chuckled as he stood beneath
That lad a-looping in the sky.
Feeling so safe and full of glee
Serenely he went home to tea.

With buttered toast he told his wife:
"My dear, you can't say I've been rash;
Three fortune tellers said my life
Would end up in an air-plane crash.
But see! I'm here so safe and sound:
By gad! I'll never leave the ground.

"For me no baptism of air;
It's in my bed I mean to die.
Behold yon crazy fool up there,
A-cutting capers in the sky.
His motor makes a devilish din . . .
Look! Look! He's gone into a spin.

"He's dashing downward - "Oh my God!" . . .
Alas! he never finished tea.
The motor ploughed the garden sod
And in the crash a corpse was he:

Proving that no man can frustrate
The merciless design of Fate.

Robert William Service

Teddy Bear

O Teddy Bear! with your head awry
And your comical twisted smile,
You rub your eyes -- do you wonder why
You've slept such a long, long while?
As you lay so still in the cupboard dim,
And you heard on the roof the rain,
Were you thinking . . . what has become of him?
And when will he play again?

Do you sometimes long for a chubby hand,
And a voice so sweetly shrill?
O Teddy Bear! don't you understand
Why the house is awf'ly still?
You sit with your muzzle propped on your paws,
And your whimsical face askew.
Don't wait, don't wait for your friend . . . because
He's sleeping and dreaming too.

Aye, sleeping long. . . . You remember how
He stabbed our hearts with his cries?
And oh, the dew of pain on his brow,
And the deeps of pain in his eyes!
And, Teddy Bear! you remember, too,
As he sighed and sank to his rest,
How all of a sudden he smiled to you,
And he clutched you close to his breast.

I'll put you away, little Teddy Bear,
In the cupboard far from my sight;
Maybe he'll come and he'll kiss you there,
A wee white ghost in the night.
But me, I'll live with my love and pain
A weariful lifetime through;
And my Hope: will I see him again, again?
Ah, God! If I only knew!

Robert William Service

The Absinthe Drinkers

He's yonder, on the terrace of the Cafe de la Paix,
The little wizened Spanish man, I see him every day.
He's sitting with his Pernod on his customary chair;
He's staring at the passers with his customary stare.
He never takes his piercing eyes from off that moving throng,
That current cosmopolitan meandering along:
Dark diplomats from Martinique, pale Rastas from Peru,
An Englishman from Bloomsbury, a Yank from Kalamazoo;
A poet from Montmartre's heights, a dapper little Jap,
Exotic citizens of all the countries on the map;
A tourist horde from every land that's underneath the sun --
That little wizened Spanish man, he misses never one.
Oh, foul or fair he's always there, and many a drink he buys,
And there's a fire of red desire within his hollow eyes.
And sipping of my Pernod, and a-knowing what I know,
Sometimes I want to shriek aloud and give away the show.
I've lost my nerve; he's haunting me; he's like a beast of prey,
That Spanish man that's watching at the Cafe de la Paix.

Say! Listen and I'll tell you all . . . the day was growing dim,
And I was with my Pernod at the table next to him;
And he was sitting soberly as if he were asleep,
When suddenly he seemed to tense, like tiger for a leap.
And then he swung around to me, his hand went to his hip,
My heart was beating like a gong -- my arm was in his grip;
His eyes were glaring into mine; aye, though I shrank with fear,
His fetid breath was on my face, his voice was in my ear:
"Excuse my brusquerie," he hissed; "but, sir, do you suppose --
That portly man who passed us had a wen upon his nose?"

And then at last it dawned on me, the fellow must be mad;
And when I soothingly replied: "I do not think he had,"
The little wizened Spanish man subsided in his chair,
And shrouded in his raven cloak resumed his owlish stare.
But when I tried to slip away he turned and glared at me,
And oh, that fishlike face of his was sinister to see:
"Forgive me if I startled you; of course you think I'm queer;
No doubt you wonder who I am, so solitary here;
You question why the passers-by I piercingly review . . .

Well, listen, my bibacious friend, I'll tell my tale to you.

"It happened twenty years ago, and in another land:
A maiden young and beautiful, two suitors for her hand.
My rival was the lucky one; I vowed I would repay;
Revenge has mellowed in my heart, it's rotten ripe to-day.
My happy rival skipped away, vamoosed, he left no trace;
And so I'm waiting, waiting here to meet him face to face;
For has it not been ever said that all the world one day
Will pass in pilgrimage before the Cafe de la Paix?"

"But, sir," I made remonstrance, "if it's twenty years ago,
You'd scarcely recognize him now, he must have altered so."
The little wizened Spanish man he laughed a hideous laugh,
And from his cloak he quickly drew a faded photograph.
"You're right," said he, "but there are traits (oh, this you must allow)
That never change; Lopez was fat, he must be fatter now.
His paunch is senatorial, he cannot see his toes,
I'm sure of it; and then, behold! that wen upon his nose.
I'm looking for a man like that. I'll wait and wait until . . ."
"What will you do?" I sharply cried; he answered me: "Why, kill!
He robbed me of my happiness -- nay, stranger, do not start;
I'll firmly and politely put -- a bullet in his heart."

And then that little Spanish man, with big cigar alight,
Uprose and shook my trembling hand and vanished in the night.
And I went home and thought of him and had a dreadful dream
Of portly men with each a wen, and woke up with a scream.
And sure enough, next morning, as I prowled the Boulevard,
A portly man with wenny nose roamed into my regard;
Then like a flash I ran to him and clutched him by the arm:
"Oh, sir," said I, "I do not wish to see you come to harm;
But if your life you value aught, I beg, entreat and pray --
Don't pass before the terrace of the Cafe de la Paix."
That portly man he looked at me with such a startled air,
Then bolted like a rabbit down the rue Michaudière.
"Ha! ha! I've saved a life," I thought; and laughed in my relief,
And straightway joined the Spanish man o'er his apéritif.
And thus each day I dodged about and kept the strictest guard
For portly men with each a wen upon the Boulevard.
And then I hailed my Spanish pal, and sitting in the sun,
We ordered many Pernods and we drank them every one.

And sternly he would stare and stare until my hand would shake,
And grimly he would glare and glare until my heart would quake.
And I would say: "Alphonso, lad, I must expostulate;
Why keep alive for twenty years the furnace of your hate?
Perhaps his wedded life was hell; and you, at least, are free . . ."
"That's where you've got it wrong," he snarled; "the fool she took was me.
My rival sneaked, threw up the sponge, betrayed himself a churl:
'Twas he who got the happiness, I only got -- the girl."
With that he looked so devil-like he made me creep and shrink,
And there was nothing else to do but buy another drink.

Now yonder like a blot of ink he sits across the way,
Upon the smiling terrace of the Cafe de la Paix;
That little wizened Spanish man, his face is ghastly white,
His eyes are staring, staring like a tiger's in the night.
I know within his evil heart the fires of hate are fanned,
I know his automatic's ready waiting to his hand.
I know a tragedy is near. I dread, I have no peace . . .
Oh, don't you think I ought to go and call upon the police?
Look there . . . he's rising up . . . my God!
He leaps from out his place . . .
Yon millionaire from Argentine . . . the two are face to face . . .
A shot! A shriek! A heavy fall! A huddled heap! Oh, see
The little wizened Spanish man is dancing in his glee. . . .
I'm sick . . . I'm faint . . . I'm going mad. . . .
Oh, please take me away . . .
There's BLOOD upon the terrace of the Cafe de la Paix. . . .

Robert William Service

The Actor

Enthusiastic was the crowd
That hailed him with delight;
The wine was bright, the laughter loud
And glorious the night.
But when at dawn he drove away
With echo of their cheer,
To where his little daughter lay,
Then he knew-- Fear.

How strangely still the house! He crept
On tip-toe to the bed;
And there she lay as if she slept
With candles at her head.
Her mother died to give her birth,
An angel child was she;
To him the dearest one on earth . . .
How could it be?

'O God! If she could only live,'
He thought with bitter pain,
'How gladly, gladly would I give
My glory and my gain.
I have created many a part,
And many a triumph known;
Yet here is one with breaking heart
I play alone.'

Beside the hush of her his breath
Came with a sobbing sigh.
He babbled: 'Sweet, you play at death . . .
'Tis I who die.'

Robert William Service

The Afflicted

Softly every night they come
 To the picture show,
That old couple, deaf and dumb
 In the second row;
Wistful watching, hand in hand,
 Proud they understand.

Shut-ins from the world away,
 All in all to each;
Knowing utter joy as they
 Read the lips of speech . . .
Would, I wonder, I be glum
 Were I deaf and dumb?

Were I quieted away,
 Far from din and shock?
Were I spared the need to say
 Silly things in talk?
Utter hush I would not mind . . .
 Happy they!--I'm blind.

Robert William Service

The Aftermath

Although my blood I've shed
 In war's red wrath,
Oh how I darkly dread
 Its aftermath!
Oh how I fear the day
 Of my release,
When I must face the fray
 Of phoney peace!

When I must fend again
 In labour strife;
And toil with sweat and strain
 For kids and wife.
The world is so upset
 I battled for,
That grimly I regret
 The peace of war.

The wounds are hard to heal
 Of shell and shard,
But O the way to weal
 Is bitter hard!
Though looking back I see
 A gory path,
How bloody black can be
 War's Aftermath!

Robert William Service

The AlcÁzar

The General now lives in town;
He's eighty odd, they say;
You'll see him strolling up and down
The Prada any day.
He goes to every football game,
The bull-ring knows his voice,
And when the people cheer his name
Moscardo must rejoice.

Yet does he, in the gaiety
Of opera and ball,
A dingy little cellar see,
A picture on a wall?
A portrait of a laughing boy
Of sixteen singing years . . .
Oh does his heart dilate with joy,
Or dim his eyes with tears?

And can he hear a wistful lad
Speak on the telephone?
"Hello! How is it with you, Dad?
That's right - I'm all alone.
They say they'll shoot me at the dawn
If you do not give in . . .
But never mind, Dad - carry on:
You know we've got to win."

And so they shot him at the dawn.
No bandage irked his eyes,
A lonely lad, so wistful wan,
He made his sacrifice.
he saw above the Citadel
His flag of glory fly,
And crying: "long live Spain!" he fell
And died as heroes die.

Robert William Service

The Anniversary

"This bunch of violets," he said,
 "Is for my daughter dear.
Since that glad morn when she was wed
 It is today a year.
She lives atop this flight of stairs--
 Please give an arm to me:
If we can take her unawares
 How glad she'll be!"

We climbed the stairs; the flight was four,
 Our steps were stiff and slow;
But as he reached his daughter's door
 His eyes were all aglow.
Joylike he raised his hand to knock,
 Then sore distressed was I,
For from the silence like a shock
 I heard a cry.

A drunken curse, a sob of woe . . .
 His withered face grew grey.
"I think," said he, "we'd better go
 And come another day."
And as he went a block with me,
 Walking with weary feet,
His violets, I sighed to see,
 Bestrewed the street.

Robert William Service

The Answer

Bill has left his house of clay,
Slammed the door and gone away:
How he laughed but yesterday!

I had two new jokes to tell,
Salty, but he loved them well:
Now I see his empty shell.

Poker-faced he looks at me;
Peeved to miss them jokes - how h
Would have belly-laughed with glee!

He gives me the pip, I swear;
Seems just like he isn't there:
Flown the coop - I wonder where?

Bill had no belief in "soul";
Thought the body was the whole,
And the grave the final goal.

Didn't reckon when we pass,
This old carcass maybe has
Spirit that sneaks out like gas.

"Look here, Bill, I'm asking you
What's the Answer? Tell me true:
Is death the end of all we do?

"Hand me out the dope - are we
No more than monkeys on a tree?"
... And then I swear to God I see
bill bat an eye and - wink at me.

Robert William Service

The Ape And I

Said a monkey unto me:
"How I'm glad I am not you!
See, I swing from tree to tree,
Something that you cannot do.
In gay greenery I drown;
Swift to skyey hights I scale:
As you watch me hang head down
Don't you wish you had a tail?

"Don't you wish that you could wear
In the place of stuffy clothes,
Just a silky coat of hair,
Never shoes to cramp your toes?
Never need to toil for bread,
Round you nuts and fruit and spice;
And with palm tuft for a bed
Happily to crack your lice?"

Said I: "You are right, maybe:
Witting naught of wordly woe,
Gloriously you are free,
And of death you nothing know.
Envyng your monkey mind,
Innocent of blight and bale,
As I touch my bald behind
How I wish I had a tail!"

So in toils of trouble caught,
Oft I wonder with a sigh
If that blue-bummed ape is not
Happier than I?

Robert William Service

The Argument

Said Jock McBrown to Tam McSmith,
"A little bet I'm game to take on,
That I can scotch this Shakespeare myth
And prove Will just a stodge for Bacon."

Said Tam McSmith to Jock McBrown,
"Ye gyke, I canna let ye rave on.
See here, I put a shilling down:
My betting's on the Bard of Avon."

Said Jock McBrown to Tam McSmith,
"Come on, ye'll pay a braw wee dramlet;
Bacon's my bet - the proof herewith . . .
He called his greatest hero - HAMlet."

Robert William Service

The Artist

All day with brow of anxious thought
 The dictionary through,
Amid a million words he sought
 The sole one that would do.
He wandered on from pub to pub
 Yet never ceased to seek
With burning brain and pencil stub
 The Word Unique.

Said he: 'I'll nail it down or die.
 Oh Heaven help me, pray!'
And then a heavy car dashed by,
 And he was in the way.
They rushed him to the hospital,
 And though his chance was bleak,
He cried: 'I'll croak, but find I shall
 The Word Unique.'

They reckoned he was off his head,
 And could be it was so;
For as they bent above his bed
 He mumbled soft and low.
And then a name they heard him speak,
 Yet did not deem it odd . . .
At last he'd found the Word Unique,--
 Just God.

Robert William Service

The Atavist

What are you doing here, Tom Thorne, on the white top-knot o' the world,
Where the wind has the cut of a naked knife and the stars are rapier keen?
Hugging a smudgy willow fire, deep in a lynx robe curled,
You that's a lord's own son, Tom Thorne -- what does your madness mean?

Go home, go home to your clubs, Tom Thorne! home to your evening dress!
Home to your place of power and pride, and the feast that waits for you!
Why do you linger all alone in the splendid emptiness,
Scouring the Land of the Little Sticks on the trail of the caribou?

Why did you fall off the Earth, Tom Thorne, out of our social ken?
What did your deep damnation prove? What was your dark despair?
Oh with the width of a world between, and years to the count of ten,
If they cut out your heart to-night, Tom Thorne, her name would be graven
there!

And you fled afar for the thing called Peace, and you thought you would find it
here,
In the purple tundras vastly spread, and the mountains whitely piled;
It's a weary quest and a dreary quest, but I think that the end is near;
For they say that the Lord has hidden it in the secret heart of the Wild.

And you know that heart as few men know, and your eyes are fey and deep,
With a "something lost" come welling back from the raw, red dawn of life:
With woe and pain have you greatly lain, till out of abysmal sleep
The soul of the Stone Age leaps in you, alert for the ancient strife.

And if you came to our feast again, with its pomp and glee and glow,
I think you would sit stone-still, Tom Thorne, and see in a daze of dream,
A mad sun goading to frenzied flame the glittering gems of the snow,
And a monster musk-ox bulking black against the blood-red gleam.

I think you would see berg-battling shores, and stammer and halt and stare,
With a sudden sense of the frozen void, serene and vast and still;
And the aching gleam and the hush of dream, and the track of a great white
bear,
And the primal lust that surged in you as you sprang to make your kill.

I think you would hear the bull-moose call, and the gluttoned river roar;

And spy the hosts of the caribou shadow the shining plain;
And feel the pulse of the Silences, and stand elate once more
On the verge of the yawning vastitudes that call to you in vain.

For I think you are one with the stars and the sun, and the wind and the wave
and the dew;

And the peaks untrod that yearn to God, and the valleys undefiled;
Men soar with wings, and they bridle kings, but what is it all to you,
Wise in the ways of the wilderness, and strong with the strength of the Wild?

You have spent your life, you have waged your strife where never we play a part;
You have held the throne of the Great Unknown, you have ruled a kingdom vast:

.

But to-night there's a strange, new trail for you, and you go, O weary heart!
To the place and rest of the Great Unguessed . . . at last, Tom Thorne, at last.

Robert William Service

The Auction Sale

Her little head just topped the window-sill;
She even mounted on a stool, maybe;
She pressed against the pane, as children will,
And watched us playing, oh so wistfully!
And then I missed her for a month or more,
And idly thought: "She's gone away, no doubt,"
Until a hearse drew up beside the door . . .
I saw a tiny coffin carried out.

And after that, towards dusk I'd often see
Behind the blind another face that looked:
Eyes of a young wife watching anxiously,
Then rushing back to where her dinner cooked.
She often gulped it down alone, I fear,
Within her heart the sadness of despair,
For near to midnight I would vaguely hear
A lurching step, a stumbling on the stair.

These little dramas of the common day!
A man weak-willed and fore-ordained to fail . . .
The window's empty now, they've gone away,
And yonder, see, their furniture's for sale.
To all the world their door is open wide,
And round and round the bargain-hunters roam,
And peer and gloat, like vultures avid-eyed,
Above the corpse of what was once a home.

So reverent I go from room to room,
And see the patient care, the tender touch,
The love that sought to brighten up the gloom,
The woman-courage tested overmuch.
Amid those things so intimate and dear,
Where now the mob invades with brutal tread,
I think: "What happiness is buried here,
What dreams are withered and what hopes are dead!"

Oh, woman dear, and were you sweet and glad
Over the lining of your little nest!
What ponderings and proud ideas you had!

What visions of a shrine of peace and rest!
For there's his easy-chair upon the rug,
His reading-lamp, his pipe-rack on the wall,
All that you could devise to make him snug --
And yet you could not hold him with it all.

Ah, patient heart, what homelike joys you planned
To stay him by the dull domestic flame!
Those silken cushions that you worked by hand
When you had time, before the baby came.
Oh, how you wove around him cozy spells,
And schemed so hard to keep him home of nights!
Aye, every touch and turn some story tells
Of sweet conspiracies and dead delights.

And here upon the scratched piano stool,
Tied in a bundle, are the songs you sung;
That cozy that you worked in colored wool,
The Spanish lace you made when you were young,
And lots of modern novels, cheap reprints,
And little dainty knick-knacks everywhere;
And silken bows and curtains of gay chintz . . .
And oh, her tiny crib, her folding chair!

Sweet woman dear, and did your heart not break,
To leave this precious home you made in vain?
Poor shabby things! so prized for old times' sake,
With all their memories of love and pain.
Alas! while shouts the raucous auctioneer,
And rat-faced dames are prying everywhere,
The echo of old joy is all I hear,
All, all I see just heartbreak and despair.

Robert William Service

The Baldness Of Chewed-Ear

When Chewed-ear Jenkins got hitched up to Guinneyveer McGee,
His flowin' locks, ye recollect, wuz frivolous an' free;
But in old Hymen's jack-pot, it's a most amazin' thing,
Them flowin' locks jest disappeared like snow-balls in the Spring;
Jest seemed to wilt an' fade away like dead leaves in the Fall,
An' left old Chewed-ear balder than a white-washed cannon ball.

Now Missis Chewed-ear Jenkins, that wuz Guinneyveer McGee,
Wuz jest about as fine a draw as ever made a pair;
But when the boys got joshin' an' suggested it was she
That must be infloenshul for the old man's slump in hair --
Why! Missis Chewed-ear Jenkins jest went clean up in the air.

"To demonstrate," sez she that night, "the lovin' wife I am,
I've bought a dozen bottles of Bink's Anty-Dandruff Balm.
'Twill make yer hair jest sprout an' curl like squash-vines in the sun,
An' I'm propose to sling it on till every drop is done."
That hit old Chewed-ear's funny side, so he lays back an' hollers:
"The day you raise a hair, old girl, you'll git a thousand dollars."

Now, whether 'twas the prize or not 'tis mighty hard to say,
But Chewed-ear didn't seem to have much comfort from that day.
With bottles of that dandruff dope she followed at his heels,
An' sprinkled an' massaged him even when he ate his meals.
She waked him from his beauty sleep with tender, lovin' care,
An' rubbed an' scrubbed assiduous, yet never sign of hair.

Well, naturally all the boys soon tumbled to the joke,
An' at the Wow-wow's Social 'twas Cold-deck Davis spoke:
"The little woman's working mighty hard on Chewed-ear's crown;
Let's give her for a three-fifth's share a hundred dollars down.
We stand to make five hundred clear -- boys, drink in whiskey straight:
'The Chewed-ear Jenkins Hirsute Propagation Syndicate'."

The boys wuz on, an' soon chipped in the necessary dust;
They primed up a committy to negotiate the deal;
Then Missis Jenkins yielded, bein' rather in disgust,
An' all wuz signed an' witnessed, an' invested with a seal.
They rounded up old Chewed-ear, an' they broke it what they'd done;

Allowed they'd bought an interest in his chance of raisin' hair;
They yanked his hat off anxiouslike, opinin' one by one
Their magnifyin' glasses showed fine prospects everywhere.
They bought Hairlene, an' Thatchem, an' Jay's Capillery Juice,
An' Seven Something Sisters, an' Macassar an' Bay Rum,
An' everyone insisted on his speshul right to sluice
His speshul line of lotion onto Chewed-ear's cranium.
They only got the merrier the more the old man roared,
An' shares in "Jenkins Hirsute" went sky-highin' on the board.

The Syndicate wuz hopeful that they'd demonstrate the pay,
An' Missis Jenkins laboured in her perseverin' way.
The boys discussed on "surface rights", an' "out-crops" an' so on,
An' planned to have it "crown" surveyed, an' blue prints of it drawn.
They ran a base line, sluiced an' yelled, an' everyone wuz glad,
Except the balance of the property, an' he wuz "mad".
"It gives me pain," he interjects, "to squash yer glowin' dream,
But you wuz fools when you got in on this here `Hirsute' scheme.
You'll never raise a hair on me," when lo! that very night,
Preparin' to retire he got a most onpleasant fright:
For on that shinin' dome of his, so prominently bare,
He felt the baby outcrop of a second growth of hair.

A thousand dollars! Sufferin' Caesar! Well, it must be saved!
He grabbed his razor recklesslike, an' shaved an' shaved an' shaved.
An' when his head was smooth again he gives a mighty sigh,
An' sneaks away, an' buys some Hair Destroyer on the sly.
So there wuz Missis Jenkins with "Restorer" wagin' fight,
An' Chewed-ear with "Destroyer" circumventin' her at night.
The battle wuz a mighty one; his nerves wuz on the strain,
An' yet in spite of all he did that hair began to gain.

The situation grew intense, so quietly one day,
He gave his share-holders the slip, an' made his get-a-way.
Jest like a criminal he skipped, an' aimed to defalcate
The Chewed-ear Jenkins Hirsute Propagation Syndicate.
His guilty secret burned him, an' he sought the city's din:
"I've got to get a wig," sez he, "to cover up my sin.
It's growin', growin' night an' day; it's most amazin' hair";
An' when he looked at it that night, he shuddered with despair.
He shuddered an' suppressed a cry at what his optics seen --
For on my word of honour, boys, that hair wuz growin' green.

At first he guessed he'd get some dye, an' try to dye it black;
An' then he saw 'twas Nemmysis wuz layin' on his track.
He must jest face the music, an' confess the thing he done,
An' pay the boys an' Guinneyveer the money they had won.
An' then there came a big idee -- it thrilled him like a shock:
Why not control the Syndicate by buyin' up the Stock?

An' so next day he hurried back with smoothly shaven pate,
An' for a hundred dollars he bought up the Syndicate.
'Twas mighty frenzied finance an' the boys set up a roar,
But "Hirsutes" from the market wuz withdrawn for evermore.
An' to this day in Nuggetsville they tell the tale how slick
The Syndicate sold out too soon, and Chewed-ear turned the trick.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Blasphemous Bill

I took a contract to bury the body of blasphemous Bill MacKie,
Whenever, wherever or whatsoever the manner of death he die--
Whether he die in the light o' day or under the peak-faced moon;
In cabin or dance-hall, camp or dive, mucklucks or patent shoon;
On velvet tundra or virgin peak, by glacier, drift or draw;
In muskeg hollow or canyon gloom, by avalanche, fang or claw;
By battle, murder or sudden wealth, by pestilence, hooch or lead--
I swore on the Book I would follow and look till I found my tombless dead.

For Bill was a dainty kind of cuss, and his mind was mighty sot
On a dinky patch with flowers and grass in a civilized bone-yard lot.
And where he died or how he died, it didn't matter a damn
So long as he had a grave with frills and a tombstone "epigram".
So I promised him, and he paid the price in good cheechako coin
(Which the same I blowed in that very night down in the Tenderloin).
Then I painted a three-foot slab of pine: "Here lies poor Bill MacKie",
And I hung it up on my cabin wall and I waited for Bill to die.

Years passed away, and at last one day came a squaw with a story strange,
Of a long-deserted line of traps 'way back of the Bighorn range;
Of a little hut by the great divide, and a white man stiff and still,
Lying there by his lonesome self, and I figured it must be Bill.
So I thought of the contract I'd made with him, and I took down from the shelf
The swell black box with the silver plate he'd picked out for hisself;
And I packed it full of grub and "hooch", and I slung it on the sleigh;
Then I harnessed up my team of dogs and was off at dawn of day.

You know what it's like in the Yukon wild when it's sixty-nine below;
When the ice-worms wriggle their purple heads through the crust of the pale blue
snow;
When the pine-trees crack like little guns in the silence of the wood,
And the icicles hang down like tusks under the parka hood;
When the stove-pipe smoke breaks sudden off, and the sky is weirdly lit,
And the careless feel of a bit of steel burns like a red-hot spit;
When the mercury is a frozen ball, and the frost-fiend stalks to kill--
Well, it was just like that that day when I set out to look for Bill.

Oh, the awful hush that seemed to crush me down on every hand,
As I blundered blind with a trail to find through that blank and bitter land;

Half dazed, half crazed in the winter wild, with its grim heart-breaking woes,
And the ruthless strife for a grip on life that only the sourdough knows!
North by the compass, North I pressed; river and peak and plain
Passed like a dream I slept to lose and I waked to dream again.

River and plain and mighty peak--and who could stand unawed?
As their summits blazed, he could stand undazed at the foot of the throne of
God.

North, aye, North, through a land accurst, shunned by the scouring brutes,
And all I heard was my own harsh word and the whine of the malamutes,
Till at last I came to a cabin squat, built in the side of a hill,
And I burst in the door, and there on the floor, frozen to death, lay Bill.

Ice, white ice, like a winding-sheet, sheathing each smoke-grimed wall;
Ice on the stove-pipe, ice on the bed, ice gleaming over all;
Sparkling ice on the dead man's chest, glittering ice in his hair,
Ice on his fingers, ice in his heart, ice in his glassy stare;
Hard as a log and trussed like a frog, with his arms and legs outspread.
I gazed at the coffin I'd brought for him, and I gazed at the gruesome dead,
And at last I spoke: "Bill liked his joke; but still, goldarn his eyes,
A man had ought to consider his mates in the way he goes and dies."

Have you ever stood in an Arctic hut in the shadow of the Pole,
With a little coffin six by three and a grief you can't control?
Have you ever sat by a frozen corpse that looks at you with a grin,
And that seems to say: "You may try all day, but you'll never jam me in"?
I'm not a man of the quitting kind, but I never felt so blue
As I sat there gazing at that stiff and studying what I'd do.
Then I rose and I kicked off the husky dogs that were nosing round about,
And I lit a roaring fire in the stove, and I started to thaw Bill out.

Well, I thawed and thawed for thirteen days, but it didn't seem no good;
His arms and legs stuck out like pegs, as if they was made of wood.
Till at last I said: "It ain't no use--he's froze too hard to thaw;
He's obstinate, and he won't lie straight, so I guess I got to--saw."
So I sawed off poor Bill's arms and legs, and I laid him snug and straight
In the little coffin he picked hisself, with the dinky silver plate;
And I came nigh near to shedding a tear as I nailed him safely down;
Then I stowed him away in my Yukon sleigh, and I started back to town.

So I buried him as the contract was in a narrow grave and deep,
And there he's waiting the Great Clean-up, when the Judgment sluice-heads

sweep;

And I smoke my pipe and I meditate in the light of the Midnight Sun,

And sometimes I wonder if they was, the awful things I done.

And as I sit and the parson talks, expounding of the Law,

I often think of poor old Bill--and how hard he was to saw.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Casey's Billy-Goat

You've heard of "Casey at The Bat,"
And "Casey's Tabble Dote";
But now it's time
To write a rhyme
Of "Casey's Billy-goat."

Pat Casey had a billy-goat he gave the name of Shamus,
Because it was (the neighbours said) a national disgrace.
And sure enough that animal was eminently famous
For masticating every rag of laundry round the place.
For shirts to skirts prodigiously it proved its powers of chewing;
The question of digestion seemed to matter not at all;
But you'll agree, I think with me, its limit of misdoing
Was reached the day it swallowed Missis Rooney's ould red shawl.

Now Missis Annie Rooney was a winsome widow women,
And many a bouncing boy had sought to make her change her name;
And living just across the way 'twas surely only human
A lonesome man like Casey should be wishfully the same.
So every Sunday, shaved and shined, he'd make the fine occasion
To call upon the lady, and she'd take his and coat;
And supping tea it seemed that she might yield to his persuasion,
But alas! he hadn't counted on that devastating goat.

For Shamus loved his master with a deep and dumb devotion,
And everywhere that Casey went that goat would want to go;
And though I cannot analyze a quadruped's emotion,
They said the baste was jealous, and I reckon it was so.
For every time that Casey went to call on Missis Rooney,
Beside the gate the goat would wait with woefulness intense;
Until one day it chanced that they were fast becoming spooney,
When Shamus spied that ould red shawl a-flutter on the fence.

Now Missis Rooney loved that shawl beyond all rhyme or reason,
And maybe 'twas an heirloom or a cherished souvenir;
For judging by the way she wore it season after season,
I might have been as precious as a product of Cashmere.
So Shamus strolled towards it, and no doubt the colour pleased him,
For he biffed it and he sniffed it, as most any goat might do;

Then his melancholy vanished as a sense of hunger seized him,
And he wagged his tail with rapture as he started in to chew.

"Begorra! you're a daisy," said the doting Mister Casey
to the blushing Widow Rooney as they parted at the door.
"Wid yer tinderness an' tazin' sure ye've set me heart a-blazin',
And I dread the day I'll nivver see me Anniw anny more."
"Go on now wid yer blarney," said the widow softly sighing;
And she went to pull his whiskers, when dismay her bosom smote. . . .
Her ould red shawl! 'Twas missin' where she'd left it bravely drying -
Then she saw it disappearing - down the neck of Casey's goat.

Fiercely flamed her Irish temper, "Look!" says she, "The thavin' divvle!
Sure he's made me shawl his supper. Well, I hope it's to his taste;
But excuse me, Mister Casey, if I seem to be oncivil,
For I'll nivver wed a man wid such a misbegotten baste."
So she slammed the door and left him in a state of consternation,
And he couldn't understand it, till he saw that grinning goat:
Then with eloquence he cussed it, and his final fulmination
Was a poem of profanity impossible to quote.

So blasting goats and petticoats and feeling downright sinful,
Despairfully he wandered in to Shinnigan's shebeen;
And straightway he proceeded to absorb a might skinful
Of the deadliest variety of Shinnigan's potheen.
And when he started homeward it was in the early morning,
But Shamus followed faithfully, a yard behind his back;
Then Casey slipped and stumbled, and without the slightest warning
like a lump of lead he tumbled - right across the railroad track.

And there he lay, serenely, and defied the powers to budge him,
Reposing like a baby, with his head upon the rail;
But Shamus seemed unhappy, and from time to time would nudge him,
Though his prods to protestation were without the least avail.
Then to that goatish mind, maybe, a sense of fell disaster
Came stealing like a spectre in the dim and dreary dawn;
For his bleat of warning blended with the snoring of his master
In a chorus of calamity - but Casey slumbered on.

Yet oh, that goat was troubled, for his efforts were redoubled;
Now he tugged at Casey's whisker, now he nibbled at his ear;
Now he shook him by the shoulder, and with fear become bolder,

He bellowed like a fog-horn, but the sleeper did not hear.
Then up and down the railway line he scampered for assistance;
But anxiously he hurried back and sought with tug and strain
To pull his master off the track . . . when sudden! in the distance
He heard the roar and rumble of the fast approaching train.

Did Shamus faint and falter? No, he stood there stark and splendid.
True, his tummy was distended, but he gave his horns a toss.
By them his goathood's honour would be gallantly defended,
And if their valour failed him - he would perish with his boss
So dauntlessly he lowered his head, and ever clearer, clearer,
He heard the throb and thunder of the Continental Mail.
He would face the mighty monster. It was coming nearer, nearer;
He would fight it, he would smite it, but he'd never show his tail.

Can you see that hirsute hero, standing there in tragic glory?
Can you hear the Pullman porters shrieking horror to the sky?
No, you can't; because my story has no end so grim and gory,
For Shamus did not perish and his master did not die.
At this very present moment Casey swaggers hale and hearty,
And Shamus strolls beside him with a bright bell at his throat;
While recent Missis Rooney is the gayest of the party,
For now she's Missis Casey and she's crazy for that goat.

You're wondering what happened? Well, you know that truth is stranger
Than the wildest brand of fiction, so Ill tell you without shame. . . .
There was Shamus and his master in the face of awful danger,
And the giant locomotive dashing down in smoke and flame. . . .
What power on earth could save them? Yet a golden inspiration
To gods and goats alike may come, so in that brutish brain
A thought was born - the ould red shawl. . . . Then rearing with elation,
Like lightning Shamus threw it up - AND FLAGGED AND STOPPED THE TRAIN.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Gum-Boot Ben

He was an old prospector with a vision bleared and dim.

He asked me for a grubstake, and the same I gave to him.

He hinted of a hidden trove, and when I made so bold

To question his veracity, this is the tale he told.

"I do not seek the copper streak, nor yet the yellow dust;

I am not fain for sake of gain to irk the frozen crust;

Let fellows gross find gilded dross, far other is my mark;

Oh, gentle youth, this is the truth--I go to seek the Ark.

"I prospected the Pelly bed, I prospected the White;

The Nordenscold for love of gold I piked from morn till night;

Afar and near for many a year I led the wild stampede,

Until I guessed that all my quest was vanity and greed.

"Then came I to a land I knew no man had ever seen,

A haggard land, forlornly spanned by mountains lank and lean;

The nitchies said 'twas full of dread, of smoke and fiery breath,

And no man dare put foot in there for fear of pain and death.

"But I was made all unafraid, so, careless and alone,

Day after day I made my way into that land unknown;

Night after night by camp-fire light I crouched in lonely thought;

Oh, gentle youth, this is the truth--I knew not what I sought.

"I rose at dawn; I wandered on. 'Tis somewhat fine and grand

To be alone and hold your own in God's vast awesome land;

Come woe or weal, 'tis fine to feel a hundred miles between

The trails you dare and pathways where the feet of men have been.

"And so it fell on me a spell of wander-lust was cast.

The land was still and strange and chill, and cavernous and vast;

And sad and dead, and dull as lead, the valleys sought the snows;

And far and wide on every side the ashen peaks arose.

"The moon was like a silent spike that pierced the sky right through;

The small stars popped and winked and hopped in vastitudes of blue;

And unto me for company came creatures of the shade,

And formed in rings and whispered things that made me half afraid.

"And strange though be, 'twas borne on me that land had lived of old,
And men had crept and slain and slept where now they toiled for gold;
Through jungles dim the mammoth grim had sought the oozy fen,
And on his track, all bent of back, had crawled the hairy men.

"And furthermore, strange deeds of yore in this dead place were done.
They haunted me, as wild and free I roamed from sun to sun;
Until I came where sudden flame uplit a terraced height,
A regnant peak that seemed to seek the coronal of night.

"I scaled the peak; my heart was weak, yet on and on I pressed.
Skyward I strained until I gained its dazzling silver crest;
And there I found, with all around a world supine and stark,
Swept clean of snow, a flat plateau, and on it lay--the Ark.

"Yes, there, I knew, by two and two the beasts did disembark,
And so in haste I ran and traced in letters on the Ark
My human name--Ben Smith's the same. And now I want to float
A syndicate to haul and freight to town that noble boat."

I met him later in a bar and made a gay remark
Anent an ancient miner and an option on the Ark.
He gazed at me reproachfully, as only toppers can;
But what he said I can't repeat--he was a bad old man.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Hank The Finn

Now Fireman Flynn met Hank the Finn where lights of Lust-land glow;
"Let's leave," says he, "the lousy sea, and give the land a show.
I'm fed up to the molar mark with wallop in' the brine;
I feel the bloody barnacles a-carkin' on me spine.
Let's hit the hard-boiled North a crack, where creeks are paved with gold."
"You count me in," says Hank the Finn. "Ay do as Ay ban
told."

And so they sought the Lonely Land and drifted down its stream,
Where sunny silence round them spanned, as dopey as a dream.
But to the spell of flood and fell their gold-grimed eyes were blind;
By pine and peak they paused to seek, but nothing did they find;
No yellow glint of dust to mint, just mud and mocking sand,
And a hateful hush that seemed to crush them down on every hand.
Till Fireman Flynn grew mean as sin, and cursed his comrade cold,
But Hank the Finn would only grin, and . . . do as he was told.

Now Fireman Flynn had pieces ten of yellow Yankee gold,
Which every night he would invite his partner to behold.
"Look hard," says he; "It's all you'll see in this god-blasted
land;
But you fret, I'm gonna let you hold them i your hand.
Yeah! Watch 'em gleam, then go and dream they're yours to have and
hold."
Then Hank the Finn would scratch his chin and . . . do as he was told.

But every night by camp-fire light, he'd incubate his woes,
And fan the hate of mate for mate, the evil Artic knows.
In dreams the Lapland withes gloomed like gargoyles overhead,
While the devils three of Helsinkee came cowering by his bed.
"Go take," said they, "the yellow loot he's clinking in his belt,
And leave the sneaking wolverines to snout around his pelt.
Last night he called you Swedish scum, from out the glory-hole;
To-day he said you were a bum, and damned your mother's soul.
Go, plug with lead his scurvy head, and grab his greasy gold . . ."
Then Hank the Finn saw red within, and . . . did as he was told.

So in due course the famous Force of Men Who Get Their Man,
Swooped down on sleeping Hank the Finn, and popped him in the can.

And in due time his grievous crime was judged without a plea,
And he was dated up to swing upon the gallows tree.
Then Sheriff gave a party in the Law's almighty name,
He gave a neck-tie party, and he asked me to the same.
There was no hooch a-flowin' and his party wasn't gay,
For O our hearts were heavy at the dawning of the day.
There was no band a-playin' and the only dancin' there
Was Hank the Fin interpretin' his solo in the air.

We climbed the scaffold steps and stood beside the knotted rope.
We watched the hooded hangman and his eyes were dazed with dope.
The Sheriff was in evening dress; a bell began to toll,
A beastly bell that struck a knell of horror to the soul.
As if the doomed one was myself, I shuddered, waiting there.
I spoke no word, then . . . then I heard his step upon the stair;
His halting foot, moccasin clad . . . and then I saw him stand
Between a weeping warder and a priest with Cross in hand.
And at the sight a murmur rose of terror and of awe,
And all them hardened gallows fans were sick at what they saw:
For as he towered above the mob, his limbs with leather triced,
By all that's wonderful, I swear, his face was that of Christ.

Now I ain't no blaspheming cuss, so don't you start to shout.
You see, his beard had grown so long it framed his face about.
His rippling hair was long and fair, his cheeks were spirit-pale,
His face was bright with holy light that made us wince and quail.
He looked at us with eyes a-shine, and sore were we confused,
As if he were the Judge divine, and we were the accused.
Aye, as serene he stood between the hangman and the cord,
You would have sworn, with anguish torn, he was the Blessed Lord.

The priest was wet with icy sweat, the Sheriff's lips were dry,
And we were staring starkly at the man who had to die.
"Lo! I am raised above you all," his pale lips seemed to say,
"For in a moment I shall leap to God's Eternal Day.
Am I not happy! I forgive you each for what you do;
Redeemed and penitent I go, with heart of love for you."
So there he stood in mystic mood, with scorn sublime of death.
I saw him gently kiss the Cross, and then I held by breath.
That blessed smile was blotted out; they dropped the hood of black;
They fixed the noose around his neck, the rope was hanging slack.
I heard him pray, I saw him sway, then . . . then he was not there;

A rope, a ghastly yellow rope was jerking in the air;
A jiggling rope that soon was still; a hush as of the tomb,
And Hank the Finn, that man of sin, had met his rightful doom.

His rightful doom! Now that's the point. I'm wondering, because
I hold a man is what he is, and never what he was.
You see, the priest had filled that guy so full of holy dope,
That at the last he came to die as pious as the Pope.
A gentle ray of sunshine made a halo round his head.
I thought to see a sinner - lo! I saw a Saint instead.
Aye, as he stood as martyrs stand, clean-cleansed of mortal dross,
I think he might have gloried had . . . WE NAILED HIM TO A CROSS.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Hard-Luck Henry

Now wouldn't you expect to find a man an awful crank
That's staked out nigh three hundred claims, and every one a blank;
That's followed every fool stampede, and seen the rise and fall
Of camps where men got gold in chunks and he got none at all;
That's prospected a bit of ground and sold it for a song
To see it yield a fortune to some fool that came along;
That's sunk a dozen bed-rock holes, and not a speck in sight,
Yet sees them take a million from the claims to left and right?
Now aren't things like that enough to drive a man to booze?
But Hard-Luck Smith was hoodoo-proof--he knew the way to lose.

'Twas in the fall of nineteen four--leap-year I've heard them say--
When Hard-Luck came to Hunker Creek and took a hillside lay.
And lo! as if to make amends for all the futile past,
Late in the year he struck it rich, the real pay-streak at last.
The riffles of his sluicing-box were choked with speckled earth,
And night and day he worked that lay for all that he was worth.
And when in chill December's gloom his lucky lease expired,
He found that he had made a stake as big as he desired.

One day while meditating on the waywardness of fate,
He felt the ache of lonely man to find a fitting mate;
A petticoated pard to cheer his solitary life,
A woman with soft, soothing ways, a confidant, a wife.
And while he cooked his supper on his little Yukon stove,
He wished that he had staked a claim in Love's rich treasure-trove;
When suddenly he paused and held aloft a Yukon egg,
For there in pencilled letters was the magic name of Peg.

You know these Yukon eggs of ours--some pink, some green, some blue--
A dollar per, assorted tints, assorted flavors too.
The supercilious cheechako might designate them high,
But one acquires a taste for them and likes them by-and-by.
Well, Hard-Luck Henry took this egg and held it to the light,
And there was more faint pencilling that sorely taxed his sight.
At last he made it out, and then the legend ran like this--
"Will Klondike miner write to Peg, Plumhollow, Squashville, Wis.?"

That night he got to thinking of this far-off, unknown fair;

It seemed so sort of opportune, an answer to his prayer.
She flitted sweetly through his dreams, she haunted him by day,
She smiled through clouds of nicotine, she cheered his weary way.
At last he yielded to the spell; his course of love he set--
Wisconsin his objective point; his object, Margaret.

With every mile of sea and land his longing grew and grew.
He practised all his pretty words, and these, I fear, were few.
At last, one frosty evening, with a cold chill down his spine,
He found himself before her house, the threshold of the shrine.
His courage flickered to a spark, then glowed with sudden flame--
He knocked; he heard a welcome word; she came--his goddess came.
Oh, she was fair as any flower, and huskily he spoke:
"I'm all the way from Klondike, with a mighty heavy poke.
I'm looking for a lassie, one whose Christian name is Peg,
Who sought a Klondike miner, and who wrote it on an egg."

The lassie gazed at him a space, her cheeks grew rosy red;
She gazed at him with tear-bright eyes, then tenderly she said:
"Yes, lonely Klondike miner, it is true my name is Peg.
It's also true I longed for you and wrote it on an egg.
My heart went out to someone in that land of night and cold;
But oh, I fear that Yukon egg must have been mighty old.
I waited long, I hoped and feared; you should have come before;
I've been a wedded woman now for eighteen months or more.
I'm sorry, since you've come so far, you ain't the one that wins;
But won't you take a step inside--I'll let you see the twins."

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of How Macpherson Held The Floor

Said President MacConnachie to Treasurer MacCall:

"We ought to have a piper for our next Saint Andrew's Ball.

Yon squakin' saxophone gives me the syncopated gripes.

I'm sick of jazz, I want to hear the skirling of the pipes."

"Alas! it's true," said Tam MacCall. "The young folk of to-day
Are fox-trot mad and dinna ken a reel from Strathspey.

Now, what we want's a kiltie lad, primed up wi' mountain dew,
To strut the floor at supper time, and play a lilt or two.

In all the North there's only one; of him I've heard them speak:

His name is Jock MacPherson, and he lives on Boulder Creek;

An old-time hard-rock miner, and a wild and wastrel loon,

Who spends his nights in glory, playing pibrochs to the moon.

I'll seek him out; beyond a doubt on next Saint Andrew's night

We'll proudly hear the pipes to cheer and charm our appetite.

Oh lads were neat and lassies sweet who graced Saint Andrew's Ball;

But there was none so full of fun as Treasurer MacCall.

And as Maloney's rag-time band struck up the newest hit,

He smiled a smile behind his hand, and chuckled: "Wait a bit."

And so with many a Celtic snort, with malice in his eye,

He watched the merry crowd cavort, till supper time drew nigh.

Then gleefully he seemed to steal, and sought the Nugget Bar,

Wherein there sat a tartaned chiel, as lonely as a star;

A huge and hairy Highlandman as hearty as a breeze,

A glass of whisky in his hand, his bag-pipes on his knees.

"Drink down your doch and doris, Jock," cried Treasurer MacCall;

"The time is ripe to up and pipe; they wait you in the hall.

Gird up your loins and grit your teeth, and here's a pint of hooch

To mind you of your native heath - jist pit it in your pooch.

Play on and on for all you're worth; you'll shame us if you stop.

Remember you're of Scottish birth - keep piping till you drop.

Aye, though a bunch of Willie boys should bluster and implore,

For the glory of the Highlands, lad, you've got to hold the floor."

The dancers were at supper, and the tables groaned with cheer,

When President MacConnachie exclaimed: "What do I hear?

Methinks it's like a chanter, and its coming from the hall."

"It's Jock MacPherson tuning up," cried Treasurer MacCall.

So up they jumped with shouts of glee, and gaily hurried forth.

Said they: "We never thought to see a piper in the North."

Aye, all the lads and lassies braw went buzzing out like bees,
And Jock MacPherson there they saw, with red and rugged knees.
Full six foot four he strode the floor, a grizzled son of Skye,
With glory in his whiskers and with whisky in his eye.
With skelping stride and Scottish pride he towered above them all:
"And is he no' a bonny sight?" said Treasurer MacCall.
While President MacConnachie was fairly daft with glee,
And there was jubilation in the Scottish Commy-tee.
But the dancers seemed uncertain, and they signified their doubt,
By dashing back to eat as fast as they had darted out.
And someone raised the question 'twixt the coffee and the cakes:
"Does the Piper walk to get away from all the noise he makes?"
Then reinforced with fancy food they slowly trickled forth,
And watching in patronizing mood the Piper of the North.

Proud, proud was Jock MacPherson, as he made his bag-pipes skirl,
And he set his sporran swinging, and he gave his kilts a whirl.
And President MacConnachie was jumping like a flea,
And there was joy and rapture in the Scottish Commy-tee.
"Jist let them have their saxophones wi' constipated squall;
We're having Heaven's music now," said Treasurer MacCall.
But the dancers waxed impatient, and they rather seemed to fret
For Maloney and the jazz of his Hibernian Quartette.
Yet little recked the Piper, as he swung with head on high,
Lamenting with MacCrimmon on the heather hills of Skye.
With Highland passion in his heart he held the centre floor;
Aye, Jock MacPherson played as he had never played before.

Maloney's Irish melodists were sitting in their place,
And as Maloney waited, there was wonder in his face.
'Twas sure the gorgeous music - Golly! wouldn't it be grand
If he could get MacPherson as a member of his band?
But the dancers moped and mumbled, as around the room they sat:
"We paid to dance," they grumbled; "But we cannot dance to
that.
Of course we're not denying that it's really splendid stuff;
But it's mighty satisfying - don't you think we've had enough?"
"You've raised a pretty problem," answered Treasurer MacCall;
"For on Saint Andrew's Night, ye ken, the Piper rules the Ball."
Said President MacConnachie: "You've said a solemn thing.
Tradition holds him sacred, and he's got to have his fling.
But soon, no doubt, he'll weary out. Have patience; bide a wee."

"That's right. Respect the Piper," said the Scottish Commy-tee.

And so MacPherson stalked the floor, and fast the moments flew,
Till half an hour went past, as irritation grew and grew.
Then the dancers held a council, and with faces fiercely set,
They hailed Maloney, heading his Hibernian Quartette:
"It's long enough, we've waited. Come on, Mike, play up the Blues."
And Maloney hesitated, but he didn't dare refuse.
So banjo and piano, and guitar and saxophone
Contended with the shrilling of the chanter and the drone;
And the women's ears were muffled, so infernal was the din,
But MacPherson was unruffled, for he knew that he would win.
Then two bright boys jazzed round him, and they sought to play the clown,
But MacPherson jolted sideways, and the Sassenachs went down.
And as if it was a signal, with a wild and angry roar,
The gates of wrath were riven - yet MacPherson held the floor.

Aye, amid the rising tumult, still he strode with head on high,
With ribbands gaily streaming, yet with battle in his eye.
Amid the storm that gathered, still he stalked with Highland pride,
While President and Treasurer sprang bravely to his side.
And with ire and indignation that was glorious to see,
Around him in a body ringed the Scottish Commy-tee.
Their teeth were clenched with fury; their eyes with anger blazed:
"Ye manna touch the Piper," was the slogan that they raised.
Then blows were struck, and men went down; yet 'mid the rising fray
MacPherson towered in triumph - and he never ceased to play.

Alas! his faithful followers were but a gallant few,
And faced defeat, although they fought with all the skill they knew.
For President MacConnachie was seen to slip and fall,
And o'er his prostrate body stumbled Treasurer MacCall.
And as their foes with triumph roared, and leagured them about,
It looked as if their little band would soon be counted out.
For eyes were black and noses red, yet on that field of gore,
As resolute as Highland rock - MacPherson held the floor.

Maloney watched the battle, and his brows were bleakly set,
While with him paused and panted his Hibernian Quartette.
For sure it is an evil spite, and breaking to the heart,
For Irishman to watch a fight and not be taking part.
Then suddenly on high he soared, and tightened up his belt:

"And shall we see them crush," he roared, "a brother and a Celt?

A fellow artiste needs our aid. Come on, boys, take a hand."
Then down into the mêlée dashed Maloney and his band.

Now though it was Saint Andrew's Ball, yet men of every race,
That bow before the Great God Jazz were gathered in that place.
Yea, there were those who grunt: "Ya! Ya!" and those who squeak:
"We! We!"
Likewise Dutch, Dago, Swede and Finn, Polack and Portugee.
Yet like ripe grain before the gale that national hotch-potch
Went down before the fury of the Irish and the Scotch.
Aye, though they closed their gaping ranks and rallied to the fray,
To the Shamrock and the Thistle went the glory of the day.

You should have seen the carnage in the drooling light of dawn,
Yet 'mid the scene of slaughter Jock MacPherson playing on.
Though all lay low about him, yet he held his head on high,
And piped as if he stood upon the caller crags of Skye.
His face was grim as granite, and no favour did he ask,
Though weary were his mighty lungs and empty was his flask.
And when a fallen foe wailed out: "Say! when will you have done?"
MacPherson grinned and answered: "Hoots! She's only ha'f begun."
Aye, though his hands were bloody, and his knees were gay with gore,
A Grampian of Highland pride - MacPherson held the floor.

And still in Yukon valleys where the silent peaks look down,
They tell of how the Piper was invited up to town,
And he went in kilted glory, and he piped before them all,
But wouldn't stop his piping till he busted up the Ball.
Of that Homeric scrap they speak, and how the fight went on,
With sally and with rally till the breaking of the dawn.
And how the Piper towered like a rock amid the fray,
And the battle surged about him, but he never ceased to play.
Aye, by the lonely camp-fires, still they tell the story o'er-
How the Sassenach was vanquished and - MacPherson held the floor.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Lenin's Tomb

This is the yarn he told me

As we sat in Casey's Bar,
That Rooshun mug who scammed from the jug
In the Land of the Crimson Star;
That Soviet guy with the single eye,
And the face like a flaming scar.

Where Lenin lies the red flag flies, and the rat-grey workers wait
To tread the gloom of Lenin's Tomb, where the Comrade lies in state.
With lagging pace they scan his face, so weary yet so firm;
For years a score they've laboured sore to save him from the worm.
The Kremlin walls are grimly grey, but Lenin's Tomb is red,
And pilgrims from the Sour Lands say: "He sleeps and is not dead."
Before their eyes in peace he lies, a symbol and a sign,
And as they pass that dome of glass they see - a God Divine.
So Doctors plug him full of dope, for if he drops to dust,
So will collapse their faith and hope, the whole combine will bust.
But say, Tovarich; hark to me . . . a secret I'll disclose,
For I did see what none did see; I know what no one knows.

I was a Cheko terrorist - Oh I served the Soviets well,
Till they put me down on the bone-yard list, for the fear that I might tell;
That I might tell the thing I saw, and that only I did see,
They held me in quod with a firing squad to make a corpse of me.
But I got away, and here today I'm telling my tale to you;
Though it may sound weird, by Lenin's beard, so help me God it's true.
I slouched across that great Red Square, and watched the waiting line.
The mongrel sons of Marx were there, convened to Lenin's shrine;
Ten thousand men of Muscovy, Mongol and Turkoman,
Black-bonnets of the Aral Sea and Tatars of Kazan.
Kalmuck and Bashkir, Lett and Finn, Georgian, Jew and Lapp,
Kirghiz and Kazakh, crowding in to gaze at Lenin's map.
Aye, though a score of years had run I saw them pause and pray,
As mourners at the Tomb of one who died but yesterday.
I watched them in a bleary daze of bitterness and pain,
For oh, I missed the cheery blaze of vodka in my brain.
I stared, my eyes were hypnotized by that saturnine host,
When with a start that shook my heart I saw - I saw a ghost.
As in foggèd glass I saw him pass, and peer at me and grin -

A man I knew, a man I slew, Prince Boris Mazarin.

Now do not think because I drink I love the flowing bowl;
But liquor kills remorse and stills the anguish of the soul.
And there's so much I would forget, stark horrors I have seen,
Faces and forms that haunt me yet, like shadows on a screen.
And of these sights that mar my nights the ghastliest by far
Is the death of Boris Mazarin, that soldier of the Czar.

A mighty nobleman was he; we took him by surprise;
His mother, son and daughters three we slew before his eyes.
We tortured him, with jibes and threats; then mad for glut of gore,
Upon our reeking bayonets we nailed him to the door.
But he defied us to the last, crying: "O carrion crew!
I'd die with joy could I destroy a hundred dogs like you."
I thrust my sword into his throat; the blade was gay with blood;
We flung him to his castle moat, and stamped him in its mud.
That mighty Cossack of the Don was dead with all his race....
And now I saw him coming on, dire vengeance in his face.
(Or was it some fantastic dream of my besotted brain?)
He looked at me with eyes a-gleam, the man whom I had slain.
He looked and bade me follow him; I could not help but go;
I joined the throng that passed along, so sorrowful and slow.
I followed with a sense of doom that shadow gaunt and grim;
Into the bowels of the Tomb I followed, followed him.

The light within was weird and dim, and icy cold the air;
My brow was wet with bitter sweat, I stumbled on the stair.
I tried to cry; my throat was dry; I sought to grip his arm;
For well I knew this man I slew was there to do us harm.
Lo! he was walking by my side, his fingers clutched my own,
This man I knew so well had died, his hand was naked bone.
His face was like a skull, his eyes were caverns of decay . . .
And so we came to the crystal frame where lonely Lenin lay.

Without a sound we shuffled round; I sought to make a sign,
But like a vice his hand of ice was biting into mine.
With leaden pace around the place where Lenin lies at rest,
We slouched, I saw his bony claw go fumbling to his breast.
With ghastly grin he groped within, and tore his robe apart,
And from the hollow of his ribs he drew his blackened heart. . . .
Ah no! Oh God! A bomb, a BOMB! And as I shrieked with dread,

With fiendish cry he raised it high, and . . . swung at Lenin's head.
Oh I was blinded by the flash and deafened by the roar,
And in a mess of bloody mash I wallowed on the floor.
Then Alps of darkness on me fell, and when I saw again
The leprous light 'twas in a cell, and I was racked with pain;
And ringèd around by shapes of gloom, who hoped that I would die;
For of the crowd that crammed the Tomb the sole to live was I.
They told me I had dreamed a dream that must not be revealed,
But by their eyes of evil gleam I knew my doom was sealed.

I need not tell how from my cell in Lubianka gaol,
I broke away, but listen, here's the point of all my tale. . . .
Outside the "Gay Pay Oo" none knew of that grim scene of gore;
They closed the Tomb, and then they threw it open as before.
And there was Lenin, stiff and still, a symbol and a sign,
And rancid races come to thrill and wonder at his Shrine;
And hold the thought: if Lenin rot the Soviets will decay;
And there he sleeps and calm he keeps his watch and ward for aye.
Yet if you pass that frame of glass, peer closely at his phiz,
So stern and firm it mocks the worm, it looks like wax . . . and is.
They tell you he's a mummy - don't you make that bright mistake:
I tell you - he's a dummy; aye, a fiction and a fake.
This eye beheld the bloody bomb that bashed him on the bean.
I heard the crash, I saw the flash, yet . . . there he lies serene.
And by the roar that rocked the Tomb I ask: how could that be?
But if you doubt that deed of doom, just go yourself and see.
You think I'm mad, or drunk, or both . . . Well, I don't care a damn:
I tell you this: their Lenin is a waxen, show-case SHAM.

Such was the yarn he handed me,
Down there in Casey's Bar,
That Rooshun bug with the scrambled mug
From the land of the Commissar.
It may be true, I leave it you
To figger out how far.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of One-Eyed Mike

This is the tale that was told to me by the man with the crystal eye,
As I smoked my pipe in the camp-fire light, and the Glories swept the sky;
As the Northlights gleamed and curved and streamed, and the bottle of "hooch"
was dry.

A man once aimed that my life be shamed, and wrought me a deathly wrong;
I vowed one day I would well repay, but the heft of his hate was strong.
He thonged me East and he thonged me West; he harried me back and forth,
Till I fled in fright from his peerless spite to the bleak, bald-headed North.

And there I lay, and for many a day I hatched plan after plan,
For a golden haul of the wherewithal to crush and to kill my man;
And there I strove, and there I clove through the drift of icy streams;
And there I fought, and there I sought for the pay-streak of my dreams.

So twenty years, with their hopes and fears and smiles and tears and such,
Went by and left me long bereft of hope of the Midas touch;
About as fat as a chancel rat, and lo! despite my will,
In the weary fight I had clean lost sight of the man I sought to kill.

'Twas so far away, that evil day when I prayed to the Prince of Gloom
For the savage strength and the sullen length of life to work his doom.
Nor sign nor word had I seen or heard, and it happed so long ago;
My youth was gone and my memory wan, and I willed it even so.

It fell one night in the waning light by the Yukon's oily flow,
I smoked and sat as I marvelled at the sky's port-winey glow;
Till it paled away to an absinthe gray, and the river seemed to shrink,
All wobbly flakes and wriggling snakes and goblin eyes a-wink.

'Twas weird to see and it 'wildered me in a queer, hypnotic dream,
Till I saw a spot like an inky blot come floating down the stream;
It bobbed and swung; it sheered and hung; it romped round in a ring;
It seemed to play in a tricksome way; it sure was a merry thing.

In freakish flights strange oily lights came fluttering round its head,
Like butterflies of a monster size--then I knew it for the Dead.
Its face was rubbed and slicked and scrubbed as smooth as a shaven pate;
In the silver snakes that the water makes it gleamed like a dinner-plate.

It gurgled near, and clear and clear and large and large it grew;
It stood upright in a ring of light and it looked me through and through.
It weltered round with a woozy sound, and ere I could retreat,
With the witless roll of a sodden soul it wantoned to my feet.

And here I swear by this Cross I wear, I heard that "floater" say:
"I am the man from whom you ran, the man you sought to slay.
That you may note and gaze and gloat, and say `Revenge is sweet',
In the grit and grime of the river's slime I am rotting at your feet.

"The ill we rue we must e'en undo, though it rive us bone from bone;
So it came about that I sought you out, for I prayed I might atone.
I did you wrong, and for long and long I sought where you might live;
And now you're found, though I'm dead and drowned, I beg you to forgive."

So sad it seemed, and its cheek-bones gleamed, and its fingers flicked the shore;
And it lapped and lay in a weary way, and its hands met to implore;
That I gently said: "Poor, restless dead, I would never work you woe;
Though the wrong you rue you can ne'er undo, I forgave you long ago."

Then, wonder-wise, I rubbed my eyes and I woke from a horrid dream.
The moon rode high in the naked sky, and something bobbed in the stream.
It held my sight in a patch of light, and then it sheered from the shore;
It dipped and sank by a hollow bank, and I never saw it more.

This was the tale he told to me, that man so warped and gray,
Ere he slept and dreamed, and the camp-fire gleamed in his eye in a wolfish
way--
That crystal eye that raked the sky in the weird Auroral ray.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Pious Pete

"The North has got him." --Yukonism.

I tried to refine that neighbor of mine, honest to God, I did.
I grieved for his fate, and early and late I watched over him like a kid.
I gave him excuse, I bore his abuse in every way that I could;
I swore to prevail; I camped on his trail; I plotted and planned for his good.
By day and by night I strove in men's sight to gather him into the fold,
With precept and prayer, with hope and despair, in hunger and hardship and cold.
I followed him into Gehennas of sin, I sat where the sirens sit;
In the shade of the Pole, for the sake of his soul, I strove with the powers of the Pit.
I shadowed him down to the scrofulous town; I dragged him from dissolute brawls;
But I killed the galoot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.

God knows what I did he should seek to be rid of one who would save him from shame.
God knows what I bore that night when he swore and bade me make tracks from his claim.
I started to tell of the horrors of hell, when sudden his eyes lit like coals;
And "Chuck it," says he, "don't persecute me with your cant and your saving of souls."
I'll swear I was mild as I'd be with a child, but he called me the son of a slut;
And, grabbing his gun with a leap and a run, he threatened my face with the butt.
So what could I do (I leave it to you)? With curses he harried me forth;
Then he was alone, and I was alone, and over us menaced the North.

Our cabins were near; I could see, I could hear; but between us there rippled the creek;
And all summer through, with a rancor that grew, he would pass me and never would speak.
Then a shuddery breath like the coming of Death crept down from the peaks far away;
The water was still; the twilight was chill; the sky was a tatter of gray.
Swift came the Big Cold, and opal and gold the lights of the witches arose;
The frost-tyrant clinched, and the valley was cinched by the stark and

cadaverous snows.

The trees were like lace where the star-beams could chase, each leaf was a jewel
agleam.

The soft white hush lapped the Northland and wrapped us round in a crystalline
dream;

So still I could hear quite loud in my ear the swish of the pinions of time;

So bright I could see, as plain as could be, the wings of God's angels ashine.

As I read in the Book I would oftentimes look to that cabin just over the creek.

Ah me, it was sad and evil and bad, two neighbors who never would speak!

I knew that full well like a devil in hell he was hatching out, early and late,

A system to bear through the frost-spangled air the warm, crimson waves of his
hate.

I only could peer and shudder and fear--'twas ever so ghastly and still;

But I knew over there in his lonely despair he was plotting me terrible ill.

I knew that he nursed a malice accurst, like the blast of a winnowing flame;

I pleaded aloud for a shield, for a shroud--Oh, God! then calamity came.

Mad! If I'm mad then you too are mad; but it's all in the point of view.

If you'd looked at them things gallivantin' on wings, all purple and green and
blue;

If you'd noticed them twist, as they mounted and hissed like scorpions dim in the
dark;

If you'd seen them rebound with a horrible sound, and spitefully spitting a spark;

If you'd watched IT with dread, as it hissed by your bed, that thing with the
feelers that crawls--

You'd have settled the brute that attempted to shoot electricity into your walls.

Oh, some they were blue, and they slithered right through; they were silent and
squashy and round;

And some they were green; they were wriggly and lean; they writhed with so
hateful a sound.

My blood seemed to freeze; I fell on my knees; my face was a white splash of
dread.

Oh, the Green and the Blue, they were gruesome to view; but the worst of them
all were the Red.

They came through the door, they came through the floor, they came through
the moss-creviced logs.

They were savage and dire; they were whiskered with fire; they bickered like
malamute dogs.

They ravined in rings like iniquitous things; they gulped down the Green and the
Blue.

I crinkled with fear whene'er they drew near, and nearer and nearer they drew.

And then came the crown of Horror's grim crown, the monster so loathsomely red.

Each eye was a pin that shot out and in, as, squidlike, it oozed to my bed;
So softly it crept with feelers that swept and quivered like fine copper wire;
Its belly was white with a sulphurous light, its jaws were a-drooling with fire.
It came and it came; I could breathe of its flame, but never a wink could I look.
I thrust in its maw the Fount of the Law; I fended it off with the Book.
I was weak--oh, so weak--but I thrilled at its shriek, as wildly it fled in the night;
And deathlike I lay till the dawn of the day. (Was ever so welcome the light?)

I loaded my gun at the rise of the sun; to his cabin so softly I slunk.

My neighbor was there in the frost-freighted air, all wrapped in a robe in his bunk.

It muffled his moans; it outlined his bones, as feebly he twisted about;
His gums were so black, and his lips seemed to crack, and his teeth all were loosening out.

'Twas a death's head that peered through the tangle of beard; 'twas a face I will never forget;

Sunk eyes full of woe, and they troubled me so with their pleadings and anguish, and yet

As I rested my gaze in a misty amaze on the scurvy-degenerate wreck,
I thought of the Things with the dragon-fly wings, then laid I my gun on his neck.
He gave out a cry that was faint as a sigh, like a perishing malamute,
And he says unto me, "I'm converted," says he; "for Christ's sake, Peter, don't shoot!"

* * * * *

They're taking me out with an escort about, and under a sergeant's care;
I am humbled indeed, for I'm 'cuffed to a Swede that thinks he's a millionaire.
But it's all Gospel true what I'm telling to you-- up there where the Shadow falls-

-

That I settled Sam Noot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Salvation Bill

'Twas in the bleary middle of the hard-boiled Arctic night,
I was lonesome as a loon, so if you can,
Imagine my emotions of amazement and delight
When I bumped into that Missionary Man.
He was lying lost and dying in the moon's unholy leer,
And frozen from his toes to finger-tips'
The famished wolf-pack ringed him; but he didn't seem to fear,
As he pressed his ice-bond Bible to his lips.

'Twas the limit of my trap-line, with the cabin miles away,
And every step was like a stab of pain;
But I packed him like a baby, and I nursed him night and day,
Till I got him back to health and strength again.
So there we were, benighted in the shadow of the Pole,
And he might have proved a priceless little pard,
If he hadn't got to worrying about my blessed soul,
And a-quotin' me his Bible by the yard.

Now there was I, a husky guy, whose god was Nicotine,
With a "coffin-nail" a fixture in my mug;
I rolled them in the pages of a pulpwood magazine,
And hacked them with my jack-knife from the plug.
For, Oh to know the bliss and glow that good tobacco means,
Just live among the everlasting ice . . .
So judge my horror when I found my stock of magazines
Was chewed into a chowder by the mice.

A woeful week went by and not a single pill I had,
Me that would smoke my forty in a day;
I sighed, I swore, I strode the floor; I felt I would go mad:
The gospel-plugger watched me with dismay.
My brow was wet, my teeth were set, my nerves were rasping raw;
And yet that preacher couldn't understand:
So with despair I wrestled there - when suddenly I saw
The volume he was holding in his hand.

Then something snapped inside my brain, and with an evil start
The wolf-man in me woke to rabid rage.
"I saved your lousy life," says I; "so show you have a heart,

And tear me out a solitary page."
He shrank and shrivelled at my words; his face went pewter white;
'Twas just as if I'd handed him a blow:
And then . . . and then he seemed to swell, and grow to Heaven's height,
And in a voice that rang he answered: "No!"

I grabbed my loaded rifle and I jabbed it to his chest:
"Come on, you shrimp, give me that Book," says I.
Well sir, he was a parson, but he stacked up with the best,
And for grit I got to hand it to the guy.
"If I should let you desecrate this Holy Word," he said,
"My soul would be eternally accurst;
So go on, Bill, I'm ready. You can pump me full of lead
And take it, but - you've got to kill me first."

Now I'm no foul assassin, though I'm full of sinful ways,
And I knew right there the fellow had me beat;
For I felt a yellow mongrel in the glory of his gaze,
And I flung my foolish firearm at his feet,
Then wearily I turned away, and dropped upon my bunk,
And there I lay and blubbered like a kid.
"Forgive me, pard," says I at last, "for acting like a skunk,
But hide the blasted rifle..." Which he did.

And he also hid his Bible, which was maybe just as well,
For the sight of all that paper gave me pain;
And there were crimson moments when I felt I'd o to hell
To have a single cigarette again.
And so I lay day after day, and brooded dark and deep,
Until one night I thought I'd end it all;
Then rough I roused the preacher, where he stretched pretending sleep,
With his map of horror turned towards the wall.

"See here, my pious pal," says I, "I've stood it long enough...
Behold! I've mixed some strychnine in a cup;
Enough to kill a dozen men - believe me it's no bluff;
Now watch me, for I'm gonna drink it up.
You've seen me bludgeoned by despair through bitter days and nights,
And now you'll see me squirming as I die.
You're not to blame, you've played the game according to your lights...
But how would Christ have played it? - Well, good-bye..."

With that I raised the deadly drink and laid it to my lips,
But he was on me with a tiger-bound;
And as we locked and reeled and rocked with wild and wicked grips,
The poison cup went crashing to the ground.
"Don't do it, Bill," he madly shrieked. "Maybe I acted wrong.
See, here's my Bible - use it as you will;
But promise me - you'll read a little as you go along...
You do! Then take it, Brother; smoke your fill."

And so I did. I smoked and smoked from Genesis to Job,
And as I smoked I read each blessed word;
While in the shadow of his bunk I heard him sigh and sob,
And then . . . a most peculiar thing occurred.
I got to reading more and more, and smoking less and less,
Till just about the day his heart was broke,
Says I: "Here, take it back, me lad. I've had enough I guess.
Your paper makes a mighty rotten smoke."

So then and there with plea and prayer he wrestled for my soul,
And I was racked and ravaged by regrets.
But God was good, for lo! next day there came the police patrol,
With paper for a thousand cigarettes. . .
So now I'm called Salvation Bill; I teach the Living Law,
And Bally-hoo the Bible with the best;
And if a guy won't listen - why, I sock him on the jaw,
And preach the Gospel sitting on his chest.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of Soulful Sam

You want me to tell you a story, a yarn of the firin' line,
Of our thin red kharki 'eroes, out there where the bullets whine;
Out there where the bombs are bustin',
and the cannons like 'ell-doors slam --
Just order another drink, boys, and I'll tell you of Soulful Sam.

Oh, Sam, he was never 'ilarious, though I've 'ad some mates as was wus;
He 'adn't C. B. on his programme, he never was known to cuss.
For a card or a skirt or a beer-mug he 'adn't a friendly word;
But when it came down to Scriptures, say! Wasn't he just a bird!

He always 'ad tracts in his pocket, the which he would haste to present,
And though the fellers would use them in ways that they never was meant,
I used to read 'em religious, and frequent I've been impressed
By some of them bundles of 'oly dope he carried around in his vest.

For I -- and oh, 'ow I shudder at the 'orror the word conveys!
'Ave been -- let me whisper it 'oarsely -- a gambler 'alf of me days;
A gambler, you 'ear -- a gambler. It makes me wishful to weep,
And yet 'ow it's true, my brethren! -- I'd rather gamble than sleep.

I've gambled the 'ole world over, from Monte Carlo to Maine;
From Dawson City to Dover, from San Francisco to Spain.
Cards! They 'ave been me ruin. They've taken me pride and me pelf,
And when I'd no one to play with -- why, I'd go and I'd play by meself.

And Sam 'e would sit and watch me, as I shuffled a greasy deck,
And 'e'd say: "You're bound to Perdition,"
And I'd answer: "Git off me neck!"
And that's 'ow we came to get friendly, though built on a different plan,
Me wot's a desprite gambler, 'im sich a good young man.

But on to me tale. Just imagine . . . Darkness! The battle-front!
The furious 'Uns attackin'! Us ones a-bearin' the brunt!
Me crouchin' be'ind a sandbag, tryin' 'ard to keep calm,
When I 'ears someone singin' a 'ymn toon; be'old! it is Soulful Sam.

Yes; right in the crash of the combat, in the fury of flash and flame,
'E was shootin' and singin' serenely as if 'e enjoyed the same.

And there in the 'eat of the battle, as the 'ordes of demons attacked,
He dipped down into 'is tunic, and 'e 'anded me out a tract.

Then a star-shell flared, and I read it: Oh, Flee From the Wrath to Come!
Nice cheerful subject, I tell yer, when you're 'earin' the bullets 'um.
And before I 'ad time to thank 'im, just one of them bits of lead
Comes slingin' along in a 'urry, and it 'its my partner. . . . Dead?

No, siree! not by a long sight! For it plugged 'im 'ard on the chest,
Just where 'e'd tracts for a army corps stowed away in 'is vest.
On its mission of death that bullet 'ustled along, and it caved
A 'ole in them tracts to 'is 'ide, boys -- but the life o' me pal was saved.

And there as 'e showed me in triumph, and 'orror was chokin' me breath,
On came another bullet on its 'orrible mission of death;
On through the night it cavorted, seekin' its 'aven of rest,
And it zipped through a crack in the sandbags, and it wolloped me bang on the
breast.

Was I killed, do you ask? Oh no, boys. Why am I sittin' 'ere
Gazin' with mournful vision at a mug long empty of beer?
With a throat as dry as a -- oh, thanky! I don't much mind if I do.
Beer with a dash of 'ollands, that's my particular brew.

Yes, that was a terrible moment. It 'ammered me 'ard o'er the 'eart;
It bowled me down like a nine-pin, and I looked for the gore to start;
And I saw in the flash of a moment, in that thunder of hate and strife,
Me wretched past like a pitchur -- the sins of a gambler's life.

For I 'ad no tracts to save me, to thwart that mad missile's doom;
I 'ad no pious pamphlets to 'elp me to cheat the tomb;
I 'ad no 'oly leaflets to baffle a bullet's aim;
I'd only -- a deck of cards, boys, but . . . it seemed to do just the same.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of The Black Fox Skin

I

There was Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike living the life of shame,
When unto them in the Long, Long Night came the man-who-had-no-name;
Bearing his prize of a black fox pelt, out of the Wild he came.

His cheeks were blanched as the flume-head foam when the brown spring
freshets flow;
Deep in their dark, sin-calcined pits were his sombre eyes aglow;
They knew him far for the fitful man who spat forth blood on the snow.

"Did ever you see such a skin?" quoth he; "there's nought in the world so fine--
Such fullness of fur as black as the night, such lustre, such size, such shine;
It's life to a one-lunged man like me; it's London, it's women, it's wine.

"The Moose-hides called it the devil-fox, and swore that no man could kill;
That he who hunted it, soon or late, must surely suffer some ill;
But I laughed at them and their old squaw-tales. Ha! Ha! I'm laughing still.

"For look ye, the skin--it's as smooth as sin, and black as the core of the Pit.
By gun or by trap, whatever the hap, I swore I would capture it;
By star and by star afield and afar, I hunted and would not quit.

"For the devil-fox, it was swift and sly, and it seemed to flee at me;
I would wake in fright by the camp-fire light, hearing its evil glee;
Into my dream its eyes would gleam, and its shadow would I see.

"It sniffed and ran from the ptarmigan I had poisoned to excess;
Unharm'd it sped from my wrathful lead ('twas as if I shot by guess);
Yet it came by night in the stark moonlight to mock at my weariness.

"I tracked it up where the mountains hunch like the vertebrae of the world;
I tracked it down to the death-still pits where the avalanche is hurled;
From the glooms to the sacerdotal snows, where the carded clouds are curled.

"From the vastitudes where the world protrudes through clouds like seas up-
shoaled,
I held its track till it led me back to the land I had left of old--
The land I had looted many moons. I was weary and sick and cold.

"I was sick, soul-sick, of the futile chase, and there and then I swore
The foul fiend fox might scathless go, for I would hunt no more;
Then I rubbed mine eyes in a vast surprise--it stood by my cabin door.

"A rifle raised in the wraith-like gloom, and a vengeful shot that sped;
A howl that would thrill a cream-faced corpse-- and the demon fox lay dead. . . .
Yet there was never a sign of wound, and never a drop he bled.

"So that was the end of the great black fox, and here is the prize I've won;
And now for a drink to cheer me up--I've mused since the early sun;
We'll drink a toast to the sorry ghost of the fox whose race is run."

II

Now Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike, bad as the worst were they;
In their road-house down by the river-trail they waited and watched for prey;
With wine and song they joyed night long, and they slept like swine by day.

For things were done in the Midnight Sun that no tongue will ever tell;
And men there be who walk earth-free, but whose names are writ in hell--
Are writ in flames with the guilty names of Fournier and Labelle.

Put not your trust in a poke of dust would ye sleep the sleep of sin;
For there be those who would rob your clothes ere yet the dawn comes in;
And a prize likewise in a woman's eyes is a peerless black fox skin.

Put your faith in the mountain cat if you lie within his lair;
Trust the fangs of the mother-wolf, and the claws of the lead-ripped bear;
But oh, of the wiles and the gold-tooth smiles of a dance-hall wench beware!

Wherefore it was beyond all laws that lusts of man restrain,
A man drank deep and sank to sleep never to wake again;
And the Yukon swallowed through a hole the cold corpse of the slain.

III

The black fox skin a shadow cast from the roof nigh to the floor;
And sleek it seemed and soft it gleamed, and the woman stroked it o'er;
And the man stood by with a brooding eye, and gnashed his teeth and swore.

When thieves and thugs fall out and fight there's fell arrears to pay;

And soon or late sin meets its fate, and so it fell one day
That Claw-fingered Kitty and Windy Ike fanged up like dogs at bay.

"The skin is mine, all mine," she cried; "I did the deed alone."
"It's share and share with a guilt-yoked pair", he hissed in a pregnant tone;
And so they snarled like malamutes over a mildewed bone.

And so they fought, by fear untaught, till haply it befell
One dawn of day she slipped away to Dawson town to sell
The fruit of sin, this black fox skin that had made their lives a hell.

She slipped away as still he lay, she clutched the wondrous fur;
Her pulses beat, her foot was fleet, her fear was as a spur;
She laughed with glee, she did not see him rise and follow her.

The bluffs uprear and grimly peer far over Dawson town;
They see its lights a blaze o' nights and harshly they look down;
They mock the plan and plot of man with grim, ironic frown.

The trail was steep; 'twas at the time when swiftly sinks the snow;
All honey-combed, the river ice was rotting down below;
The river chafed beneath its rind with many a mighty throe.

And up the swift and oozy drift a woman climbed in fear,
Clutching to her a black fox fur as if she held it dear;
And hard she pressed it to her breast--then Windy Ike drew near.

She made no moan--her heart was stone--she read his smiling face,
And like a dream flashed all her life's dark horror and disgrace;
A moment only--with a snarl he hurled her into space.

She rolled for nigh an hundred feet; she bounded like a ball;
From crag to crag she carromed down through snow and timber fall; . . .
A hole gaped in the river ice; the spray flashed--that was all.

A bird sang for the joy of spring, so piercing sweet and frail;
And blinding bright the land was dight in gay and glittering mail;
And with a wondrous black fox skin a man slid down the trail.

IV

A wedge-faced man there was who ran along the river bank,

Who stumbled through each drift and slough, and ever slipped and sank,
And ever cursed his Maker's name, and ever "hooch" he drank.

He travelled like a hunted thing, hard harried, sore distress;
The old grandmother moon crept out from her cloud-quilted nest;
The aged mountains mocked at him in their primeval rest.

Grim shadows diapered the snow; the air was strangely mild;
The valley's girth was dumb with mirth, the laughter of the wild;
The still, sardonic laughter of an ogre o'er a child.

The river writhed beneath the ice; it groaned like one in pain,
And yawning chasms opened wide, and closed and yawned again;
And sheets of silver heaved on high until they split in twain.

From out the road-house by the trail they saw a man afar
Make for the narrow river-reach where the swift cross-currents are;
Where, frail and worn, the ice is torn and the angry waters jar.

But they did not see him crash and sink into the icy flow;
They did not see him clinging there, gripped by the undertow,
Clawing with bleeding finger-nails at the jagged ice and snow.

They found a note beside the hole where he had stumbled in:
"Here met his fate by evil luck a man who lived in sin,
And to the one who loves me least I leave this black fox skin."

And strange it is; for, though they searched the river all around,
No trace or sign of black fox skin was ever after found;
Though one man said he saw the tread of HOOFS deep in the ground.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of The Brand

'Twas up in a land long famed for gold, where women were far and rare,
Tellus, the smith, had taken to wife a maiden amazingly fair;
Tellus, the brawny worker in iron, hairy and heavy of hand,
Saw her and loved her and bore her away from the tribe of a Southern land;
Deeming her worthy to queen his home and mother him little ones,
That the name of Tellus, the master smith, might live in his stalwart sons.

Now there was little of law in the land, and evil doings were rife,
And every man who joyed in his home guarded the fame of his wife;
For there were those of the silver tongue and the honeyed art to beguile,
Who would cozen the heart from a woman's breast and damn her soul with a smile.

And there were women too quick to heed a look or a whispered word,
And once in a while a man was slain, and the ire of the King was stirred;
So far and wide he proclaimed his wrath, and this was the law he willed:
"That whosoever killeth a man, even shall he be killed."

Now Tellus, the smith, he trusted his wife; his heart was empty of fear.
High on the hill was the gleam of their hearth, a beacon of love and cheer.
High on the hill they builded their bower, where the broom and the bracken meet;

Under a grove of oaks it was, hushed and drowsily sweet.
Here he enshrined her, his dearest saint, his idol, the light of his eye;
Her kisses rested upon his lips as brushes a butterfly.
The weight of her arms around his neck was light as the thistle down;
And sweetly she studied to win his smile, and gently she mocked his frown.
And when at the close of the dusty day his clangorous toil was done,
She hastened to meet him down the way all lit by the amber sun.

Their dove-cot gleamed in the golden light, a temple of stainless love;
Like the hanging cup of a big blue flower was the topaz sky above.
The roses and lilies yearned to her, as swift through their throng she pressed;
A little white, fragile, fluttering thing that lay like a child on his breast.
Then the heart of Tellus, the smith, was proud, and sang for the joy of life,
And there in the bronzing summertime he thanked the gods for his wife.

Now there was one called Philo, a scribe, a man of exquisite grace,
Carved like the god Apollo in limb, fair as Adonis in face;
Eager and winning in manner, full of such radiant charm,

Womenkind fought for his favor and loved to their uttermost harm.
Such was his craft and his knowledge, such was his skill at the game,
Never was woman could flout him, so be he plotted her shame.
And so he drank deep of pleasure, and then it fell on a day
He gazed on the wife of Tellus and marked her out for his prey.

Tellus, the smith, was merry, and the time of the year it was June,
So he said to his stalwart helpers: "Shut down the forge at noon.
Go ye and joy in the sunshine, rest in the coolth of the grove,
Drift on the dreamy river, every man with his love."
Then to himself: "Oh, Beloved, sweet will be your surprise;
To-day will we sport like children, laugh in each other's eyes;
Weave gay garlands of poppies, crown each other with flowers,
Pull plump carp from the lilies, rifle the ferny bowers.
To-day with feasting and gladness the wine of Cyprus will flow;
To-day is the day we were wedded only a twelvemonth ago."

The larks trilled high in the heavens; his heart was lyric with joy;
He plucked a posy of lilies; he sped like a love-sick boy.
He stole up the velvety pathway--his cottage was sunsteeped and still;
Vines honeysuckled the window; softly he peeped o'er the sill.
The lilies dropped from his fingers; devils were choking his breath;
Rigid with horror, he stiffened; ghastly his face was as death.
Like a nun whose faith in the Virgin is met with a prurient jibe,
He shrank--'twas the wife of his bosom in the arms of Philo, the scribe.

Tellus went back to his smithy; he reeled like a drunken man;
His heart was riven with anguish; his brain was brooding a plan.
Straight to his anvil he hurried; started his furnace aglow;
Heated his iron and shaped it with savage and masterful blow.
Sparks showered over and round him; swiftly under his hand
There at last it was finished--a hideous and infamous Brand.

That night the wife of his bosom, the light of joy in her eyes,
Kissed him with words of rapture; but he knew that her words were lies.
Never was she so beguiling, never so merry of speech
(For passion ripens a woman as the sunshine ripens a peach).
He clenched his teeth into silence; he yielded up to her lure,
Though he knew that her breasts were heaving from the fire of her paramour.
"To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow"--he wove her hair in a strand,
Twisted it round his fingers and smiled as he thought of the Brand.

The morrow was come, and Tellus swiftly stole up the hill.
Butterflies drowsed in the noon-heat; coverts were sunsteeped and still.
Softly he padded the pathway unto the porch, and within
Heard he the low laugh of dalliance, heard he the rapture of sin.
Knew he her eyes were mystic with light that no man should see,
No man kindle and joy in, no man on earth save he.
And never for him would it kindle. The bloodlust surged in his brain;
Through the senseless stone could he see them, wanton and warily fain.
Horrible! Heaven he sought for, gained it and gloried and fell--
Oh, it was sudden--headlong into the nethermost hell. . . .

Was this he, Tellus, this marble? Tellus . . . not dreaming a dream?
Ah! sharp-edged as a javelin, was that a woman's scream?
Was it a door that shattered, shell-like, under his blow?
Was it his saint, that strumpet, dishevelled and cowering low?
Was it her lover, that wild thing, that twisted and gouged and tore?
Was it a man he was crushing, whose head he beat on the floor?
Laughing the while at its weakness, till sudden he stayed his hand--
Through the red ring of his madness flamed the thought of the Brand.

Then bound he the naked Philo with thongs that cut in the flesh,
And the wife of his bosom, fear-frantic, he gagged with a silken mesh,
Choking her screams into silence; bound her down by the hair;
Dragged her lover unto her under her frenzied stare.
In the heat of the hearth-fire embers he heated the hideous Brand;
Twisting her fingers open, he forced its haft in her hand.
He pressed it downward and downward; she felt the living flesh sear;
She saw the throe of her lover; she heard the scream of his fear.
Once, twice and thrice he forced her, heedless of prayer and shriek--
Once on the forehead of Philo, twice in the soft of his cheek.
Then (for the thing was finished) he said to the woman: "See
How you have branded your lover! Now will I let him go free."
He severed the thongs that bound him, laughing: "Revenge is sweet",
And Philo, sobbing in anguish, feebly rose to his feet.
The man who was fair as Apollo, god-like in woman's sight,
Hideous now as a satyr, fled to the pity of night.

Then came they before the Judgment Seat, and thus spoke the Lord of the Land:
"He who seeketh his neighbor's wife shall suffer the doom of the Brand.
Brutish and bold on his brow be it stamped, deep in his cheek let it sear,
That every man may look on his shame, and shudder and sicken and fear.
He shall hear their mock in the market-place, their fleering jibe at the feast;

He shall seek the caves and the shroud of night, and the fellowship of the beast.
Outcast forever from homes of men, far and far shall he roam.
Such be the doom, sadder than death, of him who shameth a home."

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of The Ice-Worm Cocktail

To Dawson Town came Percy Brown from London on the Thames.
A pane of glass was in his eye, and stockings on his stems.
Upon the shoulder of his coat a leather pad he wore,
To rest his deadly rifle when it wasn't seeking gore;
The which it must have often been, for Major Percy Brown,
According to his story was a hunter of renown,
Who in the Murrumbidgee wilds had stalked the kangaroo
And killed the cassowary on the plains of Timbuctoo.
And now the Arctic fox he meant to follow to its lair,
And it was also his intent to beard the Artic hare...
Which facts concerning Major Brown I merely tell because
I fain would have you know him for the Nimrod that he was.

Now Skipper Grey and Deacon White were sitting in the shack,
And sampling of the whisky that pertained to Sheriff Black.
Said Skipper Grey: "I want to say a word about this Brown:
The piker's sticking out his chest as if he owned the town."
Said Sheriff Black: "he has no lack of frigorated cheek;
He called himself a Sourdough when he'd just been here a week."
Said Deacon White: "Methinks you're right, and so I have a plan
By which I hope to prove to-night the mettle of the man.
Just meet me where the hooch-bird sings, and though our ways be rude
We'll make a proper Sourdough of this Piccadilly dude."

Within the Malamute Saloon were gathered all the gang;
The fun was fast and furious, and the loud hooch-bird sang.
In fact the night's hilarity had almost reached its crown,
When into its storm-centre breezed the gallant Major Brown.
And at the apparation, whith its glass eye and plus-fours,
From fifty alcoholic throats responded fifty roars.
With shouts of stark amazement and with whoops of sheer delight,
They surged around the stranger, but the first was Deacon White.
"We welcome you," he cried aloud, "to this the Great White Land.
The Artic Brotherhood is proud to grip you by the hand.
Yea, sportsman of the bull-dog breed, from trails of far away,
To Yukoners this is indeed a memorable day.
Our jubilation to express, vocabularies fail...
Boys, hail the Great Cheechako!" And the boys responded: "Hail!"

"And now," continued Deacon White to blushing Major Brown,
"Behold assembled the eelight and cream of Dawson Town,
And one ambition fills their hearts and makes their bosoms glow -
They want to make you, honoured sir, a bony feed Sourdough.
The same, some say, is one who's seen the Yukon ice go out,
But most profound authorities the definition doubt,
And to the genial notion of this meeting, Major Brown,
A Sourdough is a guy who drinks ... an ice-worm cocktail down."

"By Gad!" responded Major Brown, "that's ripping, don't you know.
I've always felt I'd like to be a certified Sourdough.
And though I haven't any doubt your Winter's awf'ly nice,
Mayfair, I fear, may miss me ere the break-up of your ice.
Yet (pray excuse my ignorance of matters such as these)
A cocktail I can understand - but what's an ice-worm, please?"
Said Deacon White: "It is not strange that you should fail to know,
Since ice-worms are peculiar to the Mountain of Blue Snow.
Within the Polar rim it rears, a solitary peak,
And in the smoke of early Spring (a spectacle unique)
Like flame it leaps upon the sight and thrills you through and through,
For though its cone is piercing white, its base is blazing blue.
Yet all is clear as you draw near - for coyley peering out
Are hosts and hosts of tiny worms, each indigo of snout.
And as no nourishment they find, to keep themselves alive
They masticate each other's tails, till just the Tough survive.
Yet on this stern and Spartan fare so-rapidly they grow,
That some attain six inches by the melting of the snow.
Then when the tundra glows to green and nigger heads appear,
They burrow down and are not seen until another year."

"A toughish yarn," laughed Major Brown, "as well you may admit.
I'd like to see this little beast before I swallow it."
"'Tis easy done," said Deacon White, "Ho! Barman, haste and bring
Us forth some pickled ice-worms of the vintage of last Spring."
But sadly still was Barman Bill, then sighed as one bereft:
"There's been a run on cocktails, Boss; there ain't an ice-worm left.
Yet wait . . . By gosh! it seems to me that some of extra size
Were picked and put away to show the scientific guys."
Then deeply in a drawer he sought, and there he found a jar,
The which with due and proper pride he put upon the bar;
And in it, wreathed in queasy rings, or rolled into a ball,
A score of grey and greasy things, were drowned in alcohol.

Their bellies were a bilious blue, their eyes a bulbous red;
Their back were grey, and gross were they, and hideous of head.
And when with gusto and a fork the barman speared one out,
It must have gone four inches from its tail-tip to its snout.
Cried Deacon White with deep delight: "Say, isn't that a beaut?"
"I think it is," sniffed Major Brown, "a most disgustin' brute.
Its very sight gives me the pip. I'll bet my bally hat,
You're only spoofin' me, old chap. You'll never swallow that."
"The hell I won't!" said Deacon White. "Hey! Bill, that fellows fine.
Fix up four ice-worm cocktails, and just put that wop in mine."

So Barman Bill got busy, and with sacerdotal air
His art's supreme achievement he proceeded to prepare.
His silver cups, like sickle moon, went waving to and fro,
And four celestial cocktails soon were shining in a row.
And in the starry depths of each, artistically piled,
A fat and juicy ice-worm raised its mottled mug and smiled.
Then closer pressed the peering crown, suspended was the fun,
As Skipper Grey in courteous way said: "Stranger, please take one."
But with a gesture of disgust the Major shook his head.
"You can't bluff me. You'll never drink that gastly thing," he said.
"You'll see all right," said Deacon White, and held his cocktail high,
Till its ice-worm seemed to wiggle, and to wink a wicked eye.
Then Skipper Grey and Sheriff Black each lifted up a glass,
While through the tense and quiet crown a tremor seemed to pass.
"Drink, Stranger, drink," boomed Deacon White. "proclaim you're of the best,
A doughty Sourdough who has passed the Ice-worm Cocktail Test."
And at these words, with all eyes fixed on gaping Major Brown,
Like a libation to the gods, each dashed his cocktail down.
The Major gasped with horror as the trio smacked their lips.
He twiddled at his eye-glass with unsteady finger-tips.
Into his starry cocktail with a look of woe he peered,
And its ice-worm, to his thinking, mosy incontinently leered.
Yet on him were a hundred eyes, though no one spoke aloud,
For hushed with expectation was the waiting, watching crowd.
The Major's fumbling hand went forth - the gang prepared to cheer;
The Major's falt'ring hand went back, the mob prepared to jeer,
The Major gripped his gleaming glass and laid it to his lips,
And as despairfully he took some nauseated sips,
From out its coil of crapulence the ice-worm raised its head,
Its muzzle was a murky blue, its eyes a ruby red.
And then a roughneck bellowed fourth: "This stiff comes here and struts,

As if he bought the blasted North - jest let him show his guts."
And with a roar the mob proclaimed: "Cheechako, Major Brown,
Reveal that you're of Sourdough stuff, and drink your cocktail down."

The Major took another look, then quickly closed his eyes,
For even as he raised his glass he felt his gorge arise.
Aye, even though his sight was sealed, in fancy he could see
That grey and greasy thing that reared and sneered in mockery.
Yet round him ringed the callous crowd - and how they seemed to gloat!
It must be done . . . He swallowed hard . . . The brute was at his throat.
He choked. . . he gulped . . . Thank God! at last he'd got the horror down.
Then from the crowd went up a roar: "Hooray for Sourdough Brown!"
With shouts they raised him shoulder high, and gave a rousing cheer,
But though they praised him to the sky the Major did not hear.
Amid their demonstrative glee delight he seemed to lack;
Indeed it almost seemed that he - was "keeping something back."
A clammy sweat was on his brow, and pallid as a sheet:
"I feel I must be going now," he'd plaintively repeat.
Aye, though with drinks and smokes galore, they tempted him to stay,
With sudden bolt he gained the door, and made his get-away.

And ere next night his story was the talk of Dawson Town,
But gone and reft of glory was the wrathful Major Brown;
For that ice-worm (so they told him) of such formidable size
Was - a stick of stained spaghetti with two red ink spots for eyes.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of The Leather Medal

Only a Leather Medal, hanging there on the wall,
Dingy and frayed and faded, dusty and worn and old;
Yet of my humble treasures I value it most of all,
And I wouldn't part with that medal if you gave me its weight in gold.

Read the inscription: For Valour - presented to Millie MacGee.
Ah! how in mem'ry it takes me back to the "auld lang syne,"
When Millie and I were sweethearts, and fair as a flower was she -
Yet little I dreamt that her bosom held the heart of heroine.

Listen! I'll tell you about it... An orphan was Millie MacGee,
Living with Billie her brother, under the Yukon sky,
Sam, her pa, was cremated in the winter of nineteen-three,
As duly and truly related by the pen of an author guy.

A cute little kid was Billie, solemn and silken of hair,
The image of Jackie Coogan in the days before movies could speak.
Devoted to him was Millie, with more than a mother's care,
And happy were they together in their cabin on Bunker Creek.

'Twas only a mining village, where hearts are simple and true,
And Millie MacGee was schoolma'am, loved and admired by all;
Yet no one dreamed for a moment she'd do what she dared to do -
But wait and I'll try to tell you, as clear as I can recall...

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Christmas Eve in the school-house! A scene of glitter and glee;
The children eager and joyful; parents and neighbours too;
Right in the forefront, Millie, close to the Christmas Tree.
While Billie, her brother, recited "The Shooting of Dan McGrew."

I reckon you've heard the opus, a ballad of guts and gore;
Of a Yukon frail and a frozen trail and a fight in a dringing dive,
It's on a par, I figger, with "The Face on the Bar-Room Floor,"
And the boys who wrote them pieces ought to be skinned alive.

Picture that scene of gladness; the honest faces aglow;
The kiddies gaping and spellbound, as Billie strutted his stuff.

The stage with its starry candles, and there in the foremost row,
Millie, bright as a fairy, in radiant flounce and fluff.

More like an angel I thought her; all she needed was wings,
And I sought for a smile seraphic, but her eyes were only for Bill;
So there was I longing and loving, and dreaming the craziest things,
And Billie shouting and spouting, and everyone rapt and still.

Proud as a prince was Billie, bang in the footlights' glare,
And quaking for him was Millie, as she followed every word;
Then just as he reached the climax, ranting and sawing the air -
Ugh! How it makes me shudder! The horrible thing occurred...

'Twas the day when frocks were frilly, and skirts were scraping the ground,
And the snowy flounces of Millie like sea foam round her swept;
Humbly adoring I watched her - when oh, my heart gave a bound!
Hoary and scarred and hideous, out from the tree...it...crept.

A whiskered, beady-eyes monster, grisly and grim of hue;
Savage and slinking and silent, born of the dark and dirt;
Dazed by the glare and the glitter, it wavered a moment or two -
Then like a sinister shadow, it vanished... 'neath Millie's skirt.

I stared. had my eyes deceived me? I shivered. I held my breath.
Surly I must have dreamed it. I quivered. I made to rise...
Then - my God! it was real. Millie grew pale as death;
And oh, such a look of terror woke in her lovely eyes.

Did her scream ring out? Ah no, sir. It froze at her very lips.
Clenching her teeth she checked it, and I saw her slim hands lock,
Grasping and gripping tensely, with desperate finger tips,
Something that writhed and wriggled under her dainty frock.

Quick I'd have dashed to her rescue, but fiercely she signalled: "No!"
Her eyes were dark with anguish, but her lips were set and grim;
Then I knew she was thinking of Billie - the kiddy must have his show,
Reap to the full his glory, nothing mattered but him.

So spiked to my chair with horror, there I shuddered and saw
Her fingers frenziedly clutching and squeezing with all their might
Something that squirmed and struggled, a daemon of tooth and claw,
Fighting with fear and fury, under her garment white.

Oh could I only aid her! But the wide room lay between,
And again her eyes besought me: "Steady!" they seemed to say.
"Stay where you are, Bob Simmons; don't let us have a scene,
Billie will soon be finished. Only a moment...stay!"

A moment! Ah yes, I got her. I knew how night after night
She'd learned him each line of that ballad with patience and pride and glee;
With gesture and tone dramatic, she'd taught him how to recite...
And now at the last to fail him - no, it must never be.

A moment! It seemed like ages. Why was Billie so slow?
He stammered. Twice he repeated: "The Lady that's known as Lou -"
The kiddy was stuck and she knew it. Her face was frantic with woe.
Could she but come to his rescue? Could she remember the cue?

I saw her whispering wildly as she leaned to the frightened boy;
But Billie stared like a dummy, and I stifled an anxious curse.
Louder, louder she prompted; then his face illumined with joy,
And panting, flushed and exultant, he finished the final verse.

So the youngster would up like a whirlwind, while cheer resounded on cheer;
His piece was the hit of the evening. "Bravo!" I heard them say.
But there in the heart of the racket was one who could not hear -
The loving sister who'd coached him; for Millie had fainted away.

I rushed to her side and grabbed her; then others saw her distress,
And all were eager to aid me, as I pillowed that golden head,
But her arms were tense and rigid, and clutched in the folds of her dress,
Unlocking her hands they found it . . . A RAT . . . and the brute was dead.

In silence she'd crushed its life out, rather than scare the crowd,
And queer little Billie's triumph . . . Hey! Mother, what about tea?
I've just been telling a story that makes me so mighty proud...
Stranger, let me present you - my wife, that was Millie MacGee.

Robert William Service

The Ballad Of The Northern Lights

One of the Down and Out--that's me. Stare at me well, ay, stare!
Stare and shrink--say! you wouldn't think that I was a millionaire.
Look at my face, it's crimped and gouged--one of them death-mask things;
Don't seem the sort of man, do I, as might be the pal of kings?
Slouching along in smelly rags, a bleary-eyed, no-good bum;
A knight of the hollow needle, pard, spewed from the sodden slum.
Look me all over from head to foot; how much would you think I was worth?
A dollar? a dime? a nickel? Why, I'm the wealthiest man on earth.

No, don't you think that I'm off my base. You'll sing a different tune
If only you'll let me spin my yarn. Come over to this saloon;
Wet my throat--it's as dry as chalk, and seeing as how it's you,
I'll tell the tale of a Northern trail, and so help me God, it's true.
I'll tell of the howling wilderness and the haggard Arctic heights,
Of a reckless vow that I made, and how I staked the Northern Lights.

Remember the year of the Big Stampede and the trail of Ninety-eight,
When the eyes of the world were turned to the North, and the hearts of men
elate;
Hearts of the old dare-devil breed thrilled at the wondrous strike,
And to every man who could hold a pan came the message, "Up and hike".
Well, I was there with the best of them, and I knew I would not fail.
You wouldn't believe it to see me now; but wait till you've heard my tale.

You've read of the trail of Ninety-eight, but its woe no man may tell;
It was all of a piece and a whole yard wide, and the name of the brand was
"Hell".
We heard the call and we staked our all; we were plungers playing blind,
And no man cared how his neighbor fared, and no man looked behind;
For a ruthless greed was born of need, and the weakling went to the wall,
And a curse might avail where a prayer would fail, and the gold lust crazed us all.

Bold were we, and they called us three the "Unholy Trinity";
There was Ole Olson, the Sailor Swede, and the Dago Kid and me.
We were the discards of the pack, the foreloopers of Unrest,
Reckless spirits of fierce revolt in the ferment of the West.
We were bound to win and we revelled in the hardships of the way.
We staked our ground and our hopes were crowned, and we hoisted out the pay.
We were rich in a day beyond our dreams, it was gold from the grass-roots

down;

But we weren't used to such sudden wealth, and there was the siren town.
We were crude and careless frontiersmen, with much in us of the beast;
We could bear the famine worthily, but we lost our heads at the feast.
The town looked mighty bright to us, with a bunch of dust to spend,
And nothing was half too good them days, and everyone was our friend.
Wining meant more than mining then, and life was a dizzy whirl,
Gambling and dropping chunks of gold down the neck of a dance-hall girl;
Till we went clean mad, it seems to me, and we squandered our last poke,
And we sold our claim, and we found ourselves one bitter morning--broke.

The Dago Kid he dreamed a dream of his mother's aunt who died--
In the dawn-light dim she came to him, and she stood by his bedside,
And she said: "Go forth to the highest North till a lonely trail ye find;
Follow it far and trust your star, and fortune will be kind."
But I jeered at him, and then there came the Sailor Swede to me,
And he said: "I dreamed of my sister's son, who croaked at the age of three.
From the herded dead he sneaked and said: `Seek you an Arctic trail;
'Tis pale and grim by the Polar rim, but seek and ye shall not fail."
And lo! that night I too did dream of my mother's sister's son,
And he said to me: "By the Arctic Sea there's a treasure to be won.
Follow and follow a lone moose trail, till you come to a valley grim,
On the slope of the lonely watershed that borders the Polar brim."
Then I woke my pals, and soft we swore by the mystic Silver Flail,
'Twas the hand of Fate, and to-morrow straight we would seek the lone moose
trail.

We watched the groaning ice wrench free, crash on with a hollow din;
Men of the wilderness were we, freed from the taint of sin.
The mighty river snatched us up and it bore us swift along;
The days were bright, and the morning light was sweet with jewelled song.
We poled and lined up nameless streams, portaged o'er hill and plain;
We burnt our boat to save the nails, and built our boat again;
We guessed and groped, North, ever North, with many a twist and turn;
We saw ablaze in the deathless days the splendid sunsets burn.
O'er soundless lakes where the grayling makes a rush at the clumsy fly;
By bluffs so steep that the hard-hit sheep falls sheer from out the sky;
By lilled pools where the bull moose cools and wallows in huge content;
By rocky lairs where the pig-eyed bears peered at our tiny tent.
Through the black canyon's angry foam we hurled to dreamy bars,
And round in a ring the dog-nosed peaks bayed to the mocking stars.
Spring and summer and autumn went; the sky had a tallow gleam,

Yet North and ever North we pressed to the land of our Golden Dream.

So we came at last to a tundra vast and dark and grim and lone;
And there was the little lone moose trail, and we knew it for our own.
By muskeg hollow and nigger-head it wandered endlessly;
Sorry of heart and sore of foot, weary men were we.
The short-lived sun had a leaden glare and the darkness came too soon,
And stationed there with a solemn stare was the pinched, anaemic moon.
Silence and silvern solitude till it made you dumbly shrink,
And you thought to hear with an outward ear the things you thought to think.

Oh, it was wild and weird and wan, and ever in camp o' nights
We would watch and watch the silver dance of the mystic Northern Lights.
And soft they danced from the Polar sky and swept in primrose haze;
And swift they pranced with their silver feet, and pierced with a blinding blaze.
They danced a cotillion in the sky; they were rose and silver shod;
It was not good for the eyes of man--'twas a sight for the eyes of God.
It made us mad and strange and sad, and the gold whereof we dreamed
Was all forgot, and our only thought was of the lights that gleamed.

Oh, the tundra sponge it was golden brown, and some was a bright blood-red;
And the reindeer moss gleamed here and there like the tombstones of the dead.
And in and out and around about the little trail ran clear,
And we hated it with a deadly hate and we feared with a deadly fear.
And the skies of night were alive with light, with a throbbing, thrilling flame;
Amber and rose and violet, opal and gold it came.
It swept the sky like a giant scythe, it quivered back to a wedge;
Argently bright, it cleft the night with a wavy golden edge.
Pennants of silver waved and streamed, lazy banners unfurled;
Sudden splendors of sabres gleamed, lightning javelins were hurled.
There in our awe we crouched and saw with our wild, uplifted eyes
Charge and retire the hosts of fire in the battlefield of the skies.

But all things come to an end at last, and the muskeg melted away,
And frowning down to bar our path a muddle of mountains lay.
And a gorge sheered up in granite walls, and the moose trail crept betwixt;
'Twas as if the earth had gaped too far and her stony jaws were fixt.
Then the winter fell with a sudden swoop, and the heavy clouds sagged low,
And earth and sky were blotted out in a whirl of driving snow.

We were climbing up a glacier in the neck of a mountain pass,
When the Dago Kid slipped down and fell into a deep crevasse.

When we got him out one leg hung limp, and his brow was wreathed with pain,
And he says: "'Tis badly broken, boys, and I'll never walk again.
It's death for all if ye linger here, and that's no cursed lie;
Go on, go on while the trail is good, and leave me down to die."
He raved and swore, but we tended him with our uncouth, clumsy care.
The camp-fire gleamed and he gazed and dreamed with a fixed and curious
stare.
Then all at once he grabbed my gun and he put it to his head,
And he says: "I'll fix it for you, boys"--them are the words he said.

So we sewed him up in a canvas sack and we slung him to a tree;
And the stars like needles stabbed our eyes, and woeful men were we.
And on we went on our woeful way, wrapped in a daze of dream,
And the Northern Lights in the crystal nights came forth with a mystic gleam.
They danced and they danced the devil-dance over the naked snow;
And soft they rolled like a tide upshoaled with a ceaseless ebb and flow.
They rippled green with a wondrous sheen, they fluttered out like a fan;
They spread with a blaze of rose-pink rays never yet seen of man.
They writhed like a brood of angry snakes, hissing and sulphur pale;
Then swift they changed to a dragon vast, lashing a cloven tail.
It seemed to us, as we gazed aloft with an everlasting stare,
The sky was a pit of bale and dread, and a monster revelled there.

We climbed the rise of a hog-back range that was desolate and drear,
When the Sailor Swede had a crazy fit, and he got to talking queer.
He talked of his home in Oregon and the peach trees all in bloom,
And the fern head-high, and the topaz sky, and the forest's scented gloom.
He talked of the sins of his misspent life, and then he seemed to brood,
And I watched him there like a fox a hare, for I knew it was not good.
And sure enough in the dim dawn-light I missed him from the tent,
And a fresh trail broke through the crusted snow, and I knew not where it went.
But I followed it o'er the seamless waste, and I found him at shut of day,
Naked there as a new-born babe--so I left him where he lay.

Day after day was sinister, and I fought fierce-eyed despair,
And I clung to life, and I struggled on, I knew not why nor where.
I packed my grub in short relays, and I cowered down in my tent,
And the world around was purged of sound like a frozen continent.
Day after day was dark as death, but ever and ever at nights,
With a brilliancy that grew and grew, blazed up the Northern Lights.

They rolled around with a soundless sound like softly bruised silk;

They poured into the bowl of the sky with the gentle flow of milk.
In eager, pulsing violet their wheeling chariots came,
Or they poised above the Polar rim like a coronal of flame.
From depths of darkness fathomless their lancing rays were hurled,
Like the all-combining search-lights of the navies of the world.
There on the roof-pole of the world as one bewitched I gazed,
And howled and grovelled like a beast as the awful splendors blazed.
My eyes were seared, yet thrall'd I peered through the parka hood nigh blind;
But I staggered on to the lights that shone, and never I looked behind.

There is a mountain round and low that lies by the Polar rim,
And I climbed its height in a whirl of light, and I peered o'er its jagged brim;
And there in a crater deep and vast, ungained, unguessed of men,
The mystery of the Arctic world was flashed into my ken.
For there these poor dim eyes of mine beheld the sight of sights--
That hollow ring was the source and spring of the mystic Northern Lights.
Then I staked that place from crown to base, and I hit the homeward trail.
Ah, God! it was good, though my eyes were blurred, and I crawled like a sickly
snail.

In that vast white world where the silent sky communes with the silent snow,
In hunger and cold and misery I wandered to and fro.
But the Lord took pity on my pain, and He led me to the sea,
And some ice-bound whalers heard my moan, and they fed and sheltered me.
They fed the feeble scarecrow thing that stumbled out of the wild
With the ravaged face of a mask of death and the wandering wits of a child--
A craven, cowering bag of bones that once had been a man.
They tended me and they brought me back to the world, and here I am.

Some say that the Northern Lights are the glare of the Arctic ice and snow;
And some that it's electricity, and nobody seems to know.
But I'll tell you now--and if I lie, may my lips be stricken dumb--
It's a mine, a mine of the precious stuff that men call radium.
It's a million dollars a pound, they say, and there's tons and tons in sight.
You can see it gleam in a golden stream in the solitudes of night.
And it's mine, all mine--and say! if you have a hundred plunks to spare,
I'll let you have the chance of your life, I'll sell you a quarter share.
You turn it down? Well, I'll make it ten, seeing as you are my friend.
Nothing doing? Say! don't be hard--have you got a dollar to lend?
Just a dollar to help me out, I know you'll treat me white;
I'll do as much for you some day . . . God bless you, sir; good-night.

The Ballad Of Touch-The-Button Nell

Beyond the Rocking Bridge it lies, the burg of evil fame,
The huts where hive and swarm and thrive the sisterhood of shame.
Through all the night each cabin light goes out and then goes in,
A blood-red heliograph of lust, a semaphore of sin.
From Dawson Town, soft skulking down, each lewdster seeks his mate;
And glad and bad, kimono clad, the wanton women wait.
The Klondike gossips to the moon, and sinners o'er its bars;
Each silent hill is dark and chill, and chill the patient stars.
Yet hark! upon the Rocking Bridge a bacchanalian step;
A whispered: "Come," the skirl of some hell-raking demirep...

* * * * *

They gave a dance in Lousetown, and the Tenderloin was there,
The girls were fresh and frolicsome, and nearly all were fair.
They flaunted on their back the spoil of half-a-dozen towns;
And some they blazed in gems of price, and some wore Paris gowns.
The voting was divided as to who might be the belle;
But all opined, the winsomest was Touch-the-Button Nell.

Among the merry mob of men was one who did not dance,
But watched the "light fantastic" with a sour sullen glance.
They saw his white teeth gleam, they saw his thick lips twitch;
They knew him for the giant Slav, one Riley Dooleyvitch.

"Oh Riley Dooleyvitch, come forth," quoth Touch-the-Button Nell,
"And dance a step or two with me - the music's simply swell,"
He crushed her in his mighty arms, a meek, beguiling witch,
"With you, oh Nell, I'd dance to hell," said Riley Dooleyvitch.

He waltzed her up, he waltzed her down, he waltzed her round the hall;
His heart was putty in her hands, his very soul was thrall.
As Antony of old succumbed to Cleopatra's spell,
So Riley Dooleyvitch bowed down to Touch-the-Button Nell.

"And do you love me true?" she cried. "I love you as my life."
"How can you prove your love?" she sighed. "I beg you be my wife.
I stake big pay up Hunker way; some day I be so rich;
I make you shine in satins fine," said Riley Dooleyvitch.

"Some day you'll be so rich," she mocked; "that old pipe-dream don't go.
Who gets an option on this kid must have some coin to show.
You work your ground. When Spring comes round, our wedding bells will ring.
I'm on the square, and I'll take care of all the gold you bring."

So Riley Dooleyvitch went back and worked upon his claim;
He ditched and drifted, sunk and stoped, with one unswerving aim;
And when his poke of raw moose-hide with dust began to swell,
He bought and laid it at the feet of Touch-the-Button Nell.

* * * * *

Now like all others of her ilk, the lady had a friend,
And what she made my way of trade, she gave to him to spend;
To stake him in a poker game, or pay his bar-room score;
He was a pimp from Paris. and his name was Lew Lamore.

And so as Dooleyvitch went forth and worked as he was bid,
And wrested from the frozen muck the yellow stuff it hid,
And brought it to his Lady Nell, she gave him love galore -
But handed over all her gains to festive Lew Lamore.

* * * * *

A year had gone, a weary year of strain and bloody sweat;
Of pain and hurt in dark and dirt, of fear that she forget.
He sought once more her cabin door: "I've laboured like a beast;
But now, dear one, the time has come to go before the priest.

"I've brought you gold - a hundred fold I'll bring you bye and bye;
But oh I want you, want you bad; I want you till I die.
Come, quit this life with evil rife - we'll joy while yet we can..."
"I may not wed with you," she said; "I love another man.

"I love him and I hate him so. He holds me in a spell.
He beats me - see my bruise; he makes my life a hell.
He bleeds me, as by sin and shame I earn my daily bread:
Oh cruel Fate, I cannot mate till Lew Lamore is dead!"

* * * * *

The long lean flume streaked down the hill, five hundred feet of fall;
The waters in the dam above chafed at their prison wall;
They surged and swept, they churned and leapt, with savage glee and strife;
With spray and spume the dizzy flume thrilled like a thing of life.

"We must be free," the waters cried, and scurried down the slope;
"No power can hold us back," they roared, and hurried in their hope.
Into a mighty pipe they plunged, like maddened steers they ran,
And crashed out through a shard of steel - to serve the will of Man.

And there, by hydraulicking his ground beside a bedrock ditch,
With eye aflame and savage aim was Riley Dooleyvitch.
In long hip-boots and overalls, and dingy denim shirt,
Behind a giant monitor he pounded at the dirt.

A steely shaft of water shot, and smote the face of clay;
It burrowed in the frozen muck, and scooped the dirt away;
It gored the gravel from its bed, it bellowed like a bull;
It hurled the heavy rock aloft like heaps of fleecy wool.

Strength of a hundred men was there, resistless might and skill,
And only Riley Dooleyvitch to swing it at his will.
He played it up, he played it down, nigh deafened by its roar,
'Til suddenly he raised his eyes, and there stood Lew Lamore.

Pig-eyed and heavy jowled he stood and puffed a big cigar;
As cool as though he ruled the roost in some Montmartre bar.
He seemed to say, "I've got a cinch, a double diamond hitch:
I'll skin this Muscovitish oaf, this Riley Dooleyvitch.

He shouted: "Stop ze water gun; it stun me... Sacré; damn!
I like to make one beezness deal; you know ze man I am.
Zat leetle girl, she loves me so - I tell you what I do:
You geeve to me zees claim... Jeechrize! I geeve zat girl to you."

"I'll see you damned," says Dooleyvitch; but e'er he checked his tongue,
(It may have been an accident) the little Giant swung;
Swift as a lightning flash it swung, until it plumply bore
And met with an obstruction in the shape of Lew lamore.

It caught him up, and spun him round, and tossed him like a ball;
It played and pawed him in the air, before it let him fall.

Then just to show what it could do, with savage rend and thud,
It ripped the entrails from his spine, and dropped him in the mud.

They gathered up the broken bones, and sadly in a sack,
They bore to town the last remains of Lew Lamore, the macque.
And would you hear the full details of how it all befell,
Ask Missis Riley Dooleyvitch (late Touch-the-Button Nell).

Robert William Service

The Bandit

Upon his way to rob a Bank
 He paused to watch a fire;
Though crowds were pressing rank on rank
 He pushed a passage nigher;
Then sudden heard, piercing and wild,
 The screaming of a child.

A Public Enemy was he,
 A hater of the law;
He looked around for bravery
 But only fear he saw;
Then to the craven crowds amaze
 He plunged into the blaze.

How anguished was the waiting spell
 Of horror and of pain!
Then--then from out that fiery hell
 He staggered forth again:
The babe was safe, in blankets wrapt,
 The man flame lapt.

His record was an evil one,
 Of violence and sin.
No good on earth he'd ever done,
 Yet--may he Heaven win!
A gangster he . . . Is it not odd?
 --With guts of God.

Robert William Service

The Battle

Dames should be doomed to dungeons
Who masticate raw onions.

She was the cuddly kind of Miss
 A man can love to death;
But when I sought to steal a kiss
 I wilted from a breath
With onion odour so intense
 I lost my loving sense.

Yet she was ever in my thought
 Like some exotic flower,
And so a garlic bulb I bought
 And chewed it by the hour;
Then when we met I thrilled to see
 'Twas she who shrank from me.

So breath to breath we battled there,
 To dominate each other;
And though her onions odious were,
 My garlic was a smother;
Till loth I said: 'If we would kiss
 Let's call an armistice.

'Now we have proved that we are true
 To our opinions,
My garlic I'll give up if you
 Give up your onions.'
And so next day with honey sips
 How sweet her lips!

Robert William Service

The Battle Of The Bulge

This year an ocean trip I took, and as I am a Scot
And like to get my money's worth I never missed a meal.
In spite of Neptune's nastiness I ate an awful lot,
Yet felt as fit as if we sailed upon an even keel.
But now that I am home again I'm stricken with disgust;
How many pounds of fat I've gained I'd rather not divulge:
Well, anyway I mean to take this tummy down or bust,
So here I'm suet-strafig in the
 Battle of the Bulge.

No more will sausage, bacon, eggs provide my breakfast fare;
On lobster I will never lunch, with mounds of mayonnaise.
At tea I'll Spartanly eschew the chocolate &clair;
Roast duckling and péche melba shall not consummate my days.
No more nocturnal ice-box raids, midnight spaghetti feeds;
On slabs of pâté de foie gras I vow I won't indulge:
Let bran and cottage cheese suffice my gastronomic needs,
And lettuce be my ally in the
 Battle of the Bulge.

To hell with you, ignoble paunch, abhorrent in my sight!
I gaze at your rotundity, and savage is my frown.
I'll rub you and I'll scrub you and I'll drub you day and night,
But by the gods of symmetry I swear I'll get you down.
Your smooth and smug convexity, by heck! I will subdue,
And when you tucker in again with joy will I refulge;
No longer of my toes will you obstruct my downward view . . .
With might and main I'll fight to gain the
 Battle of the Bulge.

Robert William Service

The Biologic Urge

Confound all aberrations which
 Make men do foolish things,
Like buying bracelets for a bitch,
 Or witless wedding rings.
As if we had not woe enough
 Our simple souls to vex,
Without that brand of trouble stuff
 We label Sex.

Has science not the means produced
 For human propagation,
By artificially induced
 Insemination?
Then every man might be a priest,
 And every maid a nun . . .
Oh well, as chaste as they at least,--
 But nix on fun.

Just think how we would grow in grace
 If lust we could exclude;
Then innocence might take its place,
 --Well, in a sense it could.
How we would be forever free
 From passions that perplex!
What peace on earth if only we
 Could outlaw Sex!

Robert William Service

The Black Dudeen

Humping it here in the dug-out,
Sucking me black dudeen,
I'd like to say in a general way,
There's nothing like Nickyteen;
There's nothing like Nickyteen, me boys,
Be it pipes or snipes or cigars;
So be sure that a bloke
Has plenty to smoke,
If you wants him to fight your wars.

When I've eat my fill and my belt is snug,
I begin to think of my baccy plug.
I whittle a fill in my horny palm,
And the bowl of me old clay pipe I cram.
I trim the edges, I tamp it down,
I nurse a light with an anxious frown;
I begin to draw, and my cheeks tuck in,
And all my face is a blissful grin;
And up in a cloud the good smoke goes,
And the good pipe glimmers and fades and glows;
In its throat it chuckles a cheery song,
For I likes it hot and I likes it strong.
Oh, it's good is grub when you're feeling hollow,
But the best of a meal's the smoke to follow.

There was Micky and me on a night patrol,
Having to hide in a fizz-bang hole;
And sure I thought I was worse than dead
Wi' them crump-crumps hustlin' over me head.
Sure I thought 'twas the dirty spot,
Hammer and tongs till the air was hot.
And mind you, water up to your knees.
And cold! A monkey of brass would freeze.
And if we ventured our noses out
A "typewriter" clattered its pills about.
The Field of Glory! Well, I don't think!
I'd sooner be safe and snug in clink.

Then Micky, he goes and he cops one bad,

He always was having ill-luck, poor lad.
Says he: "Old chummy, I'm booked right through;
Death and me 'as a wrongday voo.
But . . . 'aven't you got a pinch of shag? --
I'd sell me perishin' soul for a fag."
And there he shivered and cursed his luck,
So I gave him me old black pipe to suck.
And he heaves a sigh, and he takes to it
Like a babby takes to his mammy's tit;
Like an infant takes to his mother's breast,
Poor little Micky! he went to rest.

But the dawn was near, though the night was black,
So I left him there and I started back.
And I laughed as the silly old bullets came,
For the bullet ain't made wot's got me name.
Yet some of 'em buzzed onhealthily near,
And one little blighter just chipped me ear.
But there! I got to the trench all right,
When sudden I jumped wi' a start o' fright,
And a word that doesn't look well in type:
I'd clean forgotten me old clay pipe.

So I had to do it all over again,
Crawling out on that filthy plain.
Through shells and bombs and bullets and all --
Only this time -- I do not crawl.
I run like a man wot's missing a train,
Or a tom-cat caught in a plump of rain.
I hear the spit of a quick-fire gun
Tickle my heels, but I run, I run.
Through crash and crackle, and flicker and flame,
(Oh, the packet ain't issued wot's got me name!)
I run like a man that's no ideer
Of hunting around for a sooveneer.
I run bang into a German chap,
And he stares like an owl, so I bash his map.
And just to show him that I'm his boss,
I gives him a kick on the parados.
And I marches him back with me all serene,
Wiv, tucked in me grup, me old dudeen.

Sitting here in the trenches
 Me heart's a-splittin' with spleen,
For a parcel o' lead comes missing me head,
 But it smashes me old dudeen.
God blast that red-headed sniper!
 I'll give him somethin' to snipe;
Before the war's through
Just see how I do
 That blighter that smashed me pipe.

Robert William Service

The Black Sheep

"The aristocratic ne'er-do-well in Canada frequently finds his way into the ranks of the Royal North-West Mounted Police." -- Extract.

Hark to the ewe that bore him:

"What has muddied the strain?

Never his brothers before him

Showed the hint of a stain."

Hark to the tups and wethers;

Hark to the old gray ram:

"We're all of us white, but he's black as night,

And he'll never be worth a damn."

I'm up on the bally wood-pile at the back of the barracks yard;

"A damned disgrace to the force, sir", with a comrade standing guard;

Making the bluff I'm busy, doing my six months hard.

"Six months hard and dismissed, sir." Isn't that rather hell?

And all because of the liquor laws and the wiles of a native belle--

Some "hooch" I gave to a siwash brave who swore that he wouldn't tell.

At least they say that I did it. It's so in the town report.

All that I can recall is a night of revel and sport,

When I woke with a "head" in the guard-room, and they dragged me sick into court.

And the O. C. said: "You are guilty", and I said never a word;

For, hang it, you see I couldn't--I didn't know what had occurred,

And, under the circumstances, denial would be absurd.

But the one that cooked my bacon was Grubbe, of the City Patrol.

He fagged for my room at Eton, and didn't I devil his soul!

And now he is getting even, landing me down in the hole.

Plugging away on the wood-pile; doing chores round the square.

There goes an officer's lady--gives me a haughty stare--

Me that's an earl's own nephew--that is the hardest to bear.

To think of the poor old mater awaiting her prodigal son.

Tho' I broke her heart with my folly, I was always the white-haired one.

(That fatted calf that they're cooking will surely be overdone.)

I'll go back and yarn to the Bishop; I'll dance with the village belle;
I'll hand round tea to the ladies, and everything will be well.
Where I have been won't matter; what I have seen I won't tell.

I'll soar to their ken like a comet. They'll see me with never a stain;
But will they reform me? --far from it. We pay for our pleasure with pain;
But the dog will return to his vomit, the hog to his wallow again.

I've chewed on the rind of creation, and bitter I've tasted the same;
Stacked up against hell and damnation, I've managed to stay in the game;
I've had my moments of sorrow; I've had my seasons of shame.

That's past; when one's nature's a cracked one, it's too jolly hard to mend.
So long as the road is level, so long as I've cash to spend.
I'm bound to go to the devil, and it's all the same in the end.

The bugle is sounding for stables; the men troop off through the gloom;
An orderly laying the tables sings in the bright mess-room.
(I'll wash in the prison bucket, and brush with the prison broom.)

I'll lie in my cell and listen; I'll wish that I couldn't hear
The laugh and the chaff of the fellows swigging the canteen beer;
The nasal tone of the gramophone playing "The Bandolier".

And it seems to me, though it's misty, that night of the flowing bowl,
That the man who potlatched the whiskey and landed me into the hole
Was Grubble, that unmerciful bounder, Grubble, of the City Patrol.

Robert William Service

The Blind And The Dead

She lay like a saint on her copper couch;
Like an angel asleep she lay,
In the stare of the ghoulish folks that slouch
Past the Dead and sneak away.

Then came old Jules of the sightless gaze,
Who begged in the streets for bread.
Each day he had come for a year of days,
And groped his way to the Dead.

"What's the Devil's Harvest to-day?" he cried;
"A wanton with eyes of blue!
I've known too many a such," he sighed;
"Maybe I know this . . . mon Dieu!"

He raised the head of the heedless Dead;
He fingered the frozen face. . . .
Then a deathly spell on the watchers fell --
God! it was still, that place!

He raised the head of the careless Dead;
He fumbled a vagrant curl;
And then with his sightless smile he said:
"It's only my little girl."

"Dear, my dear, did they hurt you so!
Come to your daddy's heart. . . ."
Aye, and he held so tight, you know,
They were hard to force apart.

No! Paris isn't always gay;
And the morgue has its stories too:
You are a writer of tales, you say --
Then there is a tale for you.

Robert William Service

The Bliss Of Ignorance

When Jack took Nell into his arms
He knew he acted ill,
And thought as he enjoyed her charms
Of his fiancée Jill.
"Poor dear," he sighed, "she dreams of me,
I shouldn't act like this;
But after all, she cannot see,
And ignorance is bliss."

Yet Jill at that same moment was
In Fred's embrace close caught,
And just a little sad because
Of sweetheart Jack she thought.
"Poor dear," she sighed, "he loves me so,
And what's a little kiss?
Or two or three - he'll never know,
And ignorance is bliss."

Now in fond wedlock all is well,
Though in their nuptial bed,
Jack's thought will sometimes stray to Nell,
And Jill's to handsome Fred.
Yet though in fancy they may flirt,
There's nothing much amiss:
What they don't know will never hurt -
Aye, Ignorance Is Bliss.

Robert William Service

The Blood-Red Fourragere

What was the blackest sight to me
Of all that campaign?
A naked woman tied to a tree
With jagged holes where her breasts should be,
Rotting there in the rain.

On we pressed to the battle fray,
Dogged and dour and spent.
Sudden I heard my Captain say:
"Voilà! Kultur has passed this way,
And left us a monument."

So I looked and I saw our Colonel there,
And his grand head, snowed with the years,
Unto the beat of the rain was bare;
And, oh, there was grief in his frozen stare,
And his cheeks were stung with tears!

Then at last he turned from the woeful tree,
And his face like stone was set;
"Go, march the Regiment past," said he,
"That every father and son may see,
And none may ever forget."

Oh, the crimson strands of her hair downpoured
Over her breasts of woe;
And our grim old Colonel leaned on his sword,
And the men filed past with their rifles lowered,
Solemn and sad and slow.

But I'll never forget till the day I die,
As I stood in the driving rain,
And the jaded columns of men slouched by,
How amazement leapt into every eye,
Then fury and grief and pain.

And some would like madmen stand aghast,
With their hands upclenched to the sky;
And some would cross themselves as they passed,

And some would curse in a scalding blast,
And some like children cry.

Yea, some would be sobbing, and some would pray,
And some hurl hateful names;
But the best had never a word to say;
They turned their twitching faces away,
And their eyes were like hot flames.

They passed; then down on his bended knee
The Colonel dropped to the Dead:
"Poor martyred daughter of France!" said he,
"O dearly, dearly avenged you'll be
Or ever a day be sped!"

Now they hold that we are the best of the best,
And each of our men may wear,
Like a gash of crimson across his chest,
As one fierce-proved in the battle-test,
The blood-red Fourragere.

For each as he leaps to the top can see,
Like an etching of blood on his brain,
A wife or a mother lashed to a tree,
With two black holes where her breasts should be,
Left to rot in the rain.

So we fight like fiends, and of us they say
That we neither yield nor spare.
Oh, we have the bitterest debt to pay. . . .
Have we paid it? -- Look -- how we wear to-day
Like a trophy, gallant and proud and gay,
Our blood-red Fourragere.

Robert William Service

The Bohemian

Up in my garret bleak and bare
I tilted back on my broken chair,
And my three old pals were with me there,
 Hunger and Thirst and Cold;
Hunger scowled at his scurvy mate:
Cold covered down by the hollow grate,
And I hated them with a deadly hate
 As old as life is old.

So up in my garret that's near the sky
I smiled a smile that was thin and dry:
"You've roomed with me twenty year," said I,
 "Hunger and Thirst and Cold;
But now, begone down the broken stair!
I've suffered enough of your spite . . . so there!"
Bang! Bang! I slapped on the table bare
 A glittering heap of gold.

"Red flames will jewel my wine to-night;
I'll loose my belt that you've lugged so tight;
Ha! Ha! Dame Fortune is smiling bright;
 The stuff of my brain I've sold;
Canaille of the gutter, up! Away!
You've battened on me for a bitter-long day;
But I'm driving you forth, and forever and aye,
 Hunger and Thirst and Cold."

So I kicked them out with a scornful roar;
Yet, oh, they turned at the garret door;
Quietly there they spoke once more:
 "The tale is not all told.
It's au revoir, but it's not good-by;
We're yours, old chap, till the day you die;
Laugh on, you fool! Oh, you'll never defy
 Hunger and Thirst and Cold."

Robert William Service

The Bohemian Dreams

Because my overcoat's in pawn,
I choose to take my glass
Within a little bistro on
The rue du Montparnasse;
The dusty bins with bottles shine,
The counter's lined with zinc,
And there I sit and drink my wine,
And think and think and think.

I think of hoary old Stamboul,
Of Moslem and of Greek,
Of Persian in coat of wool,
Of Kurd and Arab sheikh;
Of all the types of weal and woe,
And as I raise my glass,
Across Galata bridge I know
They pass and pass and pass.

I think of citron-trees aglow,
Of fan-palms shading down,
Of sailors dancing heel and toe
With wenches black and brown;
And though it's all an ocean far
From Yucatan to France,
I'll bet beside the old bazaar
They dance and dance and dance.

I think of Monte Carlo, where
The pallid croupiers call,
And in the gorgeous, guilty air
The gamblers watch the ball;
And as I flick away the foam
With which my beer is crowned,
The wheels beneath the gilded dome
Go round and round and round.

I think of vast Niagara,
Those gulfs of foam a-shine,
Whose mighty roar would stagger a

More prosy than mine;
And as the hours I idly spend
Against a greasy wall,
I know that green the waters bend
And fall and fall and fall.

I think of Nijni Novgorod
And Jews who never rest;
And womenfolk with spade and hod
Who slave in Buda-Pest;
Of squat and sturdy Japanese
Who pound the paddy soil,
And as I loaf and smoke at ease
They toil and toil and toil.

I think of shrines in Hindustan,
Of cloistral glooms in Spain,
Of minarets in Ispahan,
Of St. Sophia's fane,
Of convent towers in Palestine,
Of temples in Cathay,
And as I stretch and sip my wine
They pray and pray and pray.

And so my dreams I dwell within,
And visions come and go,
And life is passing like a Cin-
ematographic Show;
Till just as surely as my pipe
Is underneath my nose,
Amid my visions rich and ripe
I doze and doze and doze.

Robert William Service

The Booby-Trap

I'm crawlin' out in the mangolds to bury wot's left o' Joe --
Joe, my pal, and a good un (God! 'ow it rains and rains).
I'm sick o' seein' him lyin' like a 'eap o' offal, and so
I'm crawlin' out in the beet-field to bury 'is last remains.

'E might 'a bin makin' munitions -- 'e 'adn't no need to go;
An' I tells 'im strite, but 'e arnsers, "'Tain't no use chewin' the fat;
I've got to be doin' me dooty wiv the rest o' the boys" . . . an' so
Yon's 'im, yon blob on the beet-field wot I'm tryin' so 'ard to git at.

There was five of us lads from the brickyard; 'Enry was gassed at Bapome,
Sydney was drowned in a crater, 'Erbert was 'alved by a shell;
Joe was the pick o' the posy, might 'a bin sifely at 'ome,
Only son of 'is mother, 'er a widder as well.

She used to sell bobbins and buttons -- 'ad a plice near the Waterloo Road;
A little, old, bent-over lydy, wiv glasses an' silvery 'air;
Must tell 'er I planted 'im nicely, cheer 'er up like. . . . (Well, I'm blowed,
That bullet near caught me a biffer) -- I'll see the old gel if I'm spared.

She'll tike it to 'eart, pore ol' lydy, fer 'e was 'er 'ope and 'er joy;
'Is dad used to drink like a knot-'ole, she kept the 'ome goin', she did:
She pinched and she scriped fer 'is scoolin', 'e was sich a fine 'andsome boy
('Alf Flanders seems packed on me panties) -- 'e's 'andsome no longer, pore kid!

This bit o' a board that I'm packin' and draggin' around in the mire,
I was tickled to death when I found it. Says I, "'Ere's a nice little glow."
I was chilled and wet through to the marrer, so I started to make me a fire;
And then I says: "No; 'ere, Goblimy, it'll do for a cross for Joe."

Well, 'ere 'e is. Gawd! 'Ow one chinges a-lyin' six weeks in the rain.
Joe, me old pal, 'ow I'm sorry; so 'elp me, I wish I could pray.
An' now I 'ad best get a-diggin' 'is grave (it seems more like a drain) --
And I 'opes that the Boches won't git me till I gits 'im safe planted away.

(As he touches the body there is a tremendous explosion. He falls back
shattered.)

A booby-trap! Ought to 'a known it! If that's not a bastardly trick!

Well, one thing, I won't be long goin'. Gawd! I'm a 'ell of a sight.
Wish I'd died fightin' and killin'; that's wot it is makes me sick. . . .
Ah, Joe! we'll be pushin' up dysies . . . together, old Chummie . . . good-night!

Robert William Service

The Boola-Boola Maid

In the wilds of Madagascar, Dwelt a Boola-boola maid;
For her hand young men would ask her, But she always was afraid.
Oh that Boola-boola maid She was living in the shade Of a spreading Yum-yum
tree;
And - when the day was done At the setting of the sun, She would make this
melodee:

As this ditty she was cooing, Came a Boola-boola man;
And he lost no time in wooing; For he punched her on the pan.
Oh that Boola-boola maid She was terribly afraid So he punched her on the eye;
And - then he laugh'd with glee As beneath the Yum-yum tree He - heard that
maiden cry:

Then with shrieks of ribald laughter, Said the Boola-boola man;
"If it's only socks you're after, I will do the best I can.
I have handed you a pair, And I've plenty more to spare," So he socked her on
the nose;
And a woeful maid was she, As beneath the Yum-yum tree, This - lamentation
'rose:

Now the wedding tom-tom's over, for this Boola-boola maid;
And when ev'ning shadows hover, She no longer is afraid.
For she weasrs a palm-leaf pinny And she rocks a pickaninny In the shade of the
Yum-yum tree,
And she's happy with her he-man, Though she still dreams of a She-man, As she
sings this song with glee:

Chorus:

Oh - I don't want my cave-man to caress me,
Oh I don't want no coal-black heads to press me.
All I want is a fellow who wears suspenders,
That'll be the coon to whom this babe surrenders.
For the man I wed must have a proper trousseau.
On none of your fig-leaf dudes will make me do so.
For it's funny how I feel, But I'm crazy for socks appeal
And my dream is to marry a man with a pair of socks.

Robert William Service

The Bread-Knife Ballad

A little child was sitting Up on her mother's knee
And down down her cheeks the bitter tears did flow.
And as I sadly listened I heard this tender plea,
'Twas uttered in a voice so soft and low.

"Not guilty" said the Jury And the Judge said "Set her free,
But remember it must not occur again.
And next time you must listen to you little daughter's plea,"
Then all the Court did join in this refrain.

Chorus:

"Please Mother don't stab Father with the BREAD-KNIFE,
Remember 'twas a gift when you were wed.
But if you must stab Father with the BREAD-KNIFE,
Please Mother use another for the BREAD."

Robert William Service

The Bulls

Six bulls I saw as black as jet,
With crimsoned horns and amber eyes
That chewed their cud without a fret,
And swished to brush away the flies,
Unwitting their soon sacrifice.

It is the Corpus Christi fête;
Processions crowd the bannered ways;
Before the alters women wait,
While men unite in hymns of praise,
And children look with angel gaze.

The bulls know naught of holiness,
To pious pomp their eyes are blind;
Their brutish brains will never guess
The sordid passions of mankind:
Poor innocents, they wait resigned.

Till in a black room each is penned,
While from above with cruel aim
Two torturers with lances bend
To goad their fieriness to flame,
To devil them to play the game.

The red with rage and mad with fear
They charge into the roaring ring;
Against the mockery most near
Of human might their hate they fling,
In futile, blind blood-boltering.

And so the day of unction ends;
Six bulls are dragged across the sand.
Ferocity and worship blends,
Religion and red thirst hold hands . . .
Dear Christ! 'Tis hard to understand!

Robert William Service

The Buyers

Father drank himself to death,--
Quite enjoyed it.
Urged to draw a sober breath
He'd avoid it.
'Save your sympathy,' said Dad;
'Never sought it.
Hob-nail liver, gay and glad,
Sure,--I bought it.'

Uncle made a heap of dough,
Ponies playing.
'Easy come and easy go,'
Was his saying.
Though he died in poverty
Fit he thought it,
Grinning with philosophy:
'Guess I bought it.'

Auntie took the way of sin,
Seeking pleasure;
Lovers came, her heart to win,
Bringing treasure.
Sickness smote,--with lips that bled
Brave she fought it;
Smiling on her dying bed:
'Dears, I bought it.'

My decades of life are run,
Eight precisely;
Yet I've lost a lot of fun
Living wisely.
Too much piety don't pay,
Time has taught it;
Hadn't guts to go astray;
Life's a bloody bore today,--
Well, I've bought it.

Robert William Service

The Call

(France, August first, 1914)

Far and near, high and clear,
Hark to the call of War!
Over the gorse and the golden dells,
Ringing and swinging of clamorous bells,
Praying and saying of wild farewells:
War! War! War!

High and low, all must go:
Hark to the shout of War!
Leave to the women the harvest yield;
Gird ye, men, for the sinister field;
A sabre instead of a scythe to wield:
War! Red War!

Rich and poor, lord and boor,
Hark to the blast of War!
Tinker and tailor and millionaire,
Actor in triumph and priest in prayer,
Comrades now in the hell out there,
Sweep to the fire of War!

Prince and page, sot and sage,
Hark to the roar of War!
Poet, professor and circus clown,
Chimney-sweeper and fop o' the town,
Into the pot and be melted down:
Into the pot of War!

Women all, hear the call,
The pitiless call of War!
Look your last on your dearest ones,
Brothers and husbands, fathers, sons:
Swift they go to the ravenous guns,
The gluttonous guns of War.

Everywhere thrill the air
The maniac bells of War.

There will be little of sleeping to-night;
There will be wailing and weeping to-night;
Death's red sickle is reaping to-night:
 War! War! War!

Robert William Service

The Call Of The Wild

Have you gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing else to gaze on,
Set pieces and drop-curtain scenes galore,
Big mountains heaved to heaven, which the blinding sunsets blazon,
Black canyons where the rapids rip and roar?
Have you swept the visioned valley with the green stream streaking through it,
Searched the Vastness for a something you have lost?
Have you strung your soul to silence? Then for God's sake go and do it;
Hear the challenge, learn the lesson, pay the cost.

Have you wandered in the wilderness, the sagebrush desolation,
The bunch-grass levels where the cattle graze?
Have you whistled bits of rag-time at the end of all creation,
And learned to know the desert's little ways?
Have you camped upon the foothills, have you galloped o'er the ranges,
Have you roamed the arid sun-lands through and through?
Have you chummed up with the mesa? Do you know its moods and changes?
Then listen to the Wild -- it's calling you.

Have you known the Great White Silence, not a snow-gemmed twig aquiver?
(Eternal truths that shame our soothing lies.)
Have you broken trail on snowshoes? mused your huskies up the river,
Dared the unknown, led the way, and clutched the prize?
Have you marked the map's void spaces, mingled with the mongrel races,
Felt the savage strength of brute in every thew?
And though grim as hell the worst is, can you round it off with curses?
Then hearken to the Wild -- it's wanting you.

Have you suffered, starved and triumphed, groveled down, yet grasped at glory,
Grown bigger in the bigness of the whole?
"Done things" just for the doing, letting babblers tell the story,
Seeing through the nice veneer the naked soul?
Have you seen God in His splendors, heard the text that nature renders?
(You'll never hear it in the family pew.)
The simple things, the true things, the silent men who do things --
Then listen to the Wild -- it's calling you.

They have cradled you in custom, they have primed you with their preaching,
They have soaked you in convention through and through;
They have put you in a showcase; you're a credit to their teaching --

But can't you hear the Wild? -- it's calling you.
Let us probe the silent places, let us seek what luck betide us;
Let us journey to a lonely land I know.
There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star agleam to guide us,
And the Wild is calling, calling . . . let us go.

Robert William Service

The Cat With Wings

You never saw a cat with wings,
I'll bet a dollar -- well, I did;
'Twas one of those fantastic things
One runs across in old Madrid.
A walloping big tom it was,
(Maybe of the Angora line),
With silken ears and velvet paws,
And silver hair, superbly fine.

It sprawled upon a crimson mat,
Yet though crowds came to gaze on it,
It was a supercilious cat,
And didn't seem to mind a bit.
It looked at us with dim disdain,
And indolently seemed to sigh:
"There's not another cat in Spain
One half so marvelous as I."

Its owner gently stroked its head,
And tickled it with fingers light.
"Ah no, it cannot fly," he said;
"But see - it has the wings all right."
Then tenderly from off its back
He raised, despite its feline fears,
Appendages that seemed to lack
Vitality - like rabbit's ears.

And then the vision that I had
Of Tabbie soaring through the night,
Quick vanished, and I felt so sad
For that poor pussy's piteous plight.
For though frustration has it stings,
Its mockeries in Hope's despite,
The hell of hells is to have wings
Yet be denied the bliss of flight.

Robert William Service

The Centenarian

Great Grandfather was ninety-nine
And so it was our one dread,
That though his health was superfine
He'd fail to make the hundred.
Though he was not a rolling stone
No moss he seemed to gather:
A patriarch of brawn and bone
Was Great Grandfather.

He should have been senile and frail
Instead of hale and hearty;
But no, he loved a mug of ale,
A boisterous old party.
'As frisky as a cold,' said he,
'A man's allotted span
I've lived but now I plan to be
A Centenarian.'

Then one night when I called on him
Oh what a change I saw!
His head was bowed, his eye was dim,
Down-fallen was his jaw.
Said he: 'Leave me to die, I pray;
I'm no more bloody use . . .
For in my mouth I found today--
A tooth that's loose.'

Robert William Service

The Centenarians

I asked of ancient gaffers three
 The way of their ripe living,
And this is what they told to me
 Without Misgiving.

The First: 'The why I've lived so long,
 To my fond recollection
Is that for women, wine and song
 I've had a predilection.
Full many a bawdy stave I've sung
 With wenches of my choosing,
But of the joys that kept me young
 The best was boozing.'

The Second: 'I'm a sage revered
 Because I was a fool
And with the bourgeon of my beard
 I kept my ardour cool.
On health I have conserved my hold
 By never dissipating:
And that is why a hundred old
 I'm celebrating.'

The Third: 'The explanation I
 Have been so long a-olding,
Is that to wash I never try,
 Despite conjugal scolding.
I hate the sight of soap and so
 I seldom change my shirt:
Believe me, Brother, there is no
 Preservative like dirt.'

So there you have the reasons three
 Why age may you rejoice:
Booze, squalour and temerity,--
 Well, you may take your choice.
Yet let me say, although it may
 Your egoism hurt,
Of all the three it seems to me

The best is DIRT.

Robert William Service

The Choice

Some inherit manly beauty,
Some come into worldly wealth;
Some have lofty sense of duty,
Others boast exultant health.
Though the pick may be confusing,
Health, wealth, charm or character,
If you had the chance of choosing
Which would you prefer?

I'm not sold on body beauty,
Though health I appreciate;
Character and sense of duty
I resign to Men of State.
I don't need a heap of money;
Oh I know I'm hard to please.
Though to you it may seem funny,
I want none of these.

No, give me Imagination,
And the gift of weaving words
Into patterns of creation,
With the lilt of singing birds;
Passion and the power to show it,
Sense of life with love expressed:
Let my be a bloody poet,--
You can keep the rest.

Robert William Service

The Christmas Tree

In the dark and damp of the alley cold,
Lay the Christmas tree that hadn't been sold;
By a shopman dourly thrown outside;
With the ruck and rubble of Christmas-tide;
Trodden deep in the muck and mire,
Unworthy even to feed a fire...
So I stopped and salvaged that tarnished tree,
And thus is the story it told to me:

"My Mother was Queen of the forest glade,
And proudly I prospered in her shade;
For she said to me: 'When I am dead,
You will be monarch in my stead,
And reign, as I, for a hundred years,
A tower of triumph amid your peers,
When I crash in storm I will yield you space;
Son, you will worthily take my place.'

"So I grew in grace like a happy child,
In the heart of the forest free and wild;
And the moss and the ferns were all about,
And the craitive mice crept in and out;
And a wood-dove swung on my highest twig,
And a chipmunk chattered: 'So big! So big!'
And a shy fawn nibbled a tender shoot,
And a rabbit nibbled under my root...
Oh, I was happy in rain and shine
As I thought of the destiny that was mine!
Then a man with an axe came cruising by
And I knew that my fate was to fall and die.

"With a hundred others he packed me tight,
And we drove to a magic city of light,
To an avenue lined with Christmas trees,
And I thought: may be I'll be one of these,
Tinselled with silver and tricked with gold,
A lovely sight for a child to behold;
A-glitter with lights of every hue,
Ruby and emerald, orange and blue,

And kiddies dancing, with shrieks of glee -
One might fare worse than a Christmas tree.

"So they stood me up with a hundred more
In the blaze of a big department store;
But I thought of the forest dark and still,
And the dew and the snow and the heat and the chill,
And the soft chinook and the summer breeze,
And the dappled deer and the birds and the bees...
I was so homesick I wanted to cry,
But patient I waited for someone to buy.
And some said 'Too big,' and some 'Too small,'
And some passed on saying nothing at all.
Then a little boy cried: 'Ma, buy that one,'
But she shook her head: 'Too dear, my son.'
So the evening came, when they closed the store,
And I was left on the littered floor,
A tree unwanted, despised, unsold,
Thrown out at last in the alley cold."

Then I said: "Don't sorrow; at least you'll be
A bright and beautiful New Year's tree,
All shimmer and glimmer and glow and gleam,
A radiant sight like a fairy dream.
For there is a little child I know,
Who lives in poverty, want and woe;
Who lies abed from morn to night,
And never has known an hour's delight..."

So I stood the tree at the foot of her bed:
"Santa's a little late," I said.
"Poor old chap! Snowbound on the way,
But he's here at last, so let's be gay."
Then she woke from sleep and she saw you there,
And her eyes were love and her lips were prayer.
And her thin little arms were stretched to you
With a yearning joy that they never knew.
She woke from the darkest dark to see
Like a heavenly vision, that Christmas Tree.

Her mother despaired and feared the end,
But from that day she began to mend,

To play, to sing, to laugh with glee...
Bless you, O little Christmas Tree!
You died, but your life was not in vain:
You helped a child to forget her pain,
And let hope live in our hearts again.

Robert William Service

The Comforter

As I sat by my baby's bed
That's open to the sky,
There fluttered round and round my head
A radiant butterfly.

And as I wept -- of hearts that ache
The saddest in the land --
It left a lily for my sake,
And lighted on my hand.

I watched it, oh, so quietly,
And though it rose and flew,
As if it fain would comfort me
It came and came anew.

Now, where my darling lies at rest,
I do not dare to sigh,
For look! there gleams upon my breast
A snow-white butterfly.

Robert William Service

The Contented Man

"How good God is to me," he said;
"For have I not a mansion tall,
With trees and lawns of velvet tread,
And happy helpers at my call?
With beauty is my life abrim,
With tranquil hours and dreams apart;
You wonder that I yield to Him
That best of prayers, a grateful heart?"

"How good God is to me," he said;
"For look! though gone is all my wealth,
How sweet it is to earn one's bread
With brawny arms and brimming health.
Oh, now I know the joy of strife!
To sleep so sound, to wake so fit.
Ah yes, how glorious is life!
I thank Him for each day of it."

"How good God is to me," he said;
"Though health and wealth are gone, it's true;
Things might be worse, I might be dead,
And here I'm living, laughing too.
Serene beneath the evening sky
I wait, and every man's my friend;
God's most contented man am I . . .
He keeps me smiling to the End."

Robert William Service

The Contrast

Fat lady, in your four-wheeled chair,
 Dolled up to beat the band,
At me you arrogantly stare
 With gold lorgnette in hand.
Oh how you differ from the dame
 So shabby, gaunt and grey,
With legs rheumatically lame,
 Who steers you on your way.

Nay, jewelled lady, look not back
 Lest you should be disturbed
To see the skinny hag in black
 Who boosts you up the curb.
Of course I know you get her cheap,
 Since she's a lady too,
And bite to eat and bed to sleep
 Maybe are all her due.

Alas for those who give us aid
 Yet need more help than we!
And though she thinks the wages paid
 Are almost charity,
I'd love to see that lady fat
 Lug round that hefty chair,
While with lorgnette and feathered hat
 Her handmaid lounges there.

Robert William Service

The Convalescent

. . . So I walked among the willows very quietly all night;
There was no moon at all, at all; no timid star alight;
There was no light at all, at all; I wint from tree to tree,
And I called him as his mother called, but he nivver answered me.

Oh I called him all the night-time, as I walked the wood alone;
And I listened and I listened, but I nivver heard a moan;
Then I found him at the dawnin', when the sorry sky was red:
I was lookin' for the livin', but I only found the dead.

Sure I know that it was Shamus by the silver cross he wore;
But the bugles they were callin', and I heard the cannon roar.
Oh I had no time to tarry, so I said a little prayer,
And I clasped his hands together, and I left him lyin' there.

Now the birds are singin', singin', and I'm home in Donegal,
And it's Springtime, and I'm thinkin' that I only dreamed it all;
I dreamed about that evil wood, all crowded with its dead,
Where I knelt beside me brother when the battle-dawn was red.

Where I prayed beside me brother ere I wint to fight anew:
Such dreams as these are evil dreams; I can't believe it's true.
Where all is love and laughter, sure it's hard to think of loss . . .
But mother's sayin' nothin', and she clasps -- a silver cross.

Robert William Service

The Coward

'Ave you seen Bill's mug in the Noos to-day?
'E's gyned the Victoriar Cross, they say;
Little Bill wot would grizzle and run away,
 If you 'it 'im a swipe on the jawr.
'E's slaughtered the Kaiser's men in tons;
'E's captured one of their quick-fire guns,
And 'e 'adn't no practice in killin' 'Uns
 Afore 'e went off to the war.

Little Bill wot I nussed in 'is by-by clothes;
Little Bill wot told me 'is childish woes;
'Ow often I've tidied 'is pore little nose
 Wiv the 'em of me pinnyfore.
And now all the papers 'is praises ring,
And 'e's been and 'e's shaken the 'and of the King
And I sawr 'im to-day in the ward, pore thing,
 Where they're patchin' 'im up once more.

And 'e says: "Wot d'ye think of it, Lizer Ann?"
And I says: "Well, I can't make it out, old man;
You'd 'ook it as soon as a scrap began,
 When you was a bit of a kid."
And 'e whispers: "'Ere, on the quiet, Liz,
They're makin' too much of the 'ole damn biz,
And the papers is printin' me ugly phiz,
 But . . . I'm 'anged if I know wot I did.

"Oh, the Captain comes and 'e says: 'Look 'ere!
They're far too quiet out there: it's queer.
They're up to somethin' -- 'oo'll volunteer
 To crawl in the dark and see?'
Then I felt me 'eart like a 'ammer go,
And up jumps a chap and 'e says: 'Right O!'
But I chips in straight, and I says 'Oh no!
 'E's a missis and kids -- take me.'

"And the next I knew I was sneakin' out,
And the oozy corpses was all about,
And I felt so scared I wanted to shout,

And me skin fair prickled wiv fear;
And I sez: 'You coward! You 'ad no right
To take on the job of a man this night,'
Yet still I kept creepin' till ('orrid sight!)
The trench of the 'Uns was near.

"It was all so dark, it was all so still;
Yet somethin' pushed me against me will;
'Ow I wanted to turn! Yet I crawled until
I was seein' a dim light shine.
Then thinks I: 'I'll just go a little bit,
And see wot the doose I can make of it,'
And it seemed to come from the mouth of a pit:
'Christmas!' sez I, 'a mine.'

"Then 'ere's the part wot I can't explain:
I wanted to make for 'ome again,
But somethin' was blazin' inside me brain,
So I crawled to the trench instead;
Then I saw the bullet 'ead of a 'Un,
And 'e stood by a rapid-firer gun,
And I lifted a rock and I 'it 'im one,
And 'e dropped like a chunk o' lead.

"Then all the 'Uns that was underground,
Comes up with a rush and on with a bound,
And I swings that giddy old Maxim round
And belts 'em solid and square.
You see I was off me chump wiv fear:
'If I'm sellin' me life,' sez I, 'it's dear.'
And the trench was narrow and they was near,
So I peppered the brutes for fair.

"So I 'eld 'em back and I yelled wiv fright,
And the boys attacked and we 'ad a fight,
And we 'captured a section o' trench' that night
Which we didn't expect to get;
And they found me there with me Maxim gun,
And I'd laid out a score if I'd laid out one,
And I fainted away when the thing was done,
And I 'aven't got over it yet."

So that's the 'istory Bill told me.
Of course it's all on the strict Q. T.;
It wouldn't do to get out, you see,
 As 'e hacted against 'is will.
But 'e's convalescin' wiv all 'is might,
And 'e 'opes to be fit for another fight --
Say! Ain't 'e a bit of the real all right?
 Wot's the matter with Bill!

Robert William Service

The Cow-Juice Cure

The clover was in blossom, an' the year was at the June,
When Flap-jack Billy hit the town, likewise O'Flynn's saloon.
The frost was on the fodder an' the wind was growin' keen,
When Billy got to seein' snakes in Sullivan's shebeen.

Then in meandered Deep-hole Dan, once comrade of the cup:
"Oh Billy, for the love of Mike, why don't ye sober up?
I've got the gorgus recipay, 'tis smooth an' slick as silk --
Jest quit yer strangle-holt on hooch, an' irrigate with milk.
Lackteeal flooid is the lubrication you require;
Yer nervus frame-up's like a bunch of snarled piano wire.
You want to get it coated up with addypose tishoo,
So's it will work elastic-like, an' milk's the dope for you."

Well, Billy was complyable, an' in a month it's strange,
That cow-juice seemed to oppyrate a most amazin' change.
"Call up the water-wagon, Dan, an' book my seat," sez he.
"'Tis mighty queer," sez Deep-hole Dan, "'twas just the same with
me."

They shanghaied little Tim O'Shane, they cached him safe away,
An' though he objurgated some, they "cured" him night an' day;
An' pretty soon there came the change amazin' to explain:
"I'll never take another drink," sez Timothy O'Shane.
They tried it out on Spike Muldoon, that toper of renown;
They put it over Grouch McGraw, the terror of the town.
They roped in "tanks" from far and near, an' every test was sure,
An' like a flame there ran the fame of Deep-hole's Cow-juice Cure.

"It's mighty queer," sez Deep-hole Dan, "I'm puzzled through and through;
It's only milk from Riley's ranch, no other milk will do."
An' it jest happened on that night with no predictive plan,
He left some milk from Riley's ranch a-settin' in a pan;
An' picture his amazement when he poured that milk next day --
There in the bottom of the pan a dozen "colours" lay.

"Well, what d'ye know 'bout that," sez Dan; "Gosh ding my dasted eyes,
We've been an' had the Gold Cure, Bill, an' none of us was wise.
The milk's free-millin' that's a cinch; there's colours everywhere.
Now, let us figger this thing out -- how does the dust git there?"

`Gold from the grass-roots down', they say -- why, Bill! we've got it cold --
Them cows what nibbles up the grass, jest nibbles up the gold.
We're blasted, bloomin' millionaires; dissemble an' lie low:
We'll follow them gold-bearin' cows, an' prospect where they go."

An' so it came to pass, fer weeks them miners might be found
A-sneakin' round on Riley's ranch, an' snipin' at the ground;
Till even Riley stops an' stares, an' presently allows:
"Them boys appear to take a mighty interest in cows."
An' night an' day they shadowed each auriferous bovine,
An' panned the grass-roots on their trail, yet nivver gold they seen.

An' all that season, secret-like, they worked an' nothin' found;
An' there was colours in the milk, but none was in the ground.
An' mighty desperate was they, an' down upon their luck,
When sudden, inspirationlike, the source of it they struck.
An' where d'ye think they traced it to? it grieves my heart to tell --
In the black sand at the bottom of that wicked milkman's well.

Robert William Service

The Cremation Of Sam McGee

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee, where the cotton blooms and blows.
Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the Pole, God only knows.
He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;
Though he'd often say in his homely way that he'd "sooner live in hell".

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way over the Dawson trail.
Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed like a driven nail.
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze till sometimes we couldn't see;
It wasn't much fun, but the only one to whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight in our robes beneath the snow,
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe,
He turned to me, and "Cap," says he, "I'll cash in this trip, I guess;
And if I do, I'm asking that you won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a sort of moan:
"It's the cursed cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through to the
bone.
Yet 'tain't being dead -- it's my awful dread of the icy grave that pains;
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would not fail;
And we started on at the streak of dawn; but God! he looked ghastly pale.
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his home in Tennessee;
And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death, and I hurried, horror-driven,
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid, because of a promise given;
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say:
"You may tax your brawn and brains,

But you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid, and the trail has its own stern code.
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load.

In the long, long night, by the lone firelight, while the huskies, round in a ring,
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows -- O God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay seemed to heavy and heavier grow;
And on I went, though the dogs were spent and the grub was getting low;
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad, but I swore I would not give in;
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing, and it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge, and a derelict there lay;
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was called the "Alice May".
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at my frozen chum;
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry, "is my cre-ma-tor-eum."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared -- such a blaze you seldom see;
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like to hear him sizzle so;
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled, and the wind began to blow.
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled down my cheeks, and I don't know why;
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow I wrestled with grisly fear;
But the stars came out and they danced about ere again I ventured near;
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said: "I'll just take a peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"; . . . then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart of the furnace roar;
And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he said: "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm --
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first time I've been warm."

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who moil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;

The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.

Robert William Service

The Cuckoo

No lyric line I ever penned
The praise this parasitic bird;
And what is more, I don't intend
To write a laudatory word,
Since in my garden robins made
A nest with eggs of dainty spot,
And then a callous cuckoo laid
 A lone on on the lot.

Of course the sillies hatched it out
Along with their two tiny chicks,
And there it threw its weight about,
But with the others would not mix.
In fact, it seemed their guts to hate,
And crossly kicked them to the ground,
So that next morning, sorry fate!
 Two babes stone dead I found.

These stupid robins, how they strove
To gluttonize that young cuckoo!
And like a prodigy it throve,
And daily greedier it grew.
How it would snap and glup and spit!
Till finally it came to pass,
Growing too big the nest to fit,
 It fell out on the grass.

So for a week they fed it there,
As in a nook of turf it lay;
But it was scornful of their care,
for it was twice as big as they.
When lo! one afternoon I heard
A flutelike call: Cuckoo! Cuckoo!
Then suddenly that folsome bird
 Flapped to its feet and flew.

I'm sure it never said goodbye
To its fond foster Pa and Ma,
Though to their desolated sigh

It might have chirruped: "Au revoir."
But no, it went in wanton mood,
Flying the coop for climates new
And so I say: "Ingratitude,
 They name's Cuckoo."

Robert William Service

The Damned

My days are haunted by the thought
Of men in coils of Justice caught
With stone and steel, in chain and cell,
Of men condemned to living hell,--
 Yet blame them not.

In my sun-joy their dark I see:
For what they are and had to be
Blame Nature, red in tooth and claw,
Blame laws beyond all human law,
 --Blame Destiny.

Behind blind walls I see them go,
Grim spectres of eternal woe,
Drained grey of hope, dead souls of self-slain,--
And yet I know with pang of pain
 It must be so.

I know that brother's blood they've spilt,
And sons of Cain must pay their guilt;
I know the deviltries that stem
From dark abyss we must condemn;
I know that but for heaven's grace
We might be rotting in their place:
 --God pity them!

Robert William Service

The Dauber

In stilly grove beside the sea
He mingles colours, measures space;
A bronze and breezy man is he,
 Yet peace is in his face.
Behold him stand and longly stare,
Till deft of hand and deep of eye
He captures on a canvas square
 The joy of earth and sky.

Aloof from servitude and strife,
From carking care and greed apart,
Beneath the blue he lives his life
 Of Nature and of Art.
He grieves his pictures must be sold,
Aye, even when his funds are low,
And fat men pay a purse of gold
 He sighs to see them go.

My loving toil is of the pen,
Yet while my verse is not unread,
His pictures will be living when
 My tropes are dim and dead.
God gives us talents great and small,
And though my rhymes I'll never rue,
Sometimes I wish that after all
 I were a dauber too.

Robert William Service

The Death Of Marie Toro

We're taking Marie Toro to her home in Père-La-Chaise;
We're taking Marie Toro to her last resting-place.
Behold! her hearse is hung with wreaths till everything is hid
Except the blossoms heaping high upon her coffin lid.
A week ago she roamed the street, a drabble and a slut,
A by-word of the Boulevard and everybody's butt;
A week ago she haunted us, we heard her whining cry,
We brushed aside the broken blooms she pestered us to buy;
A week ago she had not where to rest her weary head . . .
But now, oh, follow, follow on, for Marie Toro's dead.

Oh Marie, she was once a queen -- ah yes, a queen of queens.
High-throned above the Carnival she held her splendid sway.
For four-and-twenty crashing hours she knew what glory means,
The cheers of half a million throats, the dêre of a day.
Yet she was only one of us, a little sewing-girl,
Though far the loveliest and best of all our laughing band;
Then Fortune beckoned; off she danced, amid the dizzy whirl,
And we who once might kiss her cheek were proud to kiss her hand.
For swiftly as a star she soared; she had her every wish;
We saw her roped with pearls of price, with princes at her call;
And yet, and yet I think her dreams were of the old Boul' Mich',

And yet I'm sure within her heart she loved us best of all.
For one night in the Purple Pig, upon the rue Saint-Jacques,
We laughed and quaffed . . . a limousine came swishing to the door;
Then Raymond Jolicoeur cried out: "It's Queen Marie come back,
In satin clad to make us glad, and witch our hearts once more."
But no, her face was strangely sad, and at the evening's end:
"Dear lads," she said; "I love you all, and when I'm far away,
Remember, oh, remember, little Marie is your friend,
And though the world may lie between, I'm coming back some day."
And so she went, and many a boy who's fought his way to Fame,
Can look back on the struggle of his garret days and bless
The loyal heart, the tender hand, the Providence that came
To him and all in hour of need, in sickness and distress.
Time passed away. She won their hearts in London, Moscow, Rome;
They worshiped her in Argentine, adored her in Brazil;
We smoked our pipes and wondered when she might be coming home,

And then we learned the luck had turned, the things were going ill.
Her health had failed, her beauty paled, her lovers fled away;
And some one saw her in Peru, a common drab at last.
So years went by, and faces changed; our beards were sadly gray,
And Marie Toro's name became an echo of the past.

You know that old and withered man, that derelict of art,
Who for a paltry franc will make a crayon sketch of you?
In slouching hat and shabby cloak he looks and is the part,
A sodden old Bohemian, without a single sou.
A boon companion of the days of Rimbaud and Verlaine,
He broods and broods, and chews the cud of bitter souvenirs;
Beneath his mop of grizzled hair his cheeks are gouged with pain,
The saffron sockets of his eyes are hollowed out with tears.
Well, one night in the D'Harcourt's din I saw him in his place,
When suddenly the door was swung, a woman halted there;
A woman cowering like a dog, with white and haggard face,
A broken creature, bent of spine, a daughter of Despair.
She looked and looked, as to her breast she held some withered bloom;
"Too late! Too late! . . . they all are dead and gone," I heard her say.
And once again her weary eyes went round and round the room;
"Not one of all I used to know . . ." she turned to go away . . .
But quick I saw the old man start: "Ah no!" he cried, "not all.
Oh Marie Toro, queen of queens, don't you remember Paul?"

"Oh Marie, Marie Toro, in my garret next the sky,
Where many a day and night I've crouched with not a crust to eat,
A picture hangs upon the wall a fortune couldn't buy,
A portrait of a girl whose face is pure and angel-sweet."
Sadly the woman looked at him: "Alas! it's true," she said;
"That little maid, I knew her once. It's long ago -- she's dead."
He went to her; he laid his hand upon her wasted arm:
"Oh, Marie Toro, come with me, though poor and sick am I.
For old times' sake I cannot bear to see you come to harm;
Ah! there are memories, God knows, that never, never die. . . ."
"Too late!" she sighed; "I've lived my life of splendor and of shame;
I've been adored by men of power, I've touched the highest height;
I've squandered gold like heaps of dirt -- oh, I have played the game;
I've had my place within the sun . . . and now I face the night.
Look! look! you see I'm lost to hope; I live no matter how . . .
To drink and drink and so forget . . . that's all I care for now."

And so she went her heedless way, and all our help was vain.
She trailed along with tattered shawl and mud-corroded skirt;
She gnawed a crust and slept beneath the bridges of the Seine,
A garbage thing, a composite of alcohol and dirt.
The students learned her story and the cafes knew her well,
The Pascal and the Pantheon, the Sufflot and Vachette;
She shuffled round the tables with the flowers she tried to sell,
A living mask of misery that no one will forget.

And then last week I missed her, and they found her in the street
One morning early, huddled down, for it was freezing cold;
But when they raised her ragged shawl her face was still and sweet;
Some bits of broken bloom were clutched within her icy hold.
That's all. . . . Ah yes, they say that saw: her blue, wide-open eyes
Were beautiful with joy again, with radiant surprise. . . .

A week ago she begged for bread; we've bought for her a stone,
And a peaceful place in Pere-Lachaise where she'll be well alone.
She cost a king his crown, they say; oh, wouldn't she be proud
If she could see the wreaths to-day, the coaches and the crowd!
So follow, follow, follow on with slow and sober tread,
For Marie Toro, gutter waif and queen of queens, is dead.

Robert William Service

The Decision

Said she: 'Although my husband Jim
Is with his home content,
I never should have married him,
We are so different.
Oh yes, I know he loves me well,
Our children he adores;
But he's so dull, and I rebel
Against a life that bores.

'Of course there is another man,
Quite pennyless is he;
And yet with hope and joy we plan
A home beyond the sea.
Though I forfeit the name of wife
And neighbours ostracise,
Such happiness will crown our life
Their censure we'll despise.

'But then what will my children think,
Whose love is pure and true?'
Said I: 'Your memory will stink
If they should speak of you.
Your doting Jim will curse your name,
And if you make a mess
Of life, oh do not in your shame
Dare hope for happiness.'

Well, still with Jim she lives serene,
And has of kiddies three.
'Oh what a fool I might have been
To leave my home,' says she.
'Of course Jim is a priceless bore,
But he's so sweet to me . . .
Come darling won't you let me pour
Another cup of tea?'

Robert William Service

The Defeated

Think not because you raise
 A gleaming sword,
That you will win to praise
 Before the Lord.

And though men hail you great
 Unto the skies,
Deem not 'twill ope' the gate
 Of Paradise.

Though you have gold and gear
 And fame and power,
What odds when you draw near
 The Judgement Hour?

But if in bloody dust
 Yet unafraid
You battle for the Just
 With broken blade--

Then will the Lord look down
 With eyes of love,
And you shall win a Crown
 All price above.

Robert William Service

The Dream

Said Will: "I'll stay and till the land."

Said Jack: "I'll sail the sea."

So one went forth kit-bag in hand,
The other ploughed the lea.

They met again at Christmas-tide,
And wistful were the two.

Said Jack: "you're lucky here to bide."

Said Will: "I envy you."

"For in your eyes a light I see
Of tropic shores a gleam."

Said Jack: "You need not envy me,
For still you have the Dream.

"The Dream that lured me out to sea;
'Twas bright as paradise;
Far fairer than the memory
You see within my eyes.

So if my foolish urge you share
In foreign lands to roam,
Take up my kit-bag waiting there
And I will stay at home."

* * * * *

Yet while the years have fated Will
To sow the sober loam,
The eyes of Jack are starry still,
High-riding hills of foam.

Robert William Service

The Dreamer

The lone man gazed and gazed upon his gold,
His sweat, his blood, the wage of weary days;
But now how sweet, how doubly sweet to hold
All gay and gleamy to the campfire blaze.
The evening sky was sinister and cold;
The willows shivered, wanly lay the snow;
The uncommiserating land, so old,
So worn, so grey, so niggard in its woe,
Peered through its ragged shroud. The lone man sighed,
Poured back the gaudy dust into its poke,
Gazed at the seething river listless-eyed,
Loaded his corn-cob pipe as if to smoke;
Then crushed with weariness and hardship crept
Into his ragged robe, and swiftly slept.

.

Hour after hour went by; a shadow slipped
From vasts of shadow to the camp-fire flame;
Gripping a rifle with a deadly aim,
A gaunt and hairy man with wolfish eyes . . .

* * * * *

The sleeper dreamed, and lo! this was his dream:
He rode a streaming horse across a moor.
Sudden 'mid pit-black night a lightning gleam
Showed him a way-side inn, forlorn and poor.
A sullen host unbarred the creaking door,
And led him to a dim and dreary room;
Wherein he sat and poked the fire a-roar,
So that weird shadows jiggled athwart the gloom.
He ordered wine. 'Od's blood! but he was tired.
What matter! Charles was crushed and George was King;
His party high in power; how he aspired!
Red guineas packed his purse, too tight to ring.
The fire-light gleamed upon his silken hose,
His silver buckles and his powdered wig.
What ho! more wine! He drank, he slowly rose.

What made the shadows dance that madcap jig?
He clutched the candle, steered his way to bed,
And in a trice was sleeping like the dead.

.

Across the room there crept, so shadow soft,
His sullen host, with naked knife a-gleam,
(A gaunt and hairy man with wolfish eyes.) . . .
And as he lay, the sleeper dreamed a dream.

* * * * *

'Twas in a ruder land, a wilder day.
A rival princeling sat upon his throne,
Within a dungeon, dark and foul he lay,
With chains that bit and festered to the bone.
They haled him harshly to a vaulted room,
Where One gazed on him with malignant eye;
And in that devil-face he read his doom,
Knowing that ere the dawn-light he must die.
Well, he was sorrow-glutted; let them bring
Their prize assassins to the bloody work.
His kingdom lost, yet would he die a King,
Fearless and proud, as when he faced the Turk.
Ah God! the glory of that great Crusade!
The bannered pomp, the gleam, the splendid urge!
The crash of reeking combat, blade to blade!
The reeling ranks, blood-avid and a-surge!
For long he thought; then feeling o'er him creep
Vast weariness, he fell into a sleep.

.

The cell door opened; soft the headsman came,
Within his hand a mighty axe a-gleam,
(A gaunt and hairy man with wolfish eyes,) . . .
And as he lay, the sleeper dreamed a dream.

* * * * *

'Twas in a land unkempt of life's red dawn;

Where in his sanded cave he dwelt alone;
Sleeping by day, or sometimes worked upon
His flint-head arrows and his knives of stone;
By night stole forth and slew the savage boar,
So that he loomed a hunter of loud fame,
And many a skin of wolf and wild-cat wore,
And counted many a flint-head to his name;
Wherefore he walked the envy of the band,
Hated and feared, but matchless in his skill.
Till lo! one night deep in that shaggy land,
He tracked a yearling bear and made his kill;
Then over-worn he rested by a stream,
And sank into a sleep too deep for dream.

.

Hunting his food a rival caveman crept
Through those dark woods, and marked him where he lay;
Cowered and crawled upon him as he slept,
Poising a mighty stone aloft to slay --
(A gaunt and hairy man with wolfish eyes.) . . .

* * * * *

The great stone crashed. The Dreamer shrieked and woke,
And saw, fear-blinded, in his dripping cell,
A gaunt and hairy man, who with one stroke
Swung a great ax of steel that flashed and fell . . .
So that he woke amid his bedroom gloom,
And saw, hair-poised, a naked, thirsting knife,
A gaunt and hairy man with eyes of doom --
And then the blade plunged down to drink his life . . .
So that he woke, wrenched back his robe, and looked,
And saw beside his dying fire upstart
A gaunt and hairy man with finger crooked --
A rifle rang, a bullet searched his heart . . .

* * * * *

The morning sky was sinister and cold.
Grotesque the Dreamer sprawled, and did not rise.
For long and long there gazed upon some gold

A gaunt and hairy man with wolfish eyes.

Robert William Service

The Duel

In Pat Mahoney's booze bazaar the fun was fast and free,
And Ragtime Billy spanked the baby grand;
While caroling a saucy song was Montreal Maree,
With sozzled sourdoughs giving her a hand.
When suddenly erupting in the gay and gilded hall,
A stranger draped himself upon the bar;
As in a voice like bedrock grit he hollered: "Drinks for all,"
And casually lit a long cigar.

He bore a battered stetson on the grizzle of his dome,
And a bunch of inky whiskers on his jaw;
The suddenly I knew the guy - 'twas Black Moran from Nome.
A guinney like greased lightening on the draw.
But no one got his number in that wild and wooly throng,
As they hailed his invitation with eclaw,
And they crowded round the stranger, but I knew something was wrong.
When in there stomped the Sheriff, Red McGraw.

Now Red McGraw from Arkansaw was noted for his spunk;
He had a dozen notches on his gun;
And whether he was sober or whether he was drunk,
He kept the lousy outlaws on the run.
So now he shouts: "Say, boys, there's been a hold-up Hunker Way,
And by this poke I'm throwin' on the bar,
I bet I'll get the bastard braced before another day,
Or send him where a dozen others are."

He banged the bag of gold-dust on the bar for all to see,
When in a lazy drawl the stranger spoke:
"As I'm the man you're lookin' for an feelin' mighty free,
I reckon, Sheriff, I'll jest take yer poke.
It's pleasant meetin' you like this, an' talkin' man to man,
For all the North had heard o' Ref McGraw.
I'm glad to make ye eat yer words, since I am Black Moran,
An' no man livin' beats me on the draw."

And as they boldly bellied, each man's hand was on his rod,
Yet at that dreaded name the Sheriff knew
A single fumbling movement and he'd go to meet his God,

The which he had no great desire to do.
So there they stood like carven wood and hushed was every breath,
We watched them glaring, staring eye to eye;
But neither drew, for either knew a second split meant death -
And so a minute . . . two . . . three three went by.

The sweat pricked on the Sheriff's brow as suddenly he broke
And limp and weak he wilted to the floor;
And then the stranger's hand shot out and grabbed the heavy poke
As jeeringly he backed up to the door.
"Say, folks," he cried, "I'm off downstream; no more of me you'll see,
But let me state the job was pretty raw. . . .
The guy that staged the robbery he thought to pin on me
Was your bastard Sheriff, Red McGraw."

Robert William Service

The End Of The Trail

Life, you've been mighty good to me,
Yet here's the end of the trail;
No more mountain, moor and sea,
No more saddle and sail.
Waves a-leap in the laughing sun
Call to me as of yore. . . .
Alas! my errant days are done:
I'll rove no more, no more.

Life, you've cheered me all the way;
You've been my bosom friend;
But gayest dog will have his day,
And biggest binge must end.
Shorebound I watch and see afar
A wistful isle grow wan,
While over is a last lone star
Dims out in lilac dawn.

Life, you've been wonderful to me,
But fleetest foot must fail;
The hour must come when all will see
The last lap of the trail.
Yet holding in my heart a hymn
Of praise for gladness gone,
Serene I wait my star to dim
In the glow of the Greater Dawn.

Robert William Service

The Enigma

The Sergeant of a Highland Reg-
-iment was drilling of his men;
With temper notably on edge
He blest them every now and then.
A sweet old lady standing by,
Was looking on with fascination,
And then she dared this question shy,
That pertubates the Celtic nation.

"Oh gentle Sergeant do not scold;
Please tell me, though your tone so curt is:
These bare-legged boys look sadly cold -
Do they wear wool beneath their skirties?
The Sergeant's face grew lobster red,
As one who sends a bloke to blazes . . .
Then: "round about turn, squad," he said;
"Now blast you! bend and pick up daises."

Robert William Service

Then to the station quietly we walked;
I had my rifle and my haversack,
My heavy boots, my blankets on my back;
And though it hurt us, cheerfully we talked.
We chatted bravely at the platform gate.
I watched the clock. My train must go at eight.
One minute to the hour . . . we kissed good-by,
Then, oh, they both broke down, with piteous cry.
I went. . . . Their way was barred; they could not pass.
I looked back as the train began to start;
Once more I ran with anguish at my heart
And through the bars I kissed my little lass. . . .

Three years have gone; they've waited day by day.
I never came. I did not even write.
For when I saw my face was such a sight
I thought that I had better . . . stay away.
And so I took the name of one who died,
A friendless friend who perished by my side.
In Prussian prison camps three years of hell
I kept my secret; oh, I kept it well!
And now I'm free, but none shall ever know;
They think I died out there . . . it's better so.

To-day I passed my wife in widow's weeds.
I brushed her arm. She did not even look.
So white, so pinched her face, my heart still bleeds,
And at the touch of her, oh, how I shook!
And then last night I passed the window where
They sat together; I could see them clear,
The lamplight softly gleaming on their hair,
And all the room so full of cozy cheer.
My wife was sewing, while my daughter read;
I even saw my portrait on the wall.
I wanted to rush in, to tell them all;
And then I cursed myself: "You're dead, you're dead!"
God! how I watched them from the darkness there,
Clutching the dripping branches of a tree,
Peering as close as ever I might dare,
And sobbing, sobbing, oh, so bitterly!

But no, it's folly; and I mustn't stay.
To-morrow I am going far away.
I'll find a ship and sail before the mast;
In some wild land I'll bury all the past.
I'll live on lonely shores and there forget,
Or tell myself that there has never been
The gay and tender courage of Lucette,
The little loving arms of Jacqueline.

A man lonely upon a lonely isle,
Sometimes I'll look towards the North and smile
To think they're happy, and they both believe
I died for France, and that I lie at rest;
And for my glory's sake they've ceased to grieve,
And hold my memory sacred. Ah! that's best.
And in that thought I'll find my joy and peace
As there alone I wait the Last Release.

Robert William Service

The Farmer's Daughter

The Rector met a little lass
Who led a heifer by a rope.
Said he: "Why don't you go to Mass?
Do you not want to please the Pope?"

The village maiden made reply,
As on the rope she ceased to pull:
"My father said this morning I
Must take Paquette to see the bull."

The Rector frowned. ";Tis wrong, I wist
To leave your prayer-book on the shelf.
Your father has a stronger wrist;
Why can't he do the job himself?"

Then lovely in her innocence,
With gaze as pure as meadow pool,
The maid spoke in her sire's defense:
"But Daddy, please your Reverence,
Would rather leave it to the bull."

Robert William Service

The Flower Shop

Because I have no garden and
 No pence to buy,
Before the flower shop I stand
 And sigh.
The beauty of the Springtide spills
 In glowing posies
Of violets and daffodils
 And roses.

And as I see that joy of bloom,
 Sad sighing,
I think of Mother in her room,
 Lone lying.
She babbles of the garden fair
 Her childhood knew,
And how she gathered roses there
 In joyous dew.

I shiver in the street so grey,
 Yet still I stop;
In gutter grime it seems so gay,
 This flower shop...
'Oh Mister, could you spare one rose? '
 (There now, I'm crying) ,
'For Mother,- every blossom knows
 - Is dying.'

Robert William Service

The Fool

"But it isn't playing the game," he said,
And he slammed his books away;
"The Latin and Greek I've got in my head
Will do for a duller day."
"Rubbish!" I cried; "The bugle's call
Isn't for lads from school."
D'ye think he'd listen? Oh, not at all:
So I called him a fool, a fool.

Now there's his dog by his empty bed,
And the flute he used to play,
And his favourite bat . . . but Dick he's dead,
Somewhere in France, they say:
Dick with his rapture of song and sun,
Dick of the yellow hair,
Dicky whose life had but begun,
Carrion-cold out there.

Look at his prizes all in a row:
Surely a hint of fame.
Now he's finished with, -- nothing to show:
Doesn't it seem a shame?
Look from the window! All you see
Was to be his one day:
Forest and furrow, lawn and lea,
And he goes and chucks it away.

Chucks it away to die in the dark:
Somebody saw him fall,
Part of him mud, part of him blood,
The rest of him -- not at all.
And yet I'll bet he was never afraid,
And he went as the best of 'em go,
For his hand was clenched on his broken blade,
And his face was turned to the foe.

And I called him a fool . . . oh how blind was I!
And the cup of my grief's abrim.
Will Glory o' England ever die

So long as we've lads like him?
So long as we've fond and fearless fools,
Who, spurning fortune and fame,
Turn out with the rallying cry of their schools,
Just bent on playing the game.

A fool! Ah no! He was more than wise.
His was the proudest part.
He died with the glory of faith in his eyes,
And the glory of love in his heart.
And though there's never a grave to tell,
Nor a cross to mark his fall,
Thank God! we know that he "batted well"
In the last great Game of all.

Robert William Service

The Front Tooth

A-sittin' in the Bull and Pump
With double gins to keep us cheery
Says she to me, says Polly Crump"
"What makes ye look so sweet. me dearie?
As if ye'd gotten back yer youth"
Says I: "It's just me new front tooth."

Says Polly Crump: "A gummy grin
Don't help to make one's business active;
We gels wot gains our bread by sin
Have got to make ourselves attractive.
I hope yer dentist was no rook?"
Says I: "A quid is what he took."

Says Polly Crump: "The shoes you wear
Are down at heel and need new soleing;
Why doncher buy a better pair?
The rain goes in and out the holeing.
They're squelchin' as ye walk yer beat. . . ."
Says I: "blokes don't look at me feet."

Says Polly Crump: "You cough all day;
It just don't do in our profession;
A girl's got to be pert and gay
To give a guy a good impression;
For if ye cough he's shy of you. . . ."
Says I: "An' wots a gel to do?"

Says Polly Crump: "I'm pink an' fat,
But you are bones an' pale as plaster;
At this dam' rate you're goin' at
You'll never live to be a laster.
You'll have the daisy roots for door. . . ."
Says I: "It's 'ell to be a 'ore."

"But I don't care now I can smile,
Smile, smile and not that gap-toothed grinning;
I'm wet and cold, but it's worth while
To once again look fairly winning.

And send ten bob or so to Mother. . . ."
Said Polly Crump: "Gwad! Have another?"

Robert William Service

The Ghosts

Said Lenin's ghost to Stalin's ghost:

"Mate with me in the Tomb;

Then day by day the rancid host

May gaze upon our doom.

A crystal casket we will share;

Come, crusty Comrade come,

And we will bear the public stare,

Ad nauseum."

Said Stalin's spook to Lenin's spook:

"Long have you held your place.

The masses must be bored to look

Upon your chemic face.

A change might be a good idear,

And though I pity you,

There is within the Tomb, I fear,

No room for two."

Said Lenin's wraith to Stalin's wraith:

"You're welcome to my job;

Let millions of our mighty faith

Gaze on your noble nob.

So when to goodly earth I've gone,

(And I'll be glad to go),

Your carrion can carry on

Our waxwork show."

Robert William Service

The Goat And I

Each sunny day upon my way
 A goat I pass;
He has a beard of silver grey,
 A bell of brass.
And all the while I am in sight
 He seems to muse,
And stares at me with all his might
 And chews and chews.

Upon the hill so thymy sweet
 With joy of Spring,
He hails me with a tiny bleat
 Of welcoming.
Though half the globe is drenched with blood
 And cities flare,
Contentedly he chews the cud
 And does not care.

Oh gentle friend, I know not what
 Your age may be,
But of my years I'd give the lot
 Yet left to me,
To chew a thistle and not choke,
 But bright of eye
Gaze at the old world-weary bloke
 Who hobbles by.

Alas! though bards make verse sublime,
 And lines to quote,
It takes a fool like me to rhyme
 About a goat.

Robert William Service

The God Of Common-Sense

My Daddy used to wallop me for every small offense:
"Its takes a hair-brush back," said he, "to teach kids common-sense."
And still to-day I scarce can look a hair-brush in the face.
Without I want in sympathy to pat a tender place.
For Dad declared with unction: "Spare the brush and spoil the brat."
The dear old man! What e'er his faults he never did do that;
And though a score of years have gone since he departed hence,
I still revere his deity, The God of Common-sense.

How often I have played the ass (Man's universal fate),
Yet always I have saved myself before it was too late;
How often tangled with a dame - you know how these things are,
Yet always had the gumption not to carry on too far;
Remembering that fancy skirts, however high they go,
Are not to be stacked up against a bunch of hard-earned dough;
And sentiment has little weight compared with pounds and pence,
According to the gospel of the God of Common-sense.

Oh blessing on that old hair-brush my Daddy used to whack
With such benign precision on the basement of my back.
Oh blessings on his wisdom, saying: "Son, don't play the fool,
Let prudence be your counselor and reason be your rule.
Don't get romantic notions, always act with judgment calm,
Poetical emotions ain't in practice worth a damn/
let solid comfort be your goal, self-interest your guide. . . ."
Then just as if to emphasize, whack! whack! the brush he plied.
And so I often wonder if my luck is Providence,
or just my humble tribute to the God of Common-sense.

Robert William Service

The Gramophone At Fond-Du-Lac

Now Eddie Malone got a swell grammyfone to draw all the trade to his store;
An' sez he: "Come along for a season of song, which the like ye had niver
before."

Then Dogrib, an' Slave, an' Yellow-knife brave, an' Cree in his dinky canoe,
Confluated near, to see an' to hear Ed's grammyfone make its dayboo.

Then Ed turned the crank, an' there on the bank they squatted like bumps on a
log.

For acres around there wasn't a sound, not even the howl of a dog.
When out of the horn there sudden was born such a marvellous elegant tone;
An' then like a spell on that auddyence fell the voice of its first grammyfone.

"Bad medicine!" cried Old Tom, the One-eyed, an' made for to jump in the lake;
But no one gave heed to his little stampede, so he guessed he had made a
mistake.

Then Roll-in-the-Mud, a chief of the blood, observed in choice Chippewayan:
"You've brought us canned beef, an' it's now my belief that this here's a case of
canned man."

Well, though I'm not strong on the Dago in song, that sure got me goin' for fair.
There was Crusoe an' Scotty, an' Ma'am Shoeman Hank, an' Melber an' Bonchy
was there.

'Twas silver an' gold, an' sweetness untold to hear all them big guinneys sing;
An' thick all around an' inhalin' the sound, them Indians formed in a ring.

So solemn they sat, an' they smoked an' they spat, but their eyes sort o'
glistened an' shone;
Yet niver a word of approvin' occurred till that guy Harry Lauder came on.
Then hunter of moose, an' squaw an' papoose jest laughed till their stummicks
was sore;
Six times Eddie set back that record an' yet they hollered an' hollered for more.

I'll never forget that frame-up, you bet; them caverns of sunset agleam;
Them still peaks aglow, them shadders below, an' the lake like a petrified dream;
The teepees that stood by the edge of the wood; the evenin' star blinkin' alone;
The peace an' the rest, an' final an' best, the music of Ed's grammyfone.

Then sudden an' clear there rang on my ear a song mighty simple an' old;
Heart-hungry an' high it thrilled to the sky, all about "silver threads in the gold".

'Twas tender to tears, an' it brung back the years, the mem'ries that hallow an'
yearn;
'Twas home-love an' joy, 'twas the thought of my boy . . . an' right there I vowed
I'd return.

Big Four-finger Jack was right at my back, an' I saw with a kind o' surprise,
He gazed at the lake with a heartful of ache, an' the tears irrigated his eyes.
An' sez he: "Cuss me, pard! but that there hits me hard; I've a mother does
nuthin' but wait.

She's turned eighty-three, an' she's only got me, an' I'm scared it'll soon be too
late."

* * * * *

On Fond-du-lac's shore I'm hearin' once more that blessed old grammyfone play.
The summer's all gone, an' I'm still livin' on in the same old haphazardous way.
Oh, I cut out the booze, an' with muscles an' thews I corralled all the coin to go
back;
But it wasn't to be: he'd a mother, you see, so I -- sliped it to Four-finger Jack.

Robert William Service

The Great Recall

I've wearied of so many things
Adored in youthful days;
Music no more my spirit wings,
E'en when Master play.
For stage and screen I have no heart,
Great paintings leave me cold;
Alas! I've lost the love of Art
That raptured me of old.

Only my love of books is left,
Yet that begins to pall;
And if of it I am bereft,
I'll read no more at all.
Then when I am too frail to walk
I'll sit out in the sun,
And there with Nature I will talk . . .
Last friend and dearest one.

For Nature's all in all to me;
My other loves are vain;
Her bosom brought me forth and she
Will take me back again.
So I will let her have her way,
For I've a feeling odd,
Whatever wiser men may say,
That she herself is GOD.

Robert William Service

The Haggis Of Private Mcphee

"Hae ye heard whit ma auld mither's postit tae me?
It fair maks me hamesick," says Private McPhee.
"And whit did she send ye?" says Private McPhun,
As he cockit his rifle and bleezed at a Hun.
"A haggis! A Haggis!" says Private McPhee;
"The brawest big haggis I ever did see.
And think! it's the morn when fond memory turns
Tae haggis and whuskey--the Birthday o' Burns.
We maun find a dram; then we'll ca' in the rest
O' the lads, and we'll hae a Burns' Nicht wi' the best."

"Be ready at sundoon," snapped Sergeant McCole;
"I want you two men for the List'nin' Patrol."
Then Private McPhee looked at Private McPhun:
"I'm thinkin', ma lad, we're confoundedly done."
Then Private McPhun looked at Private McPhee:
"I'm thinkin' auld chap, it's a' aff wi' oor spree."
But up spoke their crony, wee Wullie McNair:
"Jist lea' yer braw haggis for me tae prepare;
And as for the dram, if I search the camp roun',
We maun hae a drappie tae jist haud it doon.
Sae rin, lads, and think, though the nicht it be black,
O' the haggis that's waitin' ye when ye get back."

My! but it wis waesome on Naebuddy's Land,
And the deid they were rottin' on every hand.
And the rockets like corpse candles hauntit the sky,
And the winds o' destruction went shudderin' by.
There wis skelpin' o' bullets and skirlin' o' shells,
And breengin' o' bombs and a thousand death-knells;
But cooryin' doon in a Jack Johnson hole
Little fashed the twa men o' the List'nin' Patrol.
For sweeter than honey and bricht as a gem
Wis the thocht o' the haggis that waitit for them.

Yet alas! in oor moments o' sunniest cheer
Calamity's aften maist cruelly near.
And while the twa talked o' their puddin' divine
The Boches below them were howkin' a mine.

And while the twa cracked o' the feast they would hae,
The fuse it wis burnin' and burnin' away.
Then sudden a roar like the thunner o' doom,
A hell-leap o' flame . . . then the wheesht o' the tomb.

"Haw, Jock! Are ye hurtit?" says Private McPhun.
"Ay, Geordie, they've got me; I'm fearin' I'm done.
It's ma leg; I'm jist thinkin' it's aff at the knee;
Ye'd best gang and leave me," says Private McPhee.
"Oh leave ye I wanna," says Private McPhun;
"And leave ye I canna, for though I micht run,
It's no faur I wud gang, it's no muckle I'd see:
I'm blindit, and that's whit's the maitter wi' me."
Then Private McPhee sadly shakit his heid:
"If we bide here for lang, we'll be bidin' for deid.
And yet, Geordie lad, I could gang weel content
If I'd tasted that haggis ma auld mither sent."
"That's droll," says McPhun; "ye've jist speakit ma mind.
Oh I ken it's a terrible thing tae be blind;
And yet it's no that that embitters ma lot--
It's missin' that braw muckle haggis ye've got."
For a while they were silent; then up once again
Spoke Private McPhee, though he whussilt wi' pain:
"And why should we miss it? Between you and me
We've legs for tae run, and we've eyes for tae see.
You lend me your shanks and I'll lend you ma sicht,
And we'll baith hae a kyte-fu' o' haggis the nicht."

Oh the sky it wis dourlike and dreepin' a wee,
When Private McPhun gruppit Private McPhee.
Oh the glaur it wis fylin' and crieshin' the grun',
When Private McPhee guidit Private McPhun.
"Keep clear o' them corpses--they're maybe no deid!
Haud on! There's a big muckle crater ahead.
Look oot! There's a sap; we'll be haein' a coup.
A staur-shell! For Godsake! Doun, lad, on yer daup.
Bear aff tae yer richt. . . . Aw yer jist daein' fine:
Before the nicht's feenished on haggis we'll dine."

There wis death and destruction on every hand;
There wis havoc and horror on Naebuddy's Land.
And the shells bickered doun wi' a crump and a glare,

And the hameless wee bullets were dingin' the air.
Yet on they went staggerin', cooryin' doun
When the stutter and cluck o' a Maxim crept roun'.
And the legs o' McPhun they were sturdy and stoot,
And McPhee on his back kept a bonnie look-oot.
"On, on, ma brave lad! We're no faur frae the goal;
I can hear the braw sweerin' o' Sergeant McCole."

But strength has its leemit, and Private McPhun,
Wi' a sab and a curse fell his length on the grun'.
Then Private McPhee shoutit doon in his ear:
"Jist think o' the haggis! I smell it from here.
It's gushin' wi' juice, it's embaumin' the air;
It's steamin' for us, and we're--jist--aboot--there."
Then Private McPhun answers: "Dommit, auld chap!
For the sake o' that haggis I'll gang till I drap."
And he gets on his feet wi' a heave and a strain,
And onward he staggers in passion and pain.
And the flare and the glare and the fury increase,
Till you'd think they'd jist taken a' hell on a lease.
And on they go reelin' in peetifu' plight,
And someone is shoutin' away on their right;
And someone is runnin', and noo they can hear
A sound like a prayer and a sound like a cheer;
And swift through the crash and the flash and the din,
The lads o' the Hielands are bringin' them in.

"They're baith sairly woundit, but is it no droll
Hoo they rave aboot haggis?" says Sergeant McCole.
When hirplin alang comes wee Wullie McNair,
And they a' wonnert why he wis greetin' sae sair.
And he says: "I'd jist liftit it oot o' the pot,
And there it lay steamin' and savoury hot,
When sudden I dooked at the fleech o' a shell,
And it--dropped on the haggis and dinged it tae hell."

And oh but the lads were fair taken aback;
Then sudden the order wis passed tae attack,
And up from the trenches like lions they leapt,
And on through the nicht like a torrent they swept.
On, on, wi' their bayonets thirstin' before!
On, on tae the foe wi' a rush and a roar!

And wild to the welkin their battle-cry rang,
And doon on the Boches like tigers they sprang:
And there wisna a man but had death in his ee,
For he thocht o' the haggis o' Private McPhee.

Robert William Service

The Hand

Throughout my life I see
A guiding hand;
The pitfalls set for me
Were grimly planned.
But always when and where
They opened wide,
Someone who seemed to care
Stood by my side.

When up the pathway dark
I stumbled on,
Afar, ahead a spark
Of guidance shone.
When forked the tragic trail
And sad my plight,
My guardian without fail
Would lead me right.

How merciful a Mind
my life has planned!
Aye, though mine eyes were blind
I touched the Hand;
Though weary ways and wan
My feet have trod,
Always it led me on,
Starways to God.

Robert William Service

The Harpy

There was a woman, and she was wise; woefully wise was she;
She was old, so old, yet her years all told were but a score and three;
And she knew by heart, from finish to start, the Book of Iniquity.

There is no hope for such as I on earth, nor yet in Heaven;
Unloved I live, unloved I die, unpitied, unforgiven;
A loathed jade, I ply my trade, unhallowed and unshriven.

I paint my cheeks, for they are white, and cheeks of chalk men hate;
Mine eyes with wine I make them shine, that man may seek and sate;
With overhead a lamp of red I sit me down and wait

Until they come, the nightly scum, with drunken eyes aflame;
Your sweethearts, sons, ye scornful ones -- 'tis I who know their shame.
The gods, ye see, are brutes to me -- and so I play my game.

For life is not the thing we thought, and not the thing we plan;
And Woman in a bitter world must do the best she can --
Must yield the stroke, and bear the yoke, and serve the will of man;

Must serve his need and ever feed the flame of his desire,
Though be she loved for love alone, or be she loved for hire;
For every man since life began is tainted with the mire.

And though you know he love you so and set you on love's throne;
Yet let your eyes but mock his sighs, and let your heart be stone,
Lest you be left (as I was left) attainted and alone.

From love's close kiss to hell's abyss is one sheer flight, I trow,
And wedding ring and bridal bell are will-o'-wisps of woe,
And 'tis not wise to love too well, and this all women know.

Wherefore, the wolf-pack having gorged upon the lamb, their prey,
With siren smile and serpent guile I make the wolf-pack pay --
With velvet paws and flensing claws, a tigress roused to slay.

One who in youth sought truest truth and found a devil's lies;
A symbol of the sin of man, a human sacrifice.
Yet shall I blame on man the shame? Could it be otherwise?

Was I not born to walk in scorn where others walk in pride?
The Maker marred, and, evil-starred, I drift upon His tide;
And He alone shall judge His own, so I His judgment bide.

Fate has written a tragedy; its name is "The Human Heart".
The Theatre is the House of Life, Woman the mummer's part;
The Devil enters the prompter's box and the play is ready to start.

Robert William Service

The Hat

In city shop a hat I saw
That to my fancy seemed to strike,
I gave my wage to buy the straw,
And make myself a one the like.

I wore it to the village fair;
Oh proud I was, though poor was I.
The maids looked at me with a stare,
The lads looked at me with a sigh.

I wore it Sunday to the Mass.
The other girls wore handkerchiefs.
I saw them darkly watch and pass,
With sullen smiles, with hidden griefs.

And then with sobbing fear I fled,
But they waylaid me on the street,
And tore the hat from off my head,
And trampled it beneath their feet.

I sought the Church; my grief was wild,
And by my mother's grave I sat:
. . . I've never cried for clay-cold child,
As I wept for that ruined hat.

Robert William Service

The Headliner And The Breadliner

Moko, the Educated Ape is here,
The pet of vaudeville, so the posters say,
 And every night the gaping people pay
To see him in his panoply appear;
To see him pad his paunch with dainty cheer,
 Puff his perfecto, swill champagne, and sway
 Just like a gentleman, yet all in play,
Then bow himself off stage with brutish leer.

And as to-night, with noble knowledge crammed,
 I 'mid this human compost take my place,
I, once a poet, now so dead and damned,
 The woeful tears half freezing on my face:
"O God!" I cry, "let me but take his shape,
 Moko's, the Blest, the Educated Ape."

Robert William Service

The Healer

"Tuberculosis should not be,"
The old professor said.
"If folks would hearken unto me
'Twould save a million dead.
Nay, no consumptive needs to die,
--A cure have I.

"From blood of turtle I've distilled
An elixir of worth;
Let every sufferer be thrilled
And sing for joy of earth;
Yet every doctor turns his back
And calls me quack.

"Alas! They do not want to cure,
For sickness is their meat;
So persecution I endure,
And die in dark defeat:
Ye lungers, listen to my call!
--I'll save you all."

The old Professor now is dead,
And turtles of the sea,
Knowing their blood they need not shed,
Are festive in their glee:
While sanitoriums are crammed
With legions dammed.

Robert William Service

The Heart Of The Sourdough

There where the mighty mountains bare their fangs unto the moon,
There where the sullen sun-dogs glare in the snow-bright, bitter noon,
And the glacier-glutted streams sweep down at the clarion call of June.

There where the livid tundras keep their tryst with the tranquil snows;
There where the silences are spawned, and the light of hell-fire flows
Into the bowl of the midnight sky, violet, amber and rose.

There where the rapids churn and roar, and the ice-floes bellowing run;
Where the tortured, twisted rivers of blood rush to the setting sun --
I've packed my kit and I'm going, boys, ere another day is done.

* * * * *

I knew it would call, or soon or late, as it calls the whirring wings;
It's the olden lure, it's the golden lure, it's the lure of the timeless things,
And to-night, oh, God of the trails untrod, how it whines in my heart-strings!

I'm sick to death of your well-groomed gods, your make believe and your show;
I long for a whiff of bacon and beans, a snug shakedown in the snow;
A trail to break, and a life at stake, and another bout with the foe.

With the raw-ribbed Wild that abhors all life, the Wild that would crush and rend,
I have clinched and closed with the naked North, I have learned to defy and
defend;
Shoulder to shoulder we have fought it out -- yet the Wild must win in the end.

I have flouted the Wild. I have followed its lure, fearless, familiar, alone;
By all that the battle means and makes I claim that land for mine own;
Yet the Wild must win, and a day will come when I shall be overthrown.

Then when as wolf-dogs fight we've fought, the lean wolf-land and I;
Fought and bled till the snows are red under the reeling sky;
Even as lean wolf-dog goes down will I go down and die.

Robert William Service

The Hearth-Stone

The leaves are sick and jaundiced, they
 Drift down the air;
December's sky is sodden grey,
 Dark with despair;
A bleary dawn will light anon
 A world of care.

My name is cut into a stone,
 No care have I;
The letters drool, as I alone
 Forgotten lie:
With weed my grave is overgrown,
 None cometh nigh.

A hundred hollow years will speed
 As I decay;
And I'll be comrade to the weed,
 Kin to the clay;
Until some hind in homing-need
 Will pass my way.

Until some lover seeking hearth
 With joy will see
My nameless stone sunk in the earth
 And it will be
The ruddy birth of childish mirth,
 And elder glee.

And none will dream it bore my name
 Decades ago;
A scribbling fool of little fame,
 Who loved life so . . .
Well, flesh is grass and Time must pass,--
 Heigh ho! Heigh ho!

Robert William Service

The Hinterland

You speak to me, but does your speech
With truest truth your thought convey?
I listen to your words and each
Is what I wait to hear you say.
The pattern that your lips reveal,
How does it measure with your mind?
What undertones do you conceal?
Your smile is sweet - but what's behind?

I speak to you, but do I tell
The secret working of my brain?
Frank honesty would make life hell,
And truth be tantamount to pain.
When deep into the mind one delves,
Appalling verities we view;
If we betrayed our inner selves,
Would you hate man and I hate you?

Are we not strangers each to each,
And all alone we live and die?
Deception is the stuff of speech,
And life a smug and glossy lie,
Where puppet-like our parts we play:
The first in public we rehearse,
The second when we shrink away
into our private universe.

The soul has its grim hinterland
'Twere better never to explore;
Dark jungles where obscenely planned
Prowl monsters of primaeval lore;
With primal fear our lives are fraught,
And cravenly we cower behind
The silences of secret thought,
The murky mazes of the Mind.

Robert William Service

The Home-Coming

My boy's come back; he's here at last;
He came home on a special train.
My longing and my ache are past,
My only son is back again.
He's home with music, flags and flowers;
With peace and joy my heart's abrim;
He got here in the morning hours
With half the town to welcome him.

To hush my grief, night after night,
How I have digged my pillow deep,
And it would be the morning light
Before I sobbed myself to sleep.
And how I used to stare and stare
Across the harbour's yeasty foam,
Thinking he's fighting far out there . . .
But now with bells my boy's come home.

There's Mrs. Burke, she has her Ted,
But less the sight of his two eyes;
And Mrs. Smith - you know her Fred -
They took his legs off at the thighs.
How can these women happy be,
For all their bravery of talk,
One with a son who cannot see,
One with a boy who'll never walk.

I should be happier than they;
My lad came back without a scar,
And all the folks are proud they say,
To greet their hero of the war.
So in the gentle eventide
I'll give God thanks my Bert's come home. . . .
As peacefully I sit beside
His tiny mound of new-turned loam.

Robert William Service

The Homicide

They say she speeded wanton wild
 When she was warm with wine;
And so she killed a little child,
 (Could have been yours or mine).
The Judge's verdict was not mild,
 And heavy was the fine.

And yet I see her driving still,
 But maybe with more care . . .
Oh I should hate a child to kill
 With vine leaves in my hair;
I think that I should grieve until
 Life was too bleak to bear.

I think that I would see each day
 That child in beauty grow.
How she would haunt me in her play.
 And I would watch her go
To School a-dancing on her way,
 With gladness all aglow!

And then one day I might believe,
 With angel eyes ashine,
She'd say to me: 'Please do not grieve,
 Maybe the fault was mine.
Take heart,--to Heaven's comfort cleave,
 For am I not divine!'

I think I know how I would feel
 If I a child should slay;
The rest of living I would kneel
 And for God's pity pray . . .
Madam, I saw you at the wheel
 Of your new car today.

Robert William Service

The Host

I never could imagine God:
I don't suppose I ever will.
Beside His altar fire I nod
With senile drowsiness but still
In old of age as sight grows dim
 I have a sense of Him.

For when I count my sum of days
I find so many sweet and good,
My mind is full of peace and praise,
My heart aglow with gratitude.
For my long living in the sun
 I want to thank someone.

Someone who has been kind to me;
Some power within, if not on high,
Who shaped my gentle destiny,
And led me pleasant pastures by:
Who taught me, whether gay or grave,
 To love the life He gave.

A Host of charity and cheer,
Within a Tavern warm and bright;
Who smiles and bids me have no fear
As forth I fare into the night:
From whom I beg no Heav'n, but bless
 For earthly happiness.

Robert William Service

The Idealist

Oh you who have daring deeds to tell!
And you who have felt Ambition's spell!
Have you heard of the louse who longed to dwell
In the golden hair of a queen?
He sighed all day and he sighed all night,
And no one could understand it quite,
For the head of a slut is a louse's delight,
But he pined for the head of a queen.

So he left his kinsfolk in merry play,
And off by his lonesome he stole away,
From the home of his youth so bright and gay,
And gloriously unclean.
And at last he came to the palace gate,
And he made his way in a manner straight
(For a louse may go where a man must wait)
To the tiring-room of the queen.

The queen she spake to her tiring-maid:
"There's something the matter, I'm afraid.
To-night ere for sleep my hair ye braid,
Just see what may be seen."
And lo, when they combed that shining hair
They found him alone in his glory there,
And he cried: "I die, but I do not care,
For I've lived in the head of a queen!"

Robert William Service

The Joy Of Being Poor

I

Let others sing of gold and gear, the joy of being rich;
But oh, the days when I was poor, a vagrant in a ditch!
When every dawn was like a gem, so radiant and rare,
And I had but a single coat, and not a single care;
When I would feast right royally on bacon, bread and beer,
And dig into a stack of hay and doze like any peer;
When I would wash beside a brook my solitary shirt,
And though it dried upon my back I never took a hurt;
When I went romping down the road contemptuous of care,
And slapped Adventure on the back -- by Gad! we were a pair;
When, though my pockets lacked a coin, and though my coat was old,
The largess of the stars was mine, and all the sunset gold;
When time was only made for fools, and free as air was I,
And hard I hit and hard I lived beneath the open sky;
When all the roads were one to me, and each had its allure . . .
Ye Gods! these were the happy days, the days when I was poor.

II

Or else, again, old pal of mine, do you recall the times
You struggled with your storyettes, I wrestled with my rhymes;
Oh, we were happy, were we not? -- we used to live so "high"
(A little bit of broken roof between us and the sky);
Upon the forge of art we toiled with hammer and with tongs;
You told me all your rippling yarns, I sang to you my songs.
Our hats were frayed, our jackets patched, our boots were down at heel,
But oh, the happy men were we, although we lacked a meal.
And if I sold a bit of rhyme, or if you placed a tale,
What feasts we had of tenderloins and apple-tarts and ale!
And yet how often we would dine as cheerful as you please,
Beside our little friendly fire on coffee, bread and cheese.
We lived upon the ragged edge, and grub was never sure,
But oh, these were the happy days, the days when we were poor.

III

Alas! old man, we're wealthy now, it's sad beyond a doubt;

We cannot dodge prosperity, success has found us out.
Your eye is very dull and drear, my brow is creased with care,
We realize how hard it is to be a millionaire.
The burden's heavy on our backs -- you're thinking of your rents,
I'm worrying if I'll invest in five or six per cents.
We've limousines, and marble halls, and flunkeys by the score,
We play the part . . . but say, old chap, oh, isn't it a bore?
We work like slaves, we eat too much, we put on evening dress;
We've everything a man can want, I think . . . but happiness.
Come, let us sneak away, old chum; forget that we are rich,
And earn an honest appetite, and scratch an honest itch.
Let's be two jolly garreteers, up seven flights of stairs,
And wear old clothes and just pretend we aren't millionaires;
And wonder how we'll pay the rent, and scribble ream on ream,
And sup on sausages and tea, and laugh and loaf and dream.

And when we're tired of that, my friend, oh, you will come with me;
And we will seek the sunlit roads that lie beside the sea.
We'll know the joy the gipsy knows, the freedom nothing mars,
The golden treasure-gates of dawn, the mintage of the stars.
We'll smoke our pipes and watch the pot, and feed the crackling fire,
And sing like two old jolly boys, and dance to heart's desire;
We'll climb the hill and ford the brook and camp upon the moor . . .
Old chap, let's haste, I'm mad to taste the Joy of Being Poor.

Robert William Service

The Joy Of Little Things

It's good the great green earth to roam,
Where sights of awe the soul inspire;
But oh, it's best, the coming home,
The crackle of one's own hearth-fire!
You've hob-nobbed with the solemn Past;
You've seen the pageantry of kings;
Yet oh, how sweet to gain at last
The peace and rest of Little Things!

Perhaps you're counted with the Great;
You strain and strive with mighty men;
Your hand is on the helm of State;
Colossus-like you stride . . . and then
There comes a pause, a shining hour,
A dog that leaps, a hand that clings:
O Titan, turn from pomp and power;
Give all your heart to Little Things.

Go couch you childwise in the grass,
Believing it's some jungle strange,
Where mighty monsters peer and pass,
Where beetles roam and spiders range.
'Mid gloom and gleam of leaf and blade,
What dragons rasp their painted wings!
O magic world of shine and shade!
O beauty land of Little Things!

I sometimes wonder, after all,
Amid this tangled web of fate,
If what is great may not be small,
And what is small may not be great.
So wondering I go my way,
Yet in my heart contentment sings . . .
O may I ever see, I pray,
God's grace and love in Little Things.

So give to me, I only beg,
A little roof to call my own,
A little cider in the keg,

A little meat upon the bone;
A little garden by the sea,
A little boat that dips and swings . . .
Take wealth, take fame, but leave to me,
O Lord of Life, just Little Things.

Robert William Service

The Judgement

The Judge looked down, his face was grim,
 He scratched his ear;
The gangster's moll looked up at him
 With eyes of fear.
She thought: 'This guy in velvet gown,
 With balding pate,
Who now on me is looking down,
 Can seal my fate.'

The Judge thought: 'Fifteen years or ten
 I might decree.
Just let me say the word and then
 Go home to tea.
But then this poor wretch might not be
 So long alive . . .'
So with surprise he heard that he
 Was saying 'Five'.

The Judge went home. His daughter's child
 Was five that day;
And with sweet gifts around her piled
 She laughed in play.
Then mused the Judge: 'Life oft bestows
 Such evil odds.
May he who human mercy shows
 Not count on God's?'

Robert William Service

The Junior God

The Junior God looked from his place
In the conning towers of heaven,
And he saw the world through the span of space
Like a giant golf-ball driven.
And because he was bored, as some gods are,
With high celestial mirth,
He clutched the reins of a shooting star,
And he steered it down to earth.

The Junior God, 'mid leaf and bud,
Passed on with a weary air,
Till lo! he came to a pool of mud,
And some hogs were rolling there.
Then in he plunged with gleeful cries,
And down he lay supine;
For they had no mud in paradise,
And they likewise had no swine.

The Junior God forgot himself;
He squelched mud through his toes;
With the careless joy of a wanton boy
His reckless laughter rose.
Till, tired at last, in a brook close by,
He washed off every stain;
Then softly up to the radiant sky
He rose, a god again.

The Junior God now heads the roll
In the list of heaven's peers;
He sits in the House of High Control,
And he regulates the spheres.
Yet does he wonder, do you suppose,
If, even in gods divine,
The best and wisest may not be those
Who have wallowed awhile with the swine?

Robert William Service

The Key Of The Street

"Miss Rosemary," I dourly said,
"Our balance verges on the red,
We must cut down our overhead.
One of the staff will have to go.
There's Mister Jones, he's mighty slow,
Although he does his best, I know.

"A dear old man; I like him well,
But age, alas! will always tell.
Miss Rosemary, please ring the bell
And tell old Jones to step this way . . .
Oh dear, oh dear, it isn't gay
To say the things I have to say.

"Come in and sit down, Mister Jones."
He thanks me in sepulchral tones.
Poor chap! I hear his creaking bones.
"Have a cigar? And how's your wife?
What's that! You're fearing for her life -
A cancer and the surgeon's knife. . . .

"Yes, operations are so dear,
But it's your comfort and your cheer
To know your job's so steady here."
These are his words; so meek and mild,
He looks just like a simple child . . .
Go! darn it! Suddenly I'm riled.

And so I say: "That's just too bad.
But Mister Jones. it's very sad,
You know what losses we have had.
We must cut down in times like these,
So here's a cheque, Oh take it please -
'Twill help to pay your doctor's fees.

"And just to show how I appraise
Your work - despite these doleful days
I'm giving you . . . a little raise."

Said Rosemary: "Old Jones is crying."
Thought I: "Yes, each week I'll be sighing,
When from my pocket I am prying
Ten bucks to keep his wife from dying."

Robert William Service

The Land God Forgot

The lonely sunsets flare forlorn
Down valleys dreadly desolate;
The lordly mountains soar in scorn
As still as death, as stern as fate.

The lonely sunsets flame and die;
The giant valleys gulp the night;
The monster mountains scrape the sky,
Where eager stars are diamond-bright.

So gaunt against the gibbous moon,
Piercing the silence velvet-piled,
A lone wolf howls his ancient rune --
The fell arch-spirit of the Wild.

O outcast land! O leper land!
Let the lone wolf-cry all express
The hate insensate of thy hand,
Thy heart's abysmal loneliness.

Robert William Service

The Land Of Beyond

Have ever you heard of the Land of Beyond,
That dreams at the gates of the day?
Alluring it lies at the skirts of the skies,
And ever so far away;
Alluring it calls: O ye the yoke galls,
And ye of the trail overfond,
With saddle and pack, by paddle and track,
Let's go to the Land of Beyond!

Have ever you stood where the silences brood,
And vast the horizons begin,
At the dawn of the day to behold far away
The goal you would strive for and win?
Yet ah! in the night when you gain to the height,
With the vast pool of heaven star-spawned,
Afar and a gleam, like a valley of dream,
Still mocks you a Land of Beyond.

Thank God! there is always a Land of Beyond
For us who are true to the trail;
A vision to seek, a beckoning peak,
A farness that never will fail;
A pride in our soul that mocks at a goal,
A manhood that irks at a bond,
And try how we will, unattainable still,
Behold it, our Land of Beyond!

Robert William Service

The Lark

From wrath-red dawn to wrath-red dawn,
The guns have brayed without abate;
And now the sick sun looks upon
The bleared, blood-boltered fields of hate
As if it loathed to rise again.
How strange the hush! Yet sudden, hark!
From yon down-trodden gold of grain,
The leaping rapture of a lark.

A fusillade of melody,
That sprays us from yon trench of sky;
A new amazing enemy
We cannot silence though we try;
A battery on radiant wings,
That from yon gap of golden fleece
Hurls at us hopes of such strange things
As joy and home and love and peace.

Pure heart of song! do you not know
That we are making earth a hell?
Or is it that you try to show
Life still is joy and all is well?
Brave little wings! Ah, not in vain
You beat into that bit of blue:
Lo! we who pant in war's red rain
Lift shining eyes, see Heaven too.

Robert William Service

The Last Supper

Marie Vaux of the Painted Lips,
And the mouth so mocking gay,
A wanton you to the finger-tips,
Who break men's hearts in play;
A thing of dust I have striven for,
Honour and manhood given for,
Headlong to ruin driven for,
And this is the last, you say. . . .

Drinking your wine with dainty sips,
Marie Vaux of the Painted Lips.

Marie Vaux of the Painted Lips,
Long have you held your sway;
I have laughed at your merry quips -
Now is my time to pay.
What we sow we must reap again;
When we laugh we must weep again;
So to-night we will sleep again,
Nor wake until Judgement Day. . . .

'Tis a poisoned wine that your palate lips,
Marie Vaux of the Painted Lips.

Marie Vaux of the Painted Lips,
Down on your knees and pray;
Pray your last ere the moment slips,
Pray ere the dark and the terror grips,
And the bright world fades away.
Pray for the peace and the rest of us:
Here comes the Shape in quest of us,
Now we must go away. . . .

You and I in the grave's eclipse,
Marie Vaux of the painted Lips.

Robert William Service

The Law Of Laws

If we could roll back History
 A century, let's say,
And start from there, I'm sure that we
 Would find things as to-day:
In all creation's cosmic range
 No vestige of a change.

Turn back a thousand years, the same
 Unchangement we would view;
Cause and Effect their laws proclaim,
 The truest of the true,
And in life's mechanistic groove
 The Universe would move.

Grim is the grip of the Machine
 And everything we do
Designed implacably has been
 Since earth was virgin new:
We strut our parts as they were writ,--
 That's all there is to it.

Curse on such thinking! let us play
 At Free Will, though we be
The gnatlike creatures of the day,
 The dupes of Destiny . . .
The merle is merry in the may--
 Tomorrow's time to pray.

Robert William Service

The Law Of The Yukon

This is the law of the Yukon, and ever she makes it plain:

"Send not your foolish and feeble; send me your strong and your sane --
Strong for the red rage of battle; sane for I harry them sore;
Send me men girt for the combat, men who are grit to the core;
Swift as the panther in triumph, fierce as the bear in defeat,
Sired of a bulldog parent, steeled in the furnace heat.
Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen ones;
Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons;
Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut with my meat;
But the others -- the misfits, the failures -- I trample under my feet.
Dissolute, damned and despairful, crippled and palsied and slain,
Ye would send me the spawn of your gutters -- Go! take back your spawn again.

"Wild and wide are my borders, stern as death is my sway;
From my ruthless throne I have ruled alone for a million years and a day;
Hugging my mighty treasure, waiting for man to come,
Till he swept like a turbid torrent, and after him swept -- the scum.
The pallid pimp of the dead-line, the enervate of the pen,
One by one I weeded them out, for all that I sought was -- Men.
One by one I dismayed them, frightening them sore with my glooms;
One by one I betrayed them unto my manifold dooms.
Drowned them like rats in my rivers, starved them like curs on my plains,
Rotted the flesh that was left them, poisoned the blood in their veins;
Burst with my winter upon them, searing forever their sight,
Lashed them with fungus-white faces, whimpering wild in the night;

"Staggering blind through the storm-whirl, stumbling mad through the snow,
Frozen stiff in the ice-pack, brittle and bent like a bow;
Featureless, formless, forsaken, scented by wolves in their flight,
Left for the wind to make music through ribs that are glittering white;
Gnawing the black crust of failure, searching the pit of despair,
Crooking the toe in the trigger, trying to patter a prayer;
Going outside with an escort, raving with lips all afoam,
Writing a cheque for a million, driveling feebly of home;
Lost like a louse in the burning . . . or else in the tented town
Seeking a drunkard's solace, sinking and sinking down;
Steeped in the slime at the bottom, dead to a decent world,
Lost 'mid the human flotsam, far on the frontier hurled;
In the camp at the bend of the river, with its dozen saloons aglare,

Its gambling dens ariot, its gramophones all ablare;
Crimped with the crimes of a city, sin-ridden and bridled with lies,
In the hush of my mountained vastness, in the flush of my midnight skies.
Plague-spots, yet tools of my purpose, so nathless I suffer them thrive,
Crushing my Weak in their clutches, that only my Strong may survive.

"But the others, the men of my mettle, the men who would 'stablish my fame
Unto its ultimate issue, winning me honor, not shame;
Searching my uttermost valleys, fighting each step as they go,
Shooting the wrath of my rapids, scaling my ramparts of snow;
Ripping the guts of my mountains, looting the beds of my creeks,
Them will I take to my bosom, and speak as a mother speaks.
I am the land that listens, I am the land that broods;
Steeped in eternal beauty, crystalline waters and woods.
Long have I waited lonely, shunned as a thing accurst,
Monstrous, moody, pathetic, the last of the lands and the first;
Visioning camp-fires at twilight, sad with a longing forlorn,
Feeling my womb o'er-pregnant with the seed of cities unborn.
Wild and wide are my borders, stern as death is my sway,
And I wait for the men who will win me -- and I will not be won in a day;
And I will not be won by weaklings, subtle, suave and mild,
But by men with the hearts of vikings, and the simple faith of a child;
Desperate, strong and resistless, unthrottled by fear or defeat,
Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut with my meat.

"Lofty I stand from each sister land, patient and wearily wise,
With the weight of a world of sadness in my quiet, passionless eyes;
Dreaming alone of a people, dreaming alone of a day,
When men shall not rape my riches, and curse me and go away;
Making a bawd of my bounty, fouling the hand that gave --
Till I rise in my wrath and I sweep on their path and I stamp them into a grave.
Dreaming of men who will bless me, of women esteeming me good,
Of children born in my borders of radiant motherhood,
Of cities leaping to stature, of fame like a flag unfurled,
As I pour the tide of my riches in the eager lap of the world."

This is the Law of the Yukon, that only the Strong shall thrive;
That surely the Weak shall perish, and only the Fit survive.
Dissolute, damned and despairful, crippled and palsied and slain,
This is the Will of the Yukon, -- Lo, how she makes it plain!

The Leaning Tower

Having an aged hate of height
I forced myself to climb the Tower,
Yet paused at every second flight
Because my heart is scant of power;
Then when I gained the sloping summit
Earthward I stared, straight as a plummet.

When like a phantom by my side
I saw a man cadaverous;
At first I fancied him a guide,
For dimly he addressed me thus:
"Sir, where you stand, Oh long ago!
There also stood Galileo.

"Proud Master of a mighty mind,
he worshipped truth and knew not fear;
Aye, though in age his eyes were blind,
Till death his brain was crystal clear;
And here he communed with the stars,
Where now you park your motor cars.

"This Pisa was a pleasant place,
Beloved by poets in their prime;
Yonder our Shelly used to pace,
And Byron ottavas would rhyme.
Till Shelley, from this fair environ,
Scrammed to escape egregious Byron.

"And you who with the horde have come,
I hate your guts, I say with candour;
Your wife wears slacks, and you chew gum,
So I, the ghost of Savage Landor,
Beg you, step closer to the edge,
That I may push you o'er the ledge."

But back I shrank, sped down the stair,
And sought the Baptistry where God is;
For I had no desire, I swear,
To prove the law of falling bodies. . . .

You're right - when one's nigh eighty he's a
Dampool to climb the Tower of Pisa.

Robert William Service

The Learner

I've learned--Of all the friends I've won
 Dame Nature is the best,
And to her like a child I run
 Craving her mother breast
To comfort me in soul distress,
 And in green glade to find
Far from the world's unloveliness
 Pure peace of mind.

I've learned--the worth of simple ways,
 And though I've loved to roam,
I know the glow of hearth ablaze,
 The bliss of coming home.
I'd rather wear old clothes than new,
 I'd rather walk than drive,
And as my wants are oh so few
 I joy to be alive.

I've learned--that happiness is all,
 A sweetness of the mind;
And would you purge your heart of gall,--
 Try being kind.
Then when some weaker one you aid,
 Believe it true
'Tis God Himself will make the grade
 Less hard for you.

Robert William Service

The Legless Man

(The Dark Side)

My mind goes back to Fumin Wood, and how we stuck it out,
Eight days of hunger, thirst and cold, mowed down by steel and flame;
Waist-deep in mud and mad with woe, with dead men all about,
We fought like fiends and waited for relief that never came.
Eight days and nights they rolled on us in battle-frenzied mass!
"Debout les morts!" We hurled them back. By God! they did not pass.

They pinned two medals on my chest, a yellow and a brown,
And lovely ladies made me blush, such pretty words they said.
I felt a cheerful man, almost, until my eyes went down,
And there I saw the blankets -- how they sagged upon my bed.
And then again I drank the cup of sorrow to the dregs:
Oh, they can keep their medals if they give me back my legs.

I think of how I used to run and leap and kick the ball,
And ride and dance and climb the hills and frolic in the sea;
And all the thousand things that now I'll never do at all. . . .
Mon Dieu! there's nothing left in life, it often seems to me.
And as the nurses lift me up and strap me in my chair,
If they would chloroform me off I feel I wouldn't care.

Ah yes! we're "heroes all" to-day -- they point to us with pride;
To-day their hearts go out to us, the tears are in their eyes!
But wait a bit; to-morrow they will blindly look aside;
No more they'll talk of what they owe, the dues of sacrifice
(One hates to be reminded of an everlasting debt).
It's all in human nature. Ah! the world will soon forget.

My mind goes back to where I lay wound-rotted on the plain,
And ate the muddy mangold roots, and drank the drops of dew,
And dragged myself for miles and miles when every move was pain,
And over me the carrion-crows were retching as they flew.
Oh, ere I closed my eyes and stuck my rifle in the air
I wish that those who picked me up had passed and left me there.

(The Bright Side)

Oh, one gets used to everything!
I hum a merry song,
And up the street and round the square
I wheel my chair along;
For look you, how my chest is sound
And how my arms are strong!

Oh, one gets used to anything!
It's awkward at the first,
And jolting o'er the cobbles gives
A man a grievous thirst;
But of all ills that one must bear
That's surely not the worst.

For there's the cafe open wide,
And there they set me up;
And there I smoke my caporal
Above my cider cup;
And play manille a while before
I hurry home to sup.

At home the wife is waiting me
With smiles and pigeon-pie;
And little Zi-Zi claps her hands
With laughter loud and high;
And if there's cause to growl, I fail
To see the reason why.

And all the evening by the lamp
I read some tale of crime,
Or play my old accordion
With Marie keeping time,
Until we hear the hour of ten
From out the steeple chime.

Then in the morning bright and soon,
No moment do I lose;
Within my little cobbler's shop
To gain the silver sous
(Good luck one has no need of legs
To make a pair of shoes).

And every Sunday -- oh, it's then
I am the happy man;
They wheel me to the river-side,
And there with rod and can
I sit and fish and catch a dish
Of goujons for the pan.

Aye, one gets used to everything,
And doesn't seem to mind;
Maybe I'm happier than most
Of my two-legged kind;
For look you at the darkest cloud,
Lo! how it's silver-lined.

Robert William Service

The Little Old Log Cabin

When a man gits on his uppers in a hard-pan sort of town,
An' he ain't got nothin' comin' an' he can't afford ter eat,
An' he's in a fix for lodgin' an' he wanders up an' down,
An' you'd fancy he'd been boozin', he's so locoed 'bout the feet;
When he's feelin' sneakin' sorry an' his belt is hangin' slack,
An' his face is peaked an' gray-like an' his heart gits down an' whines,
Then he's apt ter git a-thinkin' an' a-wishin' he was back
In the little ol' log cabin in the shadder of the pines.

When he's on the blazin' desert an' his canteen's sprung a leak,
An' he's all alone an' crazy an' he's crawlin' like a snail,
An' his tongue's so black an' swollen that it hurts him fer to speak,
An' he gouges down fer water an' the raven's on his trail;
When he's done with care and cursin' an' he feels more like to cry,
An' he sees ol' Death a-grinnin' an' he thinks upon his crimes,
Then he's like ter hev' a vision, as he settles down ter die,
Of the little ol' log cabin an' the roses an' the vines.

Oh, the little ol' log cabin, it's a solemn shinin' mark,
When a feller gits ter sinnin' an' a-goin' ter the wall,
An' folks don't understand him an' he's gropin' in the dark,
An' he's sick of bein' cursed at an' he's longin' fer his call!
When the sun of life's a-sinkin' you can see it 'way above,
On the hill from out the shadder in a glory 'gin the sky,
An' your mother's voice is callin', an' her arms are stretched in love,
An' somehow you're glad you're goin', an' you ain't a-scared to die;
When you'll be like a kid again an' nestle to her breast,
An' never leave its shelter, an' forget, an' love, an' rest.

Robert William Service

The Little Piou-Piou

(The French "Tommy").

Oh, some of us lolled in the chateau,
And some of us slinked in the slum;
But now we are here with a song and a cheer
To serve at the sign of the drum.
They put us in trousers of scarlet,
In big sloppy ulsters of blue;
In boots that are flat, a box of a hat,
And they call us the little piou-piou.
Piou-piou.

The laughing and quaffing piou-piou,
The swinging and singing piou-piou;
And so with a rattle we march to the battle,
The weary but cheery piou-piou.

Encore un petit verre de vin,
Pour nous mettre en route;
Encore un petit verre de vin
Pour nous mettre en train.

They drive us head-on for the slaughter;
We haven't got much of a chance;
The issue looks bad, but we're awfully glad
To battle and die for La France.
For some must be killed, that is certain;
There's only one's duty to do;
So we leap to the fray in the glorious way
They expect of the little piou-piou.
En avant!

The way of the gallant piou-piou,
The dashing and smashing piou-piou;
The way grim and gory that leads us to glory
Is the way of the little piou-piou.

Allons, enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé.

To-day you would scarce recognise us,
Such veterans war-wise are we;
So grimy and hard, so calloused and scarred,
So "crummy", yet gay as can be.
We've finished with trousers of scarlet,
They're giving us breeches of blue,
With a helmet instead of a cap on our head, -
Yet still we're the little piou-piou.
Nous les aurons!

The jesting, unresting piou-piou;
The cheering, unfearing piou-piou;
The keep-your-head-level and fight-like-the-devil;
The dying, defying piou-piou.

À la bayonette! Jusqu'a la mort!
Sonnez la charge, clairons!

Robert William Service

The Living Dead

Since I have come to years sedate
I see with more and more acumen
The bitter irony of Fate,
The vanity of all things human.
Why, just to-day some fellow said,
As I surveyed Fame's outer portal:
"By gad! I thought that you were dead."
Poor me, who dreamed to be immortal!

But that's the way with many men
Whose name one fancied time-defying;
We thought that they were dust and then
We found them living by their dying.
Like dogs we penmen have our day,
To brief best-sellerdom elected;
And then, "thumbs down," we slink away
And die forgotten and neglected.

Ah well, my lyric fling I've had;
A thousand bits of verse I've minted;
And some, alas! were very bad,
And some, alack! were best unprinted.
But if I've made my muse a bawd
(Since I am earthy as a ditch is),
I'll answer humbly to my God:
Most men at times have toyed with bitches.

Yes, I have played with Lady Rhyme,
And had a long and lovely innings;
And when the Umpire calls my time
I'll blandly quit and take my winnings.
I'll hie me to some Sleepydale,
And feed the ducks and pat the poodles,
And prime my paunch with cakes and ale,
And blether with the village noodles.

And then some day you'll idly scan
The Times obituary column,
And say: "Dear me, the poor old man!"

And for a moment you'll look solemn.
"So all this time he's been alive -
In realms of rhyme a second-rater . . .
But gad! to live to ninety-five:
Let's toast his ghost - a sherry, waiter!"

Robert William Service

The Locket

From out her shabby rain-coat pocket
The little Jew girl in the train
Produced a dented silver locket
With pasted in it portraits twain.
"These are my parents, sir" she said;
"Or were, for now I fear they're dead.

"I know to Belsen they were sent;
I never heard of them again.
So many were like that - they went,
Our woeful quest was all in vain.
I was in London with a friend,
Or I, too, would have shared their end.

"They could have got away, I'm told,
And joined me here in Marylebone,
But Grannie was so sick and old,
They could not leave her there alone.
When they were seized she cried and cried:
Thank God! 'Twas in her bed she died.

"How did they die? I cannot bear
To think of that - it crazes me.
My mother was so sweet, so fair;
My father handsome as you see . . .
I'm sure no daughter ever had
More lovely parents . . . Yes, it's sad.

"But for their loss I shall not grieve;
I'll hug the hope they still survive;
Oh, I must make myself believe
Somehow, somewhere they're still alive. . . .

"Well, that's my only souvenir,
A locket stained with many a tear."

Robert William Service

The Logger

In the moonless, misty night, with my little pipe alight,
I am sitting by the camp-fire's fading cheer;
Oh, the dew is falling chill on the dim, deer-haunted hill,
And the breakers in the bay are moaning drear.
The toilful hours are sped, the boys are long abed,
And I alone a weary vigil keep;
In the sightless, sullen sky I can hear the night-hawk cry,
And the frogs in frenzied chorus from the creek.

And somehow the embers' glow brings me back the long ago,
The days of merry laughter and light song;
When I sped the hours away with the gayest of the gay
In the giddy whirl of fashion's festal throng.
Oh, I ran a grilling race and I little recked the pace,
For the lust of youth ran riot in my blood;
But at last I made a stand in this God-forsaken land
Of the pine-tree and the mountain and the flood.

And now I've got to stay, with an overdraft to pay,
For pleasure in the past with future pain;
And I'm not the chap to whine, for if the chance were mine
I know I'd choose the old life once again.
With its woman's eyes a-shine, and its flood of golden wine;
Its fever and its frolic and its fun;
The old life with its din, its laughter and its sin --
And chuck me in the gutter when it's done.

Ah, well! it's past and gone, and the memory is wan,
That conjures up each old familiar face;
And here by fortune hurled, I am dead to all the world,
And I've learned to lose my pride and keep my place.
My ways are hard and rough, and my arms are strong and tough,
And I hew the dizzy pine till darkness falls;
And sometimes I take a dive, just to keep my heart alive,
Among the gay saloons and dancing halls.

In the distant, dinful town just a little drink to drown
The cares that crowd and canker in my brain;
Just a little joy to still set my pulses all a-thrill,

Then back to brutish labour once again.
And things will go on so until one day I shall know
That Death has got me cinched beyond a doubt;
Then I'll crawl away from sight, and morosely in the night
My weary, wasted life will peter out.

Then the boys will gather round, and they'll launch me in the ground,
And pile the stones the timber wolf to foil;
And the moaning pine will wave overhead a nameless grave,
Where the black snake in the sunshine loves to coil.
And they'll leave me there alone, and perhaps with softened tone
Speak of me sometimes in the camp-fire's glow,
As a played-out, broken chum, who has gone to Kingdom Come,
And who went the pace in England long ago.

Robert William Service

The Lone Trail

Ye who know the Lone Trail fain would follow it,
Though it lead to glory or the darkness of the pit.
Ye who take the Lone Trail, bid your love good-by;
The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow till you die.

The trails of the world be countless, and most of the trails be tried;
You tread on the heels of the many, till you come where the ways divide;
And one lies safe in the sunlight, and the other is dreary and wan,
Yet you look aslant at the Lone Trail, and the Lone Trail lures you on.
And somehow you're sick of the highway, with its noise and its easy needs,
And you seek the risk of the by-way, and you reck not where it leads.
And sometimes it leads to the desert, and the tongue swells out of the mouth,
And you stagger blind to the mirage, to die in the mocking drouth.
And sometimes it leads to the mountain, to the light of the lone camp-fire,
And you gnaw your belt in the anguish of hunger-goded desire.
And sometimes it leads to the Southland, to the swamp where the orchid glows,
And you rave to your grave with the fever, and they rob the corpse for its
clothes.
And sometimes it leads to the Northland, and the scurvy softens your bones,
And your flesh dints in like putty, and you spit out your teeth like stones.
And sometimes it leads to a coral reef in the wash of a weedy sea,
And you sit and stare at the empty glare where the gulls wait greedily.
And sometimes it leads to an Arctic trail, and the snows where your torn feet
freeze,
And you whittle away the useless clay, and crawl on your hands and knees.
Often it leads to the dead-pit; always it leads to pain;
By the bones of your brothers ye know it, but oh, to follow you're fain.
By your bones they will follow behind you, till the ways of the world are made
plain.

Bid good-by to sweetheart, bid good-by to friend;
The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow to the end.
Tarry not, and fear not, chosen of the true;
Lover of the Lone Trail, the Lone Trail waits for you.

Robert William Service

The Lost Master

"And when I come to die," he said,
"Ye shall not lay me out in state,
Nor leave your laurels at my head,
Nor cause your men of speech orate;
No monument your gift shall be,
No column in the Hall of Fame;
But just this line ye grave for me:
 `He played the game.'"

So when his glorious task was done,
It was not of his fame we thought;
It was not of his battles won,
But of the pride with which he fought;
But of his zest, his ringing laugh,
His trenchant scorn of praise or blame:
And so we graved his epitaph,
 "He played the game."

And so we, too, in humbler ways
Went forth to fight the fight anew,
And heeding neither blame nor praise,
We held the course he set us true.
And we, too, find the fighting sweet;
And we, too, fight for fighting's sake;
And though we go down in defeat,
And though our stormy hearts may break,
We will not do our Master shame:
We'll play the game, please God,
 We'll play the game.

Robert William Service

The Lottery

"Young fellow, listen to a friend:
Beware of wedlock - 'tis a gamble,
It's MAN who holds the losing end
In every matrimonial scramble."

"Young lady, marriage mostly is
A cruel cross of hope's concealing.
A rarity is wedded bliss
And WOMAN gets the dirty dealing."

. . . Such my advice to man and maid,
But though they harken few will take it.
The parson plies his merry trade
The marriage seems much what you make it.

If Pa or Ma had counsel sought
Of me whose locks today are hoary,
And feared to tie the nuptial knot -
Would I be here to tell the story?

Nay, lad and lass, don't flout romance,
Nor heed this cynical old sinner;
Like bold Columbus take a chance,
And may your number be a winner.

Far be it from me to advise,
But in the marital relation
The safest bet is Compromise
And Mutual Consideration.

Robert William Service

The Low-Down White

This is the pay-day up at the mines, when the bearded brutes come down;
There's money to burn in the streets to-night, so I've sent my klooch to town,
With a haggard face and a ribband of red entwined in her hair of brown.

And I know at the dawn she'll come reeling home with the bottles, one, two,
three --
One for herself, to drown her shame, and two big bottles for me,
To make me forget the thing I am and the man I used to be.

To make me forget the brand of the dog, as I crouch in this hideous place;
To make me forget once I kindled the light of love in a lady's face,
Where even the squalid Siwash now holds me a black disgrace.

Oh, I have guarded my secret well! And who would dream as I speak
In a tribal tongue like a rogue unhung, 'mid the ranch-house filth and reek,
I could roll to bed with a Latin phrase and rise with a verse of Greek?

Yet I was a senior prizeman once, and the pride of a college eight;
Called to the bar -- my friends were true! but they could not keep me straight;
Then came the divorce, and I went abroad and "died" on the River Plate.

But I'm not dead yet; though with half a lung there isn't time to spare,
And I hope that the year will see me out, and, thank God, no one will care --
Save maybe the little slim Siwash girl with the rose of shame in her hair.

She will come with the dawn, and the dawn is near; I can see its evil glow,
Like a corpse-light seen through a frosty pane in a night of want and woe;
And yonder she comes by the bleak bull-pines, swift staggering through the
snow.

Robert William Service

The Lunger

Jack would laugh an' joke all day;
Never saw a lad so gay;
Singin' like a medder lark,
Loaded to the Plimsoll mark
With God's sunshine was that boy;
Had a strangle-holt on Joy.
Held his head 'way up in air,
Left no callin' cards on Care;
Breezy, buoyant, brave and true;
Sent his sunshine out to you;
Cheerfulest when clouds was black --
 Happy Jack! Oh, Happy Jack!

Sittin' in my shack alone
I could hear him in his own,
Singin' far into the night,
Till it didn't seem just right
One man should corral the fun,
Live his life so in the sun;
Didn't seem quite natural
Not to have a grouch at all;
Not a trouble, not a lack --
 Happy Jack! Oh, Happy Jack!

He was plumbful of good cheer
Till he struck that low-down year;
Got so thin, so little to him,
You could most see day-light through him.
Never was his eye so bright,
Never was his cheek so white.
Seemed as if somethin' was wrong,
Sort o' quaver in his song.
Same old smile, same hearty voice:
"Bless you, boys! let's all rejoice!"
But old Doctor shook his head:
"Half a lung," was all he said.
Yet that half was surely right,
For I heard him every night,
Singin', singin' in his shack --

Happy Jack! Oh, Happy Jack!

Then one day a letter came
Endin' with a female name;
Seemed to get him in the neck,
Sort o' pile-driver effect;
Paled his lip and plucked his breath,
Left him starin' still as death.
Somethin' had gone awful wrong,
Yet that night he sang his song.
Oh, but it was good to hear!
For there clutched my heart a fear,
So that I quaked listenin'
Every night to hear him sing.
But each day he laughed with me,
An' his smile was full of glee.
Nothin' seemed to set him back --
Happy Jack! Oh, Happy Jack!

Then one night the singin' stopped . . .
Seemed as if my heart just flopped;
For I'd learned to love the boy
With his gilt-edged line of joy,
With his glorious gift of bluff,
With his splendid fightin' stuff.
Sing on, lad, and play the game!
O dear God! . . . no singin' came,
But there surged to me instead --
Silence, silence, deep and dread;
Till I shuddered, tried to pray,
Said: "He's maybe gone away."
Oh, yes, he had gone away,
Gone forever and a day.
But he'd left behind him there,
In his cabin, pinched and bare,
His poor body, skin and bone,
His sharp face, cold as a stone.
An' his stiffened fingers pressed
Somethin' bright upon his breast:
Locket with a silken curl,
Poor, sweet portrait of a girl.
Yet I reckon at the last

How defiant-like he passed;
For there sat upon his lips
Smile that death could not eclipse;
An' within his eyes lived still
Joy that dyin' could not kill.

An' now when the nights are long,
How I miss his cheery song!
How I sigh an' wish him back!
 Happy Jack! Oh, Happy Jack!

Robert William Service

The Lure Of Little Voices

There's a cry from out the loneliness -- oh, listen, Honey, listen!
Do you hear it, do you fear it, you're a-holding of me so?
You're a-sobbing in your sleep, dear, and your lashes, how they glisten --
Do you hear the Little Voices all a-begging me to go?

All a-begging me to leave you. Day and night they're pleading, praying,
On the North-wind, on the West-wind, from the peak and from the plain;
Night and day they never leave me -- do you know what they are saying?
"He was ours before you got him, and we want him once again."

Yes, they're wanting me, they're haunting me, the awful lonely places;
They're whining and they're whimpering as if each had a soul;
They're calling from the wilderness, the vast and God-like spaces,
The stark and sullen solitudes that sentinel the Pole.

They miss my little camp-fires, ever brightly, bravely gleaming
In the womb of desolation, where was never man before;
As comradeless I sought them, lion-hearted, loving, dreaming,
And they hailed me as a comrade, and they loved me evermore.

And now they're all a-crying, and it's no use me denying;
The spell of them is on me and I'm helpless as a child;
My heart is aching, aching, but I hear them, sleeping, waking;
It's the Lure of Little Voices, it's the mandate of the Wild.

I'm afraid to tell you, Honey, I can take no bitter leaving;
But softly in the sleep-time from your love I'll steal away.
Oh, it's cruel, dearie, cruel, and it's God knows how I'm grieving;
But His loneliness is calling, and He knows I must obey.

Robert William Service

The Macaronis

Italian people peaceful are,--
Let it be to their credit.
They mostly fail to win a war,
--Oh they themselves have said it.
"Allergic we to lethal guns
And military might:
We love our homes and little ones,
And loath to fight."

But Teutons are a warrior race
Who seek the sword to rattle;
And in the sun they claim a place,
Even at price of battle.
The prestige of a uniform
Is sacred in their sight;
They deem that they are soldiers born
And might is right.

And so I love Italians though
Their fighting powers are petty;
My heart with sympathy doth go
To eaters of spaghetti.
And if the choice were left to me,
I know beyond a doubt
A hundred times I'd rather be
A Dago than a Kraut.

Robert William Service

The Man From Athabaska

Oh the wife she tried to tell me that 'twas nothing but the thrumming
Of a wood-pecker a-rapping on the hollow of a tree;
And she thought that I was fooling when I said it was the drumming
Of the mustering of legions, and 'twas calling unto me;
'Twas calling me to pull my freight and hop across the sea.

And a-mending of my fish-nets sure I started up in wonder,
For I heard a savage roaring and 'twas coming from afar;
Oh the wife she tried to tell me that 'twas only summer thunder,
And she laughed a bit sarcastic when I told her it was War;
'Twas the chariots of battle where the mighty armies are.

Then down the lake came Half-breed Tom with russet sail a-flying,
And the word he said was "War" again, so what was I to do?
Oh the dogs they took to howling, and the missis took to crying,
As I flung my silver foxes in the little birch canoe:
Yes, the old girl stood a-blubbing till an island hid the view.

Says the factor: "Mike, you're crazy! They have soldier men a-plenty.
You're as grizzled as a badger, and you're sixty year or so."
"But I haven't missed a scrap," says I, "since I was one and twenty.
And shall I miss the biggest? You can bet your whiskers -- no!"
So I sold my furs and started . . . and that's eighteen months ago.

For I joined the Foreign Legion, and they put me for a starter
In the trenches of the Argonne with the Boche a step away;
And the partner on my right hand was an apache from Montmartre;
On my left there was a millionaire from Pittsburg, U. S. A.
(Poor fellow! They collected him in bits the other day.)

But I'm sprier than a chipmunk, save a touch of the lumbago,
And they calls me Old Methoosalah, and `blagues' me all the day.
I'm their exhibition sniper, and they work me like a Dago,
And laugh to see me plug a Boche a half a mile away.
Oh I hold the highest record in the regiment, they say.

And at night they gather round me, and I tell them of my roaming
In the Country of the Crepuscule beside the Frozen Sea,
Where the musk-ox runs unchallenged, and the cariboo goes homing;

And they sit like little children, just as quiet as can be:
Men of every crime and colour, how they harken unto me!

And I tell them of the Furland, of the tumpline and the paddle,
Of secret rivers loitering, that no one will explore;
And I tell them of the ranges, of the pack-strap and the saddle,
And they fill their pipes in silence, and their eyes beseech for more;
While above the star-shells fizzle and the high explosives roar.

And I tell of lakes fish-haunted, where the big bull moose are calling,
And forests still as sepulchres with never trail or track;
And valleys packed with purple gloom, and mountain peaks appalling,
And I tell them of my cabin on the shore at Fond du Lac;
And I find myself a-thinking: Sure I wish that I was back.

So I brag of bear and beaver while the batteries are roaring,
And the fellows on the firing steps are blazing at the foe;
And I yarn of fur and feather when the `marmites' are a-soaring,
And they listen to my stories, seven `poilus' in a row,
Seven lean and lousy poilus with their cigarettes aglow.

And I tell them when it's over how I'll hike for Athabaska;
And those seven greasy poilus they are crazy to go too.
And I'll give the wife the "pickle-tub" I promised, and I'll ask her
The price of mink and marten, and the run of cariboo,
And I'll get my traps in order, and I'll start to work anew.

For I've had my fill of fighting, and I've seen a nation scattered,
And an army swung to slaughter, and a river red with gore,
And a city all a-smoulder, and . . . as if it really mattered,
For the lake is yonder dreaming, and my cabin's on the shore;
And the dogs are leaping madly, and the wife is singing gladly,
And I'll rest in Athabaska, and I'll leave it nevermore.

Robert William Service

The Man From Cook's

"You're bloody right - I was a Red,"
The Man from Cook's morosely said.
And if our chaps had won the War
Today I'd be the Governor
Of all Madrid, and rule with pride,
Instead of just a lousy guide.

"For I could talk in Councils high
To draw down angels from the sky.
They put me seven years in gaol, -
You see how I am prison-pale . . .
Death sentence! Each dawn I thought
They'd drag me out and have me shot.

"Maybe far better if they had:
Suspense like that can make one mad.
Yet here I am serene and sane,
And at your service to explain
That gory battlefield out there,
The Cité Universitaire.

"See! Where the Marzanillo flows,
The women used to wash our cloths;
And often, even in its flood,
It would be purpled by our blood.
Contemptuous of shot and shell
Our women sang and - fought like hell.

"Deep trenches there ran up and down,
And linked us with the sightless town;
And every morn and every night
We sallied savagely to fight . . .
By yon ravine in broken clad
I shot and killed a soldier lad.

"Such boys they were: methinks that one
Looked to me like my only son.
He might have been; they told my wife
Before Madrid he lost his life.

Sweet Mary! Oh if I but knew
It was not my own son I slew. . . ."

So spoke that man with eye remote
And stains of gravy on his coat;
I offered him a cigarette,
And as he sighed with vain regret,
Said he: "Don't change your dollars - wait:
I'll get you twice the market rate."

Robert William Service

The Man From Eldorado

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's just arrived in town,
In moccasins and oily buckskin shirt.
He's gaunt as any Indian, and pretty nigh as brown;
He's greasy, and he smells of sweat and dirt.
He sports a crop of whiskers that would shame a healthy hog;
Hard work has racked his joints and stooped his back;
He slops along the sidewalk followed by his yellow dog,
But he's got a bunch of gold-dust in his sack.

He seems a little wistful as he blinks at all the lights,
And maybe he is thinking of his claim
And the dark and dwarfish cabin where he lay and dreamed at nights,
(Thank God, he'll never see the place again!)
Where he lived on tinned tomatoes, beef embalmed and sourdough bread,
On rusty beans and bacon furred with mould;
His stomach's out of kilter and his system full of lead,
But it's over, and his poke is full of gold.

He has panted at the windlass, he has loaded in the drift,
He has pounded at the face of oozy clay;
He has taxed himself to sickness, dark and damp and double shift,
He has labored like a demon night and day.
And now, praise God, it's over, and he seems to breathe again
Of new-mown hay, the warm, wet, friendly loam;
He sees a snowy orchard in a green and dimpling plain,
And a little vine-clad cottage, and it's--Home.

II

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's had a bite and sup,
And he's met in with a drouthy friend or two;
He's cached away his gold-dust, but he's sort of bucking up,
So he's kept enough to-night to see him through.
His eye is bright and genial, his tongue no longer lags;
' His heart is brimming o'er with joy and mirth;
He may be far from savory, he may be clad in rags,
' But to-night he feels as if he owns the earth.

Says he: "Boys, here is where the shaggy North and I will shake;

I thought I'd never manage to get free.
I kept on making misses; but at last I've got my stake;
There's no more thawing frozen muck for me.
I am going to God's Country, where I'll live the simple life;
I'll buy a bit of land and make a start;
I'll carve a little homestead, and I'll win a little wife,
And raise ten little kids to cheer my heart."

They signified their sympathy by crowding to the bar;
They bellied up three deep and drank his health.
He shed a radiant smile around and smoked a rank cigar;
They wished him honor, happiness and wealth.
They drank unto his wife to be--that unsuspecting maid;
They drank unto his children half a score;
And when they got through drinking very tenderly they laid
The man from Eldorado on the floor.

III

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's only starting in
To cultivate a thousand-dollar jag.
His poke is full of gold-dust and his heart is full of sin,
And he's dancing with a girl called Muckluck Mag.
She's as light as any fairy; she's as pretty as a peach;
She's mistress of the witchcraft to beguile;
There's sunshine in her manner, there is music in her speech,
And there's concentrated honey in her smile.

Oh, the fever of the dance-hall and the glitter and the shine,
The beauty, and the jewels, and the whirl,
The madness of the music, the rapture of the wine,
The languorous allurements of a girl!
She is like a lost madonna; he is gaunt, unkempt and grim;
But she fondles him and gazes in his eyes;
Her kisses seek his heavy lips, and soon it seems to him
He has staked a little claim in Paradise.

"Who's for a juicy two-step?" cries the master of the floor;
The music throbs with soft, seductive beat.
There's glitter, gilt and gladness; there are pretty girls galore;
There's a woolly man with moccasins on feet.
They know they've got him going; he is buying wine for all;

They crowd around as buzzards at a feast,
Then when his poke is empty they boost him from the hall,
And spurn him in the gutter like a beast.

He's the man from Eldorado, and he's painting red the town;
Behind he leaves a trail of yellow dust;
In a whirl of senseless riot he is ramping up and down;
There's nothing checks his madness and his lust.
And soon the word is passed around--it travels like a flame;
They fight to clutch his hand and call him friend,
The chevaliers of lost repute, the dames of sorry fame;
Then comes the grim awakening--the end.

IV

He's the man from Eldorado, and he gives a grand affair;
There's feasting, dancing, wine without restraint.
The smooth Beau Brummels of the bar, the faro men, are there;
The tin horns and purveyors of red paint;
The sleek and painted women, their predacious eyes aglow--
Sure Klondike City never saw the like;
Then Muckluck Mag proposed the toast, "The giver of the show,
The livest sport that ever hit the pike."

The "live one" rises to his feet; he stammers to reply--
And then there comes before his muddled brain
A vision of green vastitudes beneath an April sky,
And clover pastures drenched with silver rain.
He knows that it can never be, that he is down and out;
Life leers at him with foul and fetid breath;
And then amid the revelry, the song and cheer and shout,
He suddenly grows grim and cold as death.

He grips the table tensely, and he says: "Dear friends of mine,
I've let you dip your fingers in my purse;
I've crammed you at my table, and I've drowned you in my wine,
And I've little left to give you but--my curse.
I've failed supremely in my plans; it's rather late to whine;
My poke is mighty weasened up and small.
I thank you each for coming here; the happiness is mine--
And now, you thieves and harlots, take it all."

He twists the thong from off his poke; he swings it o'er his head;
The nuggets fall around their feet like grain.
They rattle over roof and wall; they scatter, roll and spread;
The dust is like a shower of golden rain.
The guests a moment stand aghast, then grovel on the floor;
They fight, and snarl, and claw, like beasts of prey;
And then, as everybody grabbed and everybody swore,
The man from Eldorado slipped away.

V

He's the man from Eldorado, and they found him stiff and dead,
Half covered by the freezing ooze and dirt.
A clotted Colt was in his hand, a hole was in his head,
And he wore an old and oily buckskin shirt.
His eyes were fixed and horrible, as one who hails the end;
The frost had set him rigid as a log;
And there, half lying on his breast, his last and only friend,
There crouched and whined a mangy yellow dog.

Robert William Service

The Man Who Knew

The Dreamer visioned Life as it might be,
And from his dream forthright a picture grew,
A painting all the people thronged to see,
And joyed therein -- till came the Man Who Knew,
Saying: "'Tis bad! Why do ye gape, ye fools!
He painteth not according to the schools."

The Dreamer probed Life's mystery of woe,
And in a book he sought to give the clue;
The people read, and saw that it was so,
And read again -- then came the Man Who Knew,
Saying: "Ye witless ones! this book is vile:
It hath not got the rudiments of style."

Love smote the Dreamer's lips, and silver clear
He sang a song so sweet, so tender true,
That all the market-place was thrilled to hear,
And listened rapt -- till came the Man Who Knew,
Saying: "His technique's wrong; he singeth ill.
Waste not your time." The singer's voice was still.

And then the people roused as if from sleep,
Crying: "What care we if it be not Art!
Hath he not charmed us, made us laugh and weep?
Come, let us crown him where he sits apart."
Then, with his picture spurned, his book unread,
His song unsung, they found their Dreamer -- dead.

Robert William Service

The March Of The Dead

The cruel war was over -- oh, the triumph was so sweet!

We watched the troops returning, through our tears;
There was triumph, triumph, triumph down the scarlet glittering street,
And you scarce could hear the music for the cheers.
And you scarce could see the house-tops for the flags that flew between;
The bells were pealing madly to the sky;
And everyone was shouting for the Soldiers of the Queen,
And the glory of an age was passing by.

And then there came a shadow, swift and sudden, dark and drear;
The bells were silent, not an echo stirred.

The flags were drooping sullenly, the men forgot to cheer;
We waited, and we never spoke a word.

The sky grew darker, darker, till from out the gloomy rack

There came a voice that checked the heart with dread:
"Tear down, tear down your bunting now, and hang up sable black;
They are coming -- it's the Army of the Dead."

They were coming, they were coming, gaunt and ghastly, sad and slow;
They were coming, all the crimson wrecks of pride;
With faces seared, and cheeks red smeared, and haunting eyes of woe,
And clotted holes the khaki couldn't hide.

Oh, the clammy brow of anguish! the livid, foam-flecked lips!

The reeling ranks of ruin swept along!
The limb that trailed, the hand that failed, the bloody finger tips!
And oh, the dreary rhythm of their song!

"They left us on the veldt-side, but we felt we couldn't stop

On this, our England's crowning festal day;
We're the men of Magersfontein, we're the men of Spion Kop,
Colenso -- we're the men who had to pay.
We're the men who paid the blood-price. Shall the grave be all our gain?
You owe us. Long and heavy is the score.
Then cheer us for our glory now, and cheer us for our pain,
And cheer us as ye never cheered before."

The folks were white and stricken, and each tongue seemed weighted with lead;
Each heart was clutched in hollow hand of ice;
And every eye was staring at the horror of the dead,

The pity of the men who paid the price.
They were come, were come to mock us, in the first flush of our peace;
Through writhing lips their teeth were all agleam;
They were coming in their thousands -- oh, would they never cease!
I closed my eyes, and then -- it was a dream.

There was triumph, triumph, triumph down the scarlet gleaming street;
The town was mad; a man was like a boy.
A thousand flags were flaming where the sky and city meet;
A thousand bells were thundering the joy.
There was music, mirth and sunshine; but some eyes shone with regret;
And while we stun with cheers our homing braves,
O God, in Thy great mercy, let us nevermore forget
The graves they left behind, the bitter graves.

Robert William Service

The Men That Don'T Fit In

There's a race of men that don't fit in,
A race that can't stay still;
So they break the hearts of kith and kin,
And they roam the world at will.
They range the field and they rove the flood,
And they climb the mountain's crest;
Theirs is the curse of the gypsy blood,
And they don't know how to rest.

If they just went straight they might go far;
They are strong and brave and true;
But they're always tired of the things that are,
And they want the strange and new.
They say: "Could I find my proper groove,
What a deep mark I would make!"
So they chop and change, and each fresh move
Is only a fresh mistake.

And each forgets, as he strips and runs
With a brilliant, fitful pace,
It's the steady, quiet, plodding ones
Who win in the lifelong race.
And each forgets that his youth has fled,
Forgets that his prime is past,
Till he stands one day, with a hope that's dead,
In the glare of the truth at last.

He has failed, he has failed; he has missed his chance;
He has just done things by half.
Life's been a jolly good joke on him,
And now is the time to laugh.
Ha, ha! He is one of the Legion Lost;
He was never meant to win;
He's a rolling stone, and it's bred in the bone;
He's a man who won't fit in.

Robert William Service

The Missal Makers

To visit the Escorial
We took a motor bus,
And there a guide mercurial
 Took charge of us.
He showed us through room after room,
And talked hour after hour,
Of place, crypt and royal tomb,
 Of pomp and power.

But in bewilderment of grace
What pleased me most of all
Were ancient missals proud in place
 In stately hall.
A thousand tomes there were at least,
All luminously bright,
That each a score of years some priest
 Had toiled to write.

Poor patient monk who brushed and penned
From rise to set of sun!
And when his book came to an end,
 His life was done.
With heart of love to God above
For guidance he would pray,
And here behold his art of gold
 Undimmed today.

And as our homeward way we took,
The thought occurred to me -
If scribes would only write one book,
 How good 'twould be!
Or if our authors had to scroll
Their words on vellum fair,
Their output might be very small,
 But oh how rare!

So writers of today take note,
If you your souls would save,
Let every line be one to quote

And to engrave.
Then though you dismally are dead,
You will be cheered to know
your precious prose may still be read
-Ten years or so.

Robert William Service

The Mole

Said he: "I'll dive deep in the Past,
And write a book of direful days
When summer skies were overcast
With smoke of humble hearths ablaze;
When War was rampant in the land,
And poor folk cowered in the night,
While ruin gaped on every hand -
of ravishing and wrath I'll write."

Ten years he toiled to write his book,
Yet he was happy all the while;
The world he willingly forsook
To live alone in hermit style.
In garden sanctuaried sweet,
Full favoured by the steadfast sun,
plunged in the Past, a life complete
He lived. . . . At last his work was done.

A worthy book that few would read
Yet all would praise - each precious page
Starred with some truth the rare would heed,
The vivid images of an age,
Then blinking, to the world again
He came a sage, remote, austere . . .
When lo! his eyes were smote with flame,
The wail of war was in his ear.

He shrank and sighed: "Oh can it be
These old iniquities prevail!
That sons of men are still unfree
And time repeats her sorry tale!"
So with a long sad gaze and last,
Seeking his secret garden nook,
He slipped again into the Past
To live - and write another book.

Robert William Service

The Monster

When we might make with happy heart
 This world a paradise,
With bombs we blast brave men apart,
 With napalm carbonize.
Where we might till the sunny soil,
 And sing for joy of life,
We spend our treasure and our toil
 In bloody strife.

The fields of wheat are sheening gold,
 The flocks have silver fleece;
The signs are sweetly manifold
 Of plenty, praise and peace.
Yet see! The sky is like a cowl
 Where grimy toilers bore
The shards of steel that feed the foul
 Red maw of War.

Instead of butter give us guns;
 Instead of sugar, shells.
Devoted mothers, bear your sons
 To glut still hotter hells.
Alas! When will mad mankind wake
 To banish evermore,
And damn for God in Heaven's sake
 Mass Murder--WAR?

Robert William Service

The Mother

Your children grow from you apart,
Afar and still afar;
And yet it should rejoice your heart
To see how glad they are;
In school and sport, in work and play,
And last, in wedded bliss
How others claim with joy to-day
The lips you used to kiss.

Your children distant will become,
And wide the gulf will grow;
The lips of loving will be dumb,
The trust you used to know
Will in another's heart repose,
Another's voice will cheer...
And you will fondle baby clothes
And brush away a tear.

But though you are estranged almost,
And often lost to view,
How you will see a little ghost
Who ran to cling to you!
Yet maybe children's children will
Caress you with a smile...
Grandmother love will bless you still,-
Well, just a little while.

Robert William Service

The Mountain And The Lake

I know a mountain thrilling to the stars,
Peerless and pure, and pinnacled with snow;
Glimpsing the golden dawn o'er coral bars,
Flaunting the vanished sunset's garnet glow;
Proudly patrician, passionless, serene;
Soaring in silvered steeps where cloud-surfs break;
Virgin and vestal -- Oh, a very Queen!
And at her feet there dreams a quiet lake.

My lake adores my mountain -- well I know,
For I have watched it from its dawn-dream start,
Stilling its mirror to her splendid snow,
Framing her image in its trembling heart;
Glassing her graciousness of greening wood,
Kissing her throne, melodiously mad,
Thrilling responsive to her every mood,
Gloomed with her sadness, gay when she is glad.

My lake has dreamed and loved since time was born;
Will love and dream till time shall cease to be;
Gazing to Her in worship half forlorn,
Who looks towards the stars and will not see --
My peerless mountain, splendid in her scorn. . . .
Alas! poor little lake! Alas! poor me!

Robert William Service

The Mourners

I look into the aching womb of night;
I look across the mist that masks the dead;
The moon is tired and gives but little light,
The stars have gone to bed.

The earth is sick and seems to breathe with pain;
A lost wind whimpers in a mangled tree;
I do not see the foul, corpse-cluttered plain,
The dead I do not see.

The slain I would not see . . . and so I lift
My eyes from out the shambles where they lie;
When lo! a million woman-faces drift
Like pale leaves through the sky.

The cheeks of some are channelled deep with tears;
But some are tearless, with wild eyes that stare
Into the shadow of the coming years
Of fathomless despair.

And some are young, and some are very old;
And some are rich, some poor beyond belief;
Yet all are strangely like, set in the mould
Of everlasting grief.

They fill the vast of Heaven, face on face;
And then I see one weeping with the rest,
Whose eyes beseech me for a moment's space. . . .
Oh eyes I love the best!

Nay, I but dream. The sky is all forlorn,
And there's the plain of battle writhing red:
God pity them, the women-folk who mourn!
How happy are the dead!

Robert William Service

The Mystery Of Mister Smith

For supper we had curried tripe.
I washed the dishes, wound the clock;
Then for awhile I smoked my pipe -
Puff! Puff! We had no word of talk.
The Misses sewed - a sober pair;
Says I at last: "I need some air."

A don't know why I acted so;
I had no thought, no plot, no plan.
I did not really mean to go -
I'm such a docile little man;
But suddenly I felt that I
Must change my life or I would die.

A sign I saw: A ROOM TO LET.
It had a musty, dusty smell;
It gloated gloom, it growled and yet
Somehow I felt I liked it well.
I paid the rent a month ahead:
That night I smoked my pipe in bed.

From out my world I disappeared;
My walk and talk changed over-night.
I bought black glasses, grew a beard -
Abysmally I dropped from sight;
Old Tax Collector, Mister Smith
Became a memory, a myth.

I see my wife in widow's weeds;
She's gained in weight since I have gone.
My pension serves her modest needs,
She keeps the old apartment on;
And living just a block away
I meet her nearly every day.

I hope she doesn't mourn too much;
She has a sad and worried look.
One day we passed and chanced to touch,
But as with sudden fear I shook,

So blankly in my face she peered,
I had to chuckle in my beard.

Oh, comfort is a blessed thing,
But forty years of it I had.
I never drank the wine of Spring,
No moon has ever made me mad.
I never clutched the skirts of Chance
Nor daftly dallied with Romance.

And that is why I seek to save
My soul before it is too late,
To put between me and the grave
A few years of fantastic fate:
I've won to happiness because
I've killed the man that once I was.

I've murdered Income Taxer Smith,
And now I'm Johnny Jones to you.
I have no home, no kin, no kith,
I do the things I want to do.
No matter though I've not a friend,
I've won to freedom in the end.

Bohemian born, I guess, was I;
And should my wife her widowhood
By wedlock end I will not sigh,
But pack my grip and go for good,
To live in lands where laws are lax,
And innocent of Income Tax.

Robert William Service

The Nostomaniac

On the ragged edge of the world I'll roam,
And the home of the wolf shall be my home,
And a bunch of bones on the boundless snows
The end of my trail . . . who knows, who knows!

I'm dreaming to-night in the fire-glow, alone in my study tower,
My books battalioned around me, my Kipling flat on my knee;
But I'm not in the mood for reading, I haven't moved for an hour;
Body and brain I'm weary, weary the heart of me;
Weary of crushing a longing it's little I understand,
For I thought that my trail was ended, I thought I had earned my rest;
But oh, it's stronger than life is, the call of the hearthless land!
And I turn to the North in my trouble, as a child to the mother-breast.

Here in my den it's quiet; the sea-wind taps on the pane;
There's comfort and ease and plenty, the smile of the South is sweet.
All that a man might long for, fight for and seek in vain,
Pictures and books and music, pleasure my last retreat.
Peace! I thought I had gained it, I swore that my tale was told;
By my hair that is grey I swore it, by my eyes that are slow to see;
Yet what does it all avail me? to-night, to-night as of old,
Out of the dark I hear it -- the Northland calling to me.

And I'm daring a rampageous river that runs the devil knows where;
My hand is athrill on the paddle, the birch-bark bounds like a bird.
Hark to the rumble of rapids! Here in my morris chair
Eager and tense I'm straining -- isn't it most absurd?
Now in the churn and the lather, foam that hisses and stings,
Leap I, keyed for the struggle, fury and fume and roar;
Rocks are spitting like hell-cats -- Oh, it's a sport for kings,
Life on a twist of the paddle . . . there's my "Kim" on the floor.

How I thrill and I vision! Then my camp of a night;
Red and gold of the fire-glow, net afloat in the stream;
Scent of the pines and silence, little "pal" pipe alight,
Body a-purr with pleasure, sleep untroubled of dream:
Banquet of paystreak bacon! moment of joy divine,
When the bannock is hot and gluey, and the teapot's nearing the boil!
Never was wolf so hungry, stomach cleaving to spine. . . .

Ha! there's my servant calling, says that dinner will spoil.

What do I want with dinner? Can I eat any more?
Can I sleep as I used to? . . . Oh, I abhor this life!
Give me the Great Uncertain, the Barren Land for a floor,
The Milky Way for a roof-beam, splendour and space and strife:
Something to fight and die for -- the limpid Lake of the Bear,
The Empire of Empty Bellies, the dunes where the Dogribs dwell;
Big things, real things, live things . . . here on my morris chair
How I ache for the Northland! "Dinner and servants" -- Hell!!

Am I too old, I wonder? Can I take one trip more?
Go to the granite-ribbed valleys, flooded with sunset wine,
Peaks that pierce the aurora, rivers I must explore,
Lakes of a thousand islands, millioning hordes of the Pine?
Do they not miss me, I wonder, valley and peak and plain?
Whispering each to the other: "Many a moon has passed . . .
Where has he gone, our lover? Will he come back again?
Star with his fires our tundra, leave us his bones at last?"

Yes, I'll go back to the Northland, back to the way of the bear,
Back to the muskeg and mountain, back to the ice-leaguered sea.
Old am I! what does it matter? Nothing I would not dare;
Give me a trail to conquer -- Oh, it is "meat" to me!
I will go back to the Northland, feeble and blind and lame;
Sup with the sunny-eyed Husky, eat moose-nose with the Cree;
Play with the Yellow-knife bastards, boasting my blood and my name:
I will go back to the Northland, for the Northland is calling to me.

Then give to me paddle and whiplash, and give to me tumpline and gun;
Give to me salt and tobacco, flour and a gunny of tea;
Take me up over the Circle, under the flamboyant sun;
Turn me foot-loose like a savage -- that is the finish of me.
I know the trail I am seeking, it's up by the Lake of the Bear;
It's down by the Arctic Barrens, it's over to Hudson's Bay;
Maybe I'll get there, -- maybe: death is set by a hair. . . .
Hark! it's the Northland calling! now must I go away. . . .

Go to the Wild that waits for me;
Go where the moose and the musk-ox be;
Go to the wolf and the secret snows;
Go to my fate . . . who knows, who knows!

Robert William Service

The Odyssey Of 'Erbert 'Iggins

Me and Ed and a stretcher
Out on the nootral ground.
(If there's one dead corpse, I'll betcher
There's a 'undred smellin' around.)
Me and Eddie O'Brian,
Both of the R. A. M. C.
"It'as a 'ell of a night
For a soul to take flight,"
As Eddie remarks to me.
Me and Ed crawlin' 'omeward,
Thinkin' our job is done,
When sudden and clear,
Wot do we 'ear:
'Owl of a wounded 'Un.

"Got to take 'im," snaps Eddy;
"Got to take all we can.
'E may be a Germ
Wiv the 'eart of a worm,
But, blarst 'im! ain't 'e a man?"
So 'e sloshes out fixin' a dressin'
('E'd always a medical knack),
When that wounded 'Un
'E rolls to 'is gun,
And 'e plugs me pal in the back.

Now what would you do? I arst you.
There was me slaughtered mate.
There was that 'Un
(I'd collered 'is gun),
A-snarlin' 'is 'ymn of 'ate.
Wot did I do? 'Ere, whisper . . .
'E'd a shiny bald top to 'is 'ead,
But when I got through,
Between me and you,
It was 'orrid and jaggy and red.

"Ang on like a limpet, Eddy.
Thank Gord! you ain't dead after all."

It's slow and it's sure and it's steady
 (Which is 'ard, for 'e's big and I'm small).
The rockets are shootin' and shinin',
 It's rainin' a perishin' flood,
The bullets are buzzin' and whinin',
 And I'm up to me stern in the mud.
There's all kinds of 'owlin' and 'ootin';
 It's black as a bucket of tar;
Oh, I'm doin' my bit,
But I'm 'avin' a fit,
 And I wish I was 'ome wiv Mar.

"Stick on like a plaster, Eddy.
 Old sport, you're a-slackin' your grip."
Gord! But I'm crocky already;
 My feet, 'ow they slither and slip!
There goes the biff of a bullet.
 The Boches have got us for fair.
Another one -- WHUT!
The son of a slut!
 'E managed to miss by a 'air.
'Ow! Wot was it jabbed at me shoulder?
 Gave it a dooce of a wrench.
Is it Eddy or me
Wot's a-bleedin' so free?
 Crust! but it's long to the trench.
I ain't just as strong as a Sandow,
 And Ed ain't a flapper by far;
I'm blamed if I understand 'ow
 We've managed to get where we are.
But 'ere's for a bit of a breather.
 "Steady there, Ed, 'arf a mo'.
Old pal, it's all right;
It's a 'ell of a fight,
 But are we down-'earted? No-o-o."

Now war is a funny thing, ain't it?
 It's the rummiest sort of a go.
For when it's most real,
It's then that you feel
 You're a-watchin' a cinema show.
'Ere's me wot's a barber's assistant.

Hey, presto! It's somewheres in France,
And I'm 'ere in a pit
Where a coal-box 'as 'it,
And it's all like a giddy romance.
The ruddy quick-firers are spittin',
The 'eavies are bellowin' 'ate,
And 'ere I am cashooly sittin',
And 'oldin' the 'ead of me mate.
Them gharstly green star-shells is beamin',
'Ot shrapnel is poppin' like rain,
And I'm sayin': "Bert 'Iggins, you're dreamin',
And you'll wake up in 'Ampstead again.
You'll wake up and 'ear yourself sayin':
'Would you like, sir, to 'ave a shampoo?'
'Stead of sheddin' yer blood
In the rain and the mud,
Which is some'ow the right thing to do;
Which is some'ow yer 'oary-eyed dooty,
Wot you're doin' the best wot you can,
For 'Ampstead and 'ome and beauty,
And you've been and you've slaughtered a man.
A feller wot punctured your partner;
Oh, you 'ammered 'im 'ard on the 'ead,
And you still see 'is eyes
Starin' bang at the skies,
And you ain't even sorry 'e's dead.
But you wish you was back in your diggin's
Asleep on your mouldy old stor.
Oh, you're doin' yer bit, 'Erbert 'Iggins,
But you ain't just enjoyin' the war."

"Ang on like a hoctopus, Eddy.
It's us for the bomb-belt again.
Except for the shrap
Which 'as 'it me a tap,
I'm feelin' as right as the rain.
It's my silly old feet wot are slippin',
It's as dark as a 'ogs'ead o' sin,
But don't be oneasy, my pippin,
I'm goin' to pilot you in.
It's my silly old 'ead wot is reelin'.
The bullets is buzzin' like bees.

Me shoulder's red-'ot,
And I'm bleedin' a lot,
 And me legs is on'inged at the knees.
But we're staggerin' nearer and nearer.
 Just stick it, old sport, play the game.

I make 'em out clearer and clearer,
 Our trenches a-snappin' with flame.
Oh, we're stumblin' closer and closer.
 'Ang on there, lad! Just one more try.
Did you say: Put you down? Damn it, no, sir!
 I'll carry you in if I die.
By cracky! old feller, they've seen us.
 They're sendin' out stretchers for two.
Let's give 'em the hoorah between us
 ('Anged lucky we aren't booked through).
My flipper is mashed to a jelly.
 A bullet 'as tickled your spleen.
We've shed lots of gore
And we're leakin' some more,
 But -- wot a hoccasion it's been!
Ho! 'Ere comes the rescuin' party.
 They're crawlin' out cautious and slow.
Come! Buck up and greet 'em, my 'earty,
 Shoulder to shoulder -- so.
They mustn't think we was down-'earted.
Old pal, we was never down-'earted.
If they arsts us if we was down-'earted
 We'll 'owl in their fyces: 'No-o-o!'"

Robert William Service

The Old

Oh bear with me, for I am old
And count on fingers five
The years this pencil I may hold
And hope to be alive;
How sadly soon our dreaming ends!
How brief the sunset glow!
Be kindly to the old, my friends:
You'll miss them when they go.

I've seen so many disappear
That I can scarce forget,
For death has made them doubly dear
And ripened my regret.
How wistfully I've wished them back,
With cherishing to show
The gentleness I used to lack
In years of long ago.

You, young and fit, will falter too,
And when Time's load you bear,
'Twill help if others turn to you
With comforting and care;
With loving look and tender touch . . .
Aye, in their twilight wan
Revere the old - for Oh how much
You'll miss them when they've gone!

Robert William Service

The Old General

Little Annabelle to please,
 (Lacking grace, I grant),
Grandpa down on hands and knees
 Plays the elephant.
Annabelle shrieks with delight,
 Bouncing up and down,
On his back and holding tight
 To his dressing gown.

As they roll and bowl along,
 Round and round the room,
There is sunshine and a song
 'Spite December gloom.
Yet we hear not Grandpa's groans,
 Hushed his beard inside,
As his old rheumatic bones
 Ache with every stride.

He has known his golden days,
 Soldiered with the best;
And to prove the people's praise
 Medals bright his breast.
Yet though his renown we chant,
 How we love him well
When he plays the elephant
 Just for Annabelle!

Robert William Service

The Ordinary Man

If you and I should chance to meet,
I guess you wouldn't care;
I'm sure you'd pass me in the street
As if I wasn't there;
You'd never look me in the face,
My modest mug to scan,
Because I'm just a commonplace
 And Ordinary Man.

But then, it may be, you are too
A guy of every day,
Who does the job he's told to do
And takes the wife his pay;
Who makes a home and kids his care,
And works with pick or pen. . . .
Why, Pal, I guess we're just a pair
 Of Ordinary Men.

We plug away and make no fuss,
Our feats are never crowned;
And yet it's common coves like us
Who make the world go round.
And as we steer a steady course
By God's predestined plan,
Hats off to that almighty Force:
 THE ORDINARY MAN.

Robert William Service

The Other One

"Gather around me, children dear;
The wind is high and the night is cold;
Closer, little ones, snuggle near;
Let's seek a story of ages old;
A magic tale of a bygone day,
Of lovely ladies and dragons dread;
Come, for you're all so tired of play,
We'll read till it's time to go to bed."

So they all are glad, and they nestle in,
And squat on the rough old nursery rug,
And they nudge and hush as I begin,
And the fire leaps up and all's so snug;
And there I sit in the big arm-chair,
And how they are eager and sweet and wise,
And they cup their chins in their hands and stare
At the heart of the flame with thoughtful eyes.

And then, as I read by the ruddy glow
And the little ones sit entranced and still . . .
He's drawing near, ah! I know, I know
He's listening too, as he always will.
He's there -- he's standing beside my knee;
I see him so well, my wee, wee son. . . .
Oh, children dear, don't look at me --
I'm reading now for -- the Other One.

For the firelight glints in his golden hair,
And his wondering eyes are fixed on my face,
And he rests on the arm of my easy-chair,
And the book's a blur and I lose my place:
And I touch my lips to his shining head,
And my voice breaks down and -- the story's done. . . .
Oh, children, kiss me and go to bed:
Leave me to think of the Other One.

Of the One who will never grow up at all,
Who will always be just a child at play,
Tender and trusting and sweet and small,

Who will never leave me and go away;
Who will never hurt me and give me pain;
Who will comfort me when I'm all alone;
A heart of love that's without a stain,
Always and always my own, my own.

Yet a thought shines out from the dark of pain,
And it gives me hope to be reconciled:
That each of us must be born again,
And live and die as a little child;
So that with souls all shining white,
White as snow and without one sin,
We may come to the Gates of Eternal Light,
Where only children may enter in.

So, gentle mothers, don't ever grieve
Because you have lost, but kiss the rod;
From the depths of your woe be glad, believe
You've given an angel unto God.
Rejoice! You've a child whose youth endures,
Who comes to you when the day is done,
Wistful for love, oh, yours, just yours,
Dearest of all, the Other One.

Robert William Service

The Outlaw

A wild and woeful race he ran
Of lust and sin by land and sea;
Until, abhorred of God and man,
They swung him from the gallows-tree.
And then he climbed the Starry Stair,
And dumb and naked and alone,
With head unbowed and brazen glare,
He stood before the Judgment Throne.

The Keeper of the Records spoke:
"This man, O Lord, has mocked Thy Name.
The weak have wept beneath his yoke,
The strong have fled before his flame.
The blood of babes is on his sword;
His life is evil to the brim:
Look down, decree his doom, O Lord!
Lo! there is none will speak for him."

The golden trumpets blew a blast
That echoed in the crypts of Hell,
For there was Judgment to be passed,
And lips were hushed and silence fell.
The man was mute; he made no stir,
Erect before the Judgment Seat . . .
When all at once a mongrel cur
Crept out and cowered and licked his feet.

It licked his feet with whining cry.
Come Heav'n, come Hell, what did it care?
It leapt, it tried to catch his eye;
Its master, yea, its God was there.
Then, as a thrill of wonder sped
Through throngs of shining seraphim,
The Judge of All looked down and said:
"Lo! here is ONE who pleads for him.

"And who shall love of these the least,
And who by word or look or deed
Shall pity show to bird or beast,

By Me shall have a friend in need.
Aye, though his sin be black as night,
And though he stand 'mid men alone,
He shall be softened in My sight,
And find a pleader by My Throne.

"So let this man to glory win;
From life to life salvation glean;
By pain and sacrifice and sin,
Until he stand before Me -- clean.
For he who loves the least of these
(And here I say and here repeat)
Shall win himself an angel's pleas
For Mercy at My Judgment Seat."

Robert William Service

The Palace

Grimy men with picks and shovels
Who in darkness sweat unseen,
Climb from out your lousy hovels,
Build a palace for the Queen;
Praise the powers that be for giving
You a chance to make a living.

Yet it would be better far
Could you build with cosy lure
Skyey tenements where are
Rabbit-warrens of the poor;
With a hope bright as a gem
Some day you might live in them.

Could the Queen just say: 'A score
Of rich palaces have I.
Do not make me any more,--
Raise a hostel heaven-high;
House the hundreds who have need,
To their misery give heed.'

Could she make this gesture fine
To the pit where labour grovels,
Mother hearts would cease to pine,
Weary men would wave their shovels.
All would cry with hope serene:
'Little children, bless the Queen!'

Robert William Service

The Parson's Son

This is the song of the parson's son, as he squats in his shack alone,
On the wild, weird nights, when the Northern Lights shoot up from the frozen
zone,
And it's sixty below, and couched in the snow the hungry huskies moan:

"I'm one of the Arctic brotherhood, I'm an old-time pioneer.
I came with the first -- O God! how I've cursed this Yukon -- but still I'm here.
I've sweated athirst in its summer heat, I've frozen and starved in its cold;
I've followed my dreams by its thousand streams, I've toiled and moiled for its
gold.

"Look at my eyes -- been snow-blind twice; look where my foot's half gone;
And that gruesome scar on my left cheek, where the frost-fiend bit to the bone.
Each one a brand of this devil's land, where I've played and I've lost the game,
A broken wreck with a craze for `hooch', and never a cent to my name.

"This mining is only a gamble; the worst is as good as the best;
I was in with the bunch and I might have come out right on top with the rest;
With Cormack, Ladue and Macdonald -- O God! but it's hell to think
Of the thousands and thousands I've squandered on cards and women and drink.

"In the early days we were just a few, and we hunted and fished around,
Nor dreamt by our lonely camp-fires of the wealth that lay under the ground.
We traded in skins and whiskey, and I've often slept under the shade
Of that lone birch tree on Bonanza, where the first big find was made.

"We were just like a great big family, and every man had his squaw,
And we lived such a wild, free, fearless life beyond the pale of the law;
Till sudden there came a whisper, and it maddened us every man,
And I got in on Bonanza before the big rush began.

"Oh, those Dawson days, and the sin and the blaze, and the town all open wide!
(If God made me in His likeness, sure He let the devil inside.)
But we all were mad, both the good and the bad, and as for the women, well --
No spot on the map in so short a space has hustled more souls to hell.

"Money was just like dirt there, easy to get and to spend.
I was all caked in on a dance-hall jade, but she shook me in the end.
It put me queer, and for near a year I never drew sober breath,

Till I found myself in the bughouse ward with a claim staked out on death.

"Twenty years in the Yukon, struggling along its creeks;
Roaming its giant valleys, scaling its god-like peaks;
Bathed in its fiery sunsets, fighting its fiendish cold --
Twenty years in the Yukon . . . twenty years -- and I'm old.

"Old and weak, but no matter, there's `hooch' in the bottle still.
I'll hitch up the dogs to-morrow, and mush down the trail to Bill.
It's so long dark, and I'm lonesome -- I'll just lay down on the bed;
To-morrow I'll go . . . to-morrow . . . I guess I'll play on the red.

". . . Come, Kit, your pony is saddled. I'm waiting, dear, in the court . . .
. . . Minnie, you devil, I'll kill you if you skip with that flossy sport . . .
. . . How much does it go to the pan, Bill? . . . play up, School, and play the
game . . .
. . . Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name . . ."

This was the song of the parson's son, as he lay in his bunk alone,
Ere the fire went out and the cold crept in, and his blue lips ceased to moan,
And the hunger-maddened malamutes had torn him flesh from bone.

Robert William Service

The Parting

Sky's a-waxin' grey,
Got to be a-goin';
Gittin' on my way,
Where? I ain't a-knowin'.
Fellers, no more jokes,
Fun an' frisky greetin'--
So long, all you folks,
Been nice our meetin'.

Sky's a-growin' dark,
Have to be a-startin'.
Feeble is the spark,
Pitiful the partin'.
Family an' all,
Thanks for joy I owe you;
Gotta take my call;
Been sweet to know you.

Sky's a-mighty black,
Close my heart's to breakin'.
Lonesome is the track
I must now be takin'.
Lordy, be You nigh,
Now's my time to prove you . . .
Life, good-bye, good-bye,--
Been grand to love you!

Robert William Service

The Passing Of The Year

My glass is filled, my pipe is lit,
My den is all a cosy glow;
And snug before the fire I sit,
And wait to feel the old year go.
I dedicate to solemn thought
Amid my too-unthinking days,
This sober moment, sadly fraught
With much of blame, with little praise.

Old Year! upon the Stage of Time
You stand to bow your last adieu;
A moment, and the prompter's chime
Will ring the curtain down on you.
Your mien is sad, your step is slow;
You falter as a Sage in pain;
Yet turn, Old Year, before you go,
And face your audience again.

That sphinx-like face, remote, austere,
Let us all read, whate'er the cost:
O Maiden! why that bitter tear?
Is it for dear one you have lost?
Is it for fond illusion gone?
For trusted lover proved untrue?
O sweet girl-face, so sad, so wan
What hath the Old Year meant to you?

And you, O neighbour on my right
So sleek, so prosperously clad!
What see you in that aged wight
That makes your smile so gay and glad?
What opportunity unmissed?
What golden gain, what pride of place?
What splendid hope? O Optimist!
What read you in that withered face?

And You, deep shrinking in the gloom,
What find you in that filmy gaze?
What menace of a tragic doom?

What dark, condemning yesterdays?
What urge to crime, what evil done?
What cold, confronting shape of fear?
O haggard, haunted, hidden One
What see you in the dying year?

And so from face to face I flit,
The countless eyes that stare and stare;
Some are with approbation lit,
And some are shadowed with despair.
Some show a smile and some a frown;
Some joy and hope, some pain and woe:
Enough! Oh, ring the curtain down!
Old weary year! it's time to go.

My pipe is out, my glass is dry;
My fire is almost ashes too;
But once again, before you go,
And I prepare to meet the New:
Old Year! a parting word that's true,
For we've been comrades, you and I --
I thank God for each day of you;
There! bless you now! Old Year, good-bye!

Robert William Service

The Pencil Seller

A pencil, sir; a penny -- won't you buy?
I'm cold and wet and tired, a sorry plight;
Don't turn your back, sir; take one just to try;
I haven't made a single sale to-night.
Oh, thank you, sir; but take the pencil too;
I'm not a beggar, I'm a business man.
Pencils I deal in, red and black and blue;
It's hard, but still I do the best I can.
Most days I make enough to pay for bread,
A cup o' coffee, stretching room at night.
One needs so little -- to be warm and fed,
A hole to kennel in -- oh, one's all right . . .

Excuse me, you're a painter, are you not?
I saw you looking at that dealer's show,
The croûtes he has for sale, a shabby lot --
What do I know of Art? What do I know . . .
Well, look! That David Strong so well displayed,
"White Sorcery" it's called, all gossamer,
And pale moon-magic and a dancing maid
(You like the little elfin face of her?) --
That's good; but still, the picture as a whole,
The values, -- Pah! He never painted worse;
Perhaps because his fire was lacking coal,
His cupboard bare, no money in his purse.
Perhaps . . . they say he labored hard and long,
And see now, in the harvest of his fame,
When round his pictures people gape and throng,
A scurvy dealer sells this on his name.
A wretched rag, wrung out of want and woe;
A soulless daub, not David Strong a bit,
Unworthy of his art. . . . How should I know?
How should I know? I'm Strong -- I painted it.

There now, I didn't mean to let that out.
It came in spite of me -- aye, stare and stare.
You think I'm lying, crazy, drunk, no doubt --
Think what you like, it's neither here nor there.
It's hard to tell so terrible a truth,

I saw the shadows darken round her eyes.
So tired she was, so sorrowful, so pale,
And oh, there came a day she could not rise.
The doctor looked at her; he shook his head,
And spoke of wine and grapes and Southern air:
"If you can get her out of this," he said,
"She'll have a fighting chance with proper care."

"With proper care!" When he had gone away,
I sat there, trembling, twitching, dazed with grief.
Under my old and ragged coat she lay,
Our room was bare and cold beyond belief.
"Maybe," I thought, "I still can paint a bit,
Some lilies, landscape, anything at all."
Alas! My brush, I could not steady it.
Down from my fumbling hand I let it fall.
"With proper care" -- how could I give her that,
Half of me dead? . . . I crawled down to the street.
Cowering beside the wall, I held my hat
And begged of every one I chanced to meet.
I got some pennies, bought her milk and bread,
And so I fought to keep the Doom away;
And yet I saw with agony of dread
My dear one sinking, sinking day by day.
And then I was awakened in the night:
"Please take my hands, I'm cold," I heard her sigh;
And soft she whispered, as she held me tight:
"Oh daddy, we've been happy, you and I!"
I do not think she suffered any pain,
She breathed so quietly . . . but though I tried,
I could not warm her little hands again:
And so there in the icy dark she died. . . .
The dawn came groping in with fingers gray
And touched me, sitting silent as a stone;
I kissed those piteous lips, as cold as clay --
I did not cry, I did not even moan.
At last I rose, groped down the narrow stair;
An evil fog was oozing from the sky;
Half-crazed I stumbled on, I knew not where,
Like phantoms were the folks that passed me by.
How long I wandered thus I do not know,
But suddenly I halted, stood stock-still --

Beside a door that spilled a golden glow
I saw a name, my name, upon a bill.
"A Sale of Famous Pictures," so it read,
"A Notable Collection, each a gem,
Distinguished Works of Art by painters dead."
The folks were going in, I followed them.
I stood upon the outskirts of the crowd,
I only hoped that none might notice me.
Soon, soon I heard them call my name aloud:
"A `David Strong', his Fete in Brittany."
(A brave big picture that, the best I've done,
It glowed and kindled half the hall away,
With all its memories of sea and sun,
Of pipe and bowl, of joyous work and play.
I saw the sardine nets blue as the sky,
I saw the nut-brown fisher-boats put out.)
"Five hundred pounds!" rapped out a voice near by;
"Six hundred!" "Seven!" "Eight!" And then a
shout:
"A thousand pounds!" Oh, how I thrilled to hear!
Oh, how the bids went up by leaps, by bounds!
And then a silence; then the auctioneer:
"It's going! Going! Gone! Three thousand pounds!"
Three thousand pounds! A frenzy leapt in me.
"That picture's mine," I cried; "I'm David Strong.
I painted it, this famished wretch you see;
I did it, I, and sold it for a song.
And in a garret three small hours ago
My daughter died for want of Christian care.
Look, look at me! . . . Is it to mock my woe
You pay three thousand for my picture there?" . . .

O God! I stumbled blindly from the hall;
The city crashed on me, the fiendish sounds
Of cruelty and strife, but over all
"Three thousand pounds!" I heard; "Three thousand
pounds!"

There, that's my story, sir; it isn't gay.
Tales of the Poor are never very bright . . .
You'll look for me next time you pass this way . . .
I hope you'll find me, sir; good-night, good-night.

Robert William Service

The Petit Vieux

"Sow your wild oats in your youth," so we're always told;
But I say with deeper sooth: "Sow them when you're old."
I'll be wise till I'm about seventy or so:
Then, by Gad! I'll blossom out as an ancient beau.
I'll assume a dashing air, laugh with loud Ha! ha! . . .
How my grandchildren will stare at their grandpapa!
Their perfection aureoled I will scandalize:
Won't I be a hoary old sinner in their eyes!

Watch me, how I'll learn to chaff barmaids in a bar;
Scotches daily, gayly quaff, puff a fierce cigar.
I will haunt the Tango teas, at the stage-door stand;
Wait for Dolly Dimpleknees, bouquet in my hand.

Then at seventy I'll take flutters at roulette;
While at eighty hope I'll make good at poker yet;
And in fashionable togs to the races go,
Gayest of the gay old dogs, ninety years or so.

"Sow your wild oats while you're young," that's what you are told;
Don't believe the foolish tongue -- sow 'em when you're old.
Till you're threescore years and ten, take my humble tip,
Sow your nice tame oats and then . . . Hi, boys! Let 'er rip.

Robert William Service

The Philanderer

Oh, have you forgotten those afternoons
With riot of roses and amber skies,
When we thrilled to the joy of a million Junes,
And I sought for your soul in the deeps of your eyes?
I would love you, I promised, forever and aye,
And I meant it too; yet, oh, isn't it odd?
When we met in the Underground to-day
I addressed you as Mary instead of as Maude.

Oh, don't you remember that moonlit sea,
With us on a silver trail afloat,
When I gracefully sank on my bended knee
At the risk of upsetting our little boat?
Oh, I vowed that my life was blighted then,
As friendship you proffered with mournful mien;
But now as I think of your children ten,
I'm glad you refused me, Evangeline.

Oh, is that moment eternal still
When I breathed my love in your shell-like ear,
And you plucked at your fan as a maiden will,
And you blushed so charmingly, Guenivere?
Like a worshiper at your feet I sat;
For a year and a day you made me mad;
But now, alas! you are forty, fat,
And I think: What a lucky escape I had!

Oh, maidens I've set in a sacred shrine,
Oh, Rosamond, Molly and Mignonette,
I've deemed you in turn the most divine,
In turn you've broken my heart . . . and yet
It's easily mended. What's past is past.
To-day on Lucy I'm going to call;
For I'm sure that I know true love at last,
And She is the fairest girl of all.

Robert William Service

The Philistine And The Bohemian

She was a Philistine spick and span,
He was a bold Bohemian.
She had the mode, and the last at that;
He had a cape and a brigand hat.
She was so riant and chic and trim;
He was so shaggy, unkempt and grim.
On the rue de la Paix she was wont to shine;
The rue de la Gaîté was more his line.
She doted on Barclay and Dell and Caine;
He quoted Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine.
She was a triumph at Tango teas;
At Vorticist's suppers he sought to please.
She thought that Franz Lehar was utterly great;
Of Strauss and Stravinsky he'd piously prate.
She loved elegance, he loved art;
They were as wide as the poles apart:
Yet -- Cupid and Caprice are hand and glove --
They met at a dinner, they fell in love.

Home he went to his garret bare,
Thrilling with rapture, hope, despair.
Swift he gazed in his looking-glass,
Made a grimace and murmured: "Ass!"
Seized his scissors and fiercely sheared,
Severed his buccaneering beard;
Grabbed his hair, and clip! clip! clip!
Off came a bunch with every snip.
Ran to a tailor's in startled state,
Suits a dozen commanded straight;
Coats and overcoats, pants in pairs,
Everything that a dandy wears;
Socks and collars, and shoes and ties,
Everything that a dandy buys.
Chums looked at him with wondering stare,
Fancied they'd seen him before somewhere;
A Brummell, a D'Orsay, a beau so fine,
A shining, immaculate Philistine.

Home she went in a raptured daze,

Looked in a mirror with startled gaze,
Didn't seem to be pleased at all;
Savagely muttered: "Insipid Doll!"
Clutched her hair and a pair of shears,
Cropped and bobbed it behind the ears;
Aimed at a wan and willowy-necked
Sort of a Holman Hunt effect;
Robed in subtle and sage-green tones,
Like the dames of Rossetti and E. Burne-Jones;
Girdled her garments billowing wide,
Moved with an undulating glide;
All her frivolous friends forsook,
Cultivated a soulful look;
Gushed in a voice with a creamy throb
Over some weirdly Futurist daub --
Did all, in short, that a woman can
To be a consummate Bohemian.

A year went past with its hopes and fears,
A year that seemed like a dozen years.
They met once more. . . . Oh, at last! At last!
They rushed together, they stopped aghast.
They looked at each other with blank dismay,
They simply hadn't a word to say.
He thought with a shiver: "Can this be she?"
She thought with a shudder: "This can't be he!"
This simpering dandy, so sleek and spruce;
This languorous lily in garments loose;
They sought to brace from the awful shock:
Taking a seat, they tried to talk.
She spoke of Bergson and Pater's prose,
He prattled of dances and ragtime shows;
She purred of pictures, Matisse, Cezanne,
His tastes to the girls of Kirchner ran;
She raved of Tchaikovsky and Caesar Franck,
He owned that he was a jazz-band crank!
They made no headway. Alas! alas!
He thought her a bore, she thought him an ass.
And so they arose and hurriedly fled;
Perish Illusion, Romance, you're dead.
He loved elegance, she loved art,
Better at once to part, to part.

And what is the moral of all this rot?
Don't try to be what you know you're not.
And if you're made on a muttonish plan,
Don't seek to seem a Bohemian;
And if to the goats your feet incline,
Don't try to pass for a Philistine.

Robert William Service

The Pigeon Shooting

They say that Monte Carlo is
A sunny place for shady people;
But I'm not in the gambling biz,
And sober as a parish steeple.
so though this paradisal spot
The devil's playground of the rich is,
I love it and I love it not,
As men may sometimes fall for bitches.

I lazed beneath the sky's blue bliss,
The sea swooned with a sequin glimmer;
The breeze was shy as maiden kiss,
The palms sashayed in silken shimmer.
The peace I soaked in every pore
did me more good than ten religions . . .
And then: Bang! Bang! my joy was o'er;
Says I: "There goes them poor dam pigeons."

I see them bob from out their traps,
the swarded green around them ringing;
bewildered, full of joy perhaps,
With sudden hope of skyway winging.
They blink a moment at the sun,
They flutter free of earthy tether . . .
A fat man holds a smoking gun,
A boy collects some blood and feather.

And so through all the sainted day,
Bang! Bang! a bunch of plumage gory.
Five hundred francs they cost to slay,
And few there live to tell the story . . .
Yet look! there's one so swift to fly,
Despite the shots a course he's steering . . .
Brave little bird! he's winging high,
He's gained the trees - I feel like cheering.

In Monte Carlo's garden glades
With dreamful bliss one softly lingers,
And lazily in leafy shades

The doves pick breadcrumbs from one fingers . . .
Bang! Bang! Farewell, oh sylvan courts!
Where peace and joy are sweetly blended . . .
God curse these lousy Latin sports!
My pigeons scat, my dream is ended.

Robert William Service

The Pigeons Of St. Marks

Something's wrong in Pigeon-land;
'Tisn't as it used to be,
When the pilgrim, corn in hand,
Courtied us with laughing glee;
When we crooned with pinions furled,
Tamest pigeons in the world.

When we packed each arm and shoulder,
Never deeming man a menace;
Surly birds were never bolder
Than our dainty doves of Venice:
Who would have believed a pigeon
Could become wild as a widgeon.

Well, juts blame it on the War,
When Venetians grew thinner,
And gaunt hands would grab us for
Succulence to serve a dinner . . .
How our numbers fast grew fewer,
As we perished on a skewer.

Pa and Mummie went like that,
So when tourist takes his stand,
On his Borsolino hat
Soft as whispered love I land;
Then with cooing liquid vowels
I . . . evacuate my bowls.

Something's wrong in Pigeon-land;
Mankind we no longer trust;
Shrinking from the tendered hand,
pick we corn from out the dust;
While on guileless pilgrim pate,
Thinking that revenge is sweet,
Soft I croon my hymn of hate,
Drop my tribute and retreat.

Robert William Service

The Pines

We sleep in the sleep of ages, the bleak, barbarian pines;
The gray moss drapes us like sages, and closer we lock our lines,
And deeper we clutch through the gelid gloom where never a sunbeam shines.

On the flanks of the storm-gored ridges are our black battalions massed;
We surge in a host to the sullen coast, and we sing in the ocean blast;
From empire of sea to empire of snow we grip our empire fast.

To the niggard lands were we driven, 'twixt desert and floes are we penned;
To us was the Northland given, ours to stronghold and defend;
Ours till the world be riven in the crash of the utter end;

Ours from the bleak beginning, through the aeons of death-like sleep;
Ours from the shock when the naked rock was hurled from the hissing deep;
Ours through the twilight ages of weary glacier creep.

Wind of the East, Wind of the West, wandering to and fro,
Chant your songs in our topmost boughs, that the sons of men may know
The peerless pine was the first to come, and the pine will be last to go!

We pillar the halls of perfumed gloom; we plume where the eagles soar;
The North-wind swoops from the brooding Pole, and our ancients crash and roar;
But where one falls from the crumbling walls shoots up a hardy score.

We spring from the gloom of the canyon's womb; in the valley's lap we lie;
From the white foam-fringe, where the breakers cringe to the peaks that tusk the
sky,
We climb, and we peer in the crag-locked mere that gleams like a golden eye.

Gain to the verge of the hog-back ridge where the vision ranges free:
Pines and pines and the shadow of pines as far as the eye can see;
A steadfast legion of stalwart knights in dominant empery.

Sun, moon and stars give answer; shall we not staunchly stand,
Even as now, forever, wards of the wilder strand,
Sentinels of the stillness, lords of the last, lone land?

Robert William Service

The Portrait

The portrait there above my bed
They tell me is a work of art;
My Wife,--since twenty years she's dead:
Her going nearly broke my heart.
Alas! No little ones we had
To light our hearth with joy and glee;
Yet as I linger lone and sad
 I know she's waiting me.

The picture? Sargent painted it,
And it has starred in many a show.
Her eyes are on me where I sit,
And follow me where'er I go.
She'll smile like that when I am gone,
And I am frail and oh so ill!
Aye, when I'm waxen, cold and wan,
 Lo! She'll be smiling still.

So I have bade them slash in strips
That relic of my paradise.
Let flame destroy those lovely lips
And char the starlight of her eyes!
No human gaze shall ever see
Her beauty,--stranger heart to stir:
Nay, her last smile shall be for me,
 My last look be for her.

Robert William Service

The Pretty Lady

He asked the lady in the train
If he might smoke: she smiled consent.
So lighting his cigar and fain
To talk he puffed away content,
Reflecting: how delightful are
Fair dame and fine cigar.

Then from his bulging wallet he
A photograph with pride displayed,
His charming wife and children three,
When suddenly he was dismayed
To hear her say: 'These notes you've got,--
I want the lot.'

He scarcely could believe his ears.
He laughed: 'The money isn't mine.
To pay it back would take me years,
And so politely I decline.
Madame, I think you speak in fun:
Have you a gun?'

She smiled. 'No weapon have I got,
Only my virtue, but I swear
If you don't hand me out the lot
I'll rip my blouse, let down my hair,
Denounce you as a fiend accurst . . .'
He told her: 'Do your worst.'

She did. Her silken gown she tore,
Let down her locks and pulled the cord
That stopped the train, and from the floor
She greeted engineer and guard:
'I fought and fought in vain,' she cried.
'Save me,--I'm terrified!'

The man was calm; he stood aloof.
Said he: 'Her game you understand;
But if you doubt, behold the proof
Of innocence is in my hand.'

And as they stared into the car
They saw his logic in a flash . . .
Aloft he held a lit cigar
 With two inches of ash.

Robert William Service

The Prisoner

Upspoke the culprit at the bar,
 Conducting his own case:
'Your Lordship, I have gone to far,
 But grant me of your grace.
As I was passing by a shop
 I saw my arm go out,
And though I begged of it to stop,
 It stole beyond a doubt.

'But why should my whole body be
 Condemned to dungeon grim,
For what in fact was only the
 Transgression of a limb?
So here before the Court I stand,
 And beg in Justice' name:
Please penalise my arm and hand,
 But not my frame.'

Outspoke the Judge with voice of ice,
 Although a smile he hid:
'Quite right! You should not pay the price
 For what one member did.
Your reasoning I must admit;
 Your arm should gaol expect . . .
Three months! And if you follow it
 The Court does not object.'

The culprit smiled with sudden charm,
 Then to the Court's dismay,
Quickly removed a wooden arm
 And went away.

Robert William Service

The Prospector

I strolled up old Bonanza, where I staked in ninety-eight,
A-purpose to revisit the old claim.
I kept thinking mighty sadly of the funny ways of Fate,
And the lads who once were with me in the game.
Poor boys, they're down-and-outers, and there's scarcely one to-day
Can show a dozen colors in his poke;
And me, I'm still prospecting, old and battered, gaunt and gray,
And I'm looking for a grub-stake, and I'm broke.

I strolled up old Bonanza. The same old moon looked down;
The same old landmarks seemed to yearn to me;
But the cabins all were silent, and the flat, once like a town,
Was mighty still and lonesome-like to see.
There were piles and piles of tailings where we toiled with pick and pan,
And turning round a bend I heard a roar,
And there a giant gold-ship of the very newest plan
Was tearing chunks of pay-dirt from the shore.

It wallowed in its water-bed; it burrowed, heaved and swung;
It gnawed its way ahead with grunts and sighs;
Its bill of fare was rock and sand; the tailings were its dung;
It glared around with fierce electric eyes.
Full fifty buckets crammed its maw; it bellowed out for more;
It looked like some great monster in the gloom.
With two to feed its sateless greed, it worked for seven score,
And I sighed: "Ah, old-time miner, here's your doom!"

The idle windlass turns to rust; the sagging sluice-box falls;
The holes you digged are water to the brim;
Your little sod-roofed cabins with the snugly moss-chinked walls
Are deathly now and mouldering and dim.
The battle-field is silent where of old you fought it out;
The claims you fiercely won are lost and sold;
But there's a little army that they'll never put to rout--
The men who simply live to seek the gold.

The men who can't remember when they learned to swing a pack,
Or in what lawless land the quest began;
The solitary seeker with his grub-stake on his back,

The restless buccaneer of pick and pan.
On the mesas of the Southland, on the tundras of the North,
You will find us, changed in face but still the same;
And it isn't need, it isn't greed that sends us faring forth--
It's the fever, it's the glory of the game.

For once you've panned the speckled sand and seen the bonny dust,
Its peerless brightness blinds you like a spell;
It's little else you care about; you go because you must,
And you feel that you could follow it to hell.
You'd follow it in hunger, and you'd follow it in cold;
You'd follow it in solitude and pain;
And when you're stiff and battered down let someone whisper "Gold",
You're lief to rise and follow it again.

Yet look you, if I find the stuff it's just like so much dirt;
I fling it to the four winds like a child.
It's wine and painted women and the things that do me hurt,
Till I crawl back, beggared, broken, to the Wild.
Till I crawl back, sapped and sodden, to my grub-stake and my tent--
There's a city, there's an army (hear them shout).
There's the gold in millions, millions, but I haven't got a cent;
And oh, it's me, it's me that found it out.

It was my dream that made it good, my dream that made me go
To lands of dread and death disprized of man;
But oh, I've known a glory that their hearts will never know,
When I picked the first big nugget from my pan.
It's still my dream, my dauntless dream, that drives me forth once more
To seek and starve and suffer in the Vast;
That heaps my heart with eager hope, that glimmers on before--
My dream that will uplift me to the last.

Perhaps I am stark crazy, but there's none of you too sane;
It's just a little matter of degree.
My hobby is to hunt out gold; it's fortress'd in my brain;
It's life and love and wife and home to me.
And I'll strike it, yes, I'll strike it; I've a hunch I cannot fail;
I've a vision, I've a prompting, I've a call;
I hear the hoarse stampeding of an army on my trail,
To the last, the greatest gold camp of them all.

Beyond the shark-tooth ranges sawing savage at the sky
There's a lowering land no white man ever struck;
There's gold, there's gold in millions, and I'll find it if I die,
And I'm going there once more to try my luck.
Maybe I'll fail--what matter? It's a mandate, it's a vow;
And when in lands of dreariness and dread
You seek the last lone frontier, far beyond your frontiers now,
You will find the old prospector, silent, dead.

You will find a tattered tent-pole with a ragged robe below it;
You will find a rusted gold-pan on the sod;
You will find the claim I'm seeking, with my bones as stakes to show it;
But I've sought the last Recorder, and He's--God.

Robert William Service

The Quest

I sought Him on the purple seas,
I sought Him on the peaks aflame;
Amid the gloom of giant trees
And canyons lone I called His name;
The wasted ways of earth I trod:
In vain! In vain! I found not God.

I sought Him in the hives of men,
The cities grand, the hamlets gray,
The temples old beyond my ken,
The tabernacles of to-day;
All life that is, from cloud to clod
I sought. . . . Alas! I found not God.

Then after roamings far and wide,
In streets and seas and deserts wild,
I came to stand at last beside
The death-bed of my little child.
Lo! as I bent beneath the rod
I raised my eyes . . . and there was God.

Robert William Service

The Quitter

When you're lost in the Wild, and you're scared as a child,
And Death looks you bang in the eye,
And you're sore as a boil, it's according to Hoyle
To cock your revolver and . . . die.
But the Code of a Man says: "Fight all you can,"
And self-dissolution is barred.
In hunger and woe, oh, it's easy to blow . . .
It's the hell-served-for-breakfast that's hard.

"You're sick of the game!" Well, now, that's a shame.
You're young and you're brave and you're bright.
"You've had a raw deal!" I know -- but don't squeal,
Buck up, do your damndest, and fight.
It's the plugging away that will win you the day,
So don't be a piker, old pard!
Just draw on your grit; it's so easy to quit:
It's the keeping-your-chin-up that's hard.

It's easy to cry that you're beaten -- and die;
It's easy to crawfish and crawl;
But to fight and to fight when hope's out of sight --
Why, that's the best game of them all!
And though you come out of each gruelling bout,
All broken and beaten and scarred,
Just have one more try -- it's dead easy to die,
It's the keeping-on-living that's hard.

Robert William Service

The Receptionist

France is the fairest land on earth,
Lovely to heart's desire,
And twice a year I span its girth,
Its beauty to admire.
But when a pub I seek each night,
To my profound vexation
On form they hand me I've to write
My occupation.

So once in a derisive mood
My pen I nibbled;
And though I know I never should:
'Gangster' I scribbled.
But as the clerk with startled face
Looked stark suspicion,
I blurred it out and in its place
Put 'Politician.'

Then suddenly dissolved his frown;
His face fused to a grin,
As humorously he set down
The form I handed in.
His shrug was eloquent to view.
Quoth he: 'What's in a name?
In France, alas! the lousy two
Are just the same.'

Robert William Service

The Reckoning

It's fine to have a blow-out in a fancy restaurant,
With terrapin and canvas-back and all the wine you want;
To enjoy the flowers and music, watch the pretty women pass,
Smoke a choice cigar, and sip the wealthy water in your glass.
It's bully in a high-toned joint to eat and drink your fill,
But it's quite another matter when you

Pay the bill.

It's great to go out every night on fun or pleasure bent;
To wear your glad rags always and to never save a cent;
To drift along regardless, have a good time every trip;
To hit the high spots sometimes, and to let your chances slip;
To know you're acting foolish, yet to go on fooling still,
Till Nature calls a show-down, and you

Pay the bill.

Time has got a little bill -- get wise while yet you may,
For the debit side's increasing in a most alarming way;
The things you had no right to do, the things you should have done,
They're all put down; it's up to you to pay for every one.
So eat, drink and be merry, have a good time if you will,
But God help you when the time comes, and you

Foot the bill.

Robert William Service

The Record

Fearing that she might go one day
With some fine fellow of her choice,
I called her from her childish play,
And made a record of her voice.
And now that she is truly gone,
I hear it sweet and crystal clear
From out my wheezy gramophone:
 "I love you, Daddy dear."

Indeed it's true she went away,
But Oh she went all, all alone;
Into the dark she went for aye,
Poor little mite! ere girlhood grown.
Ah that I could with her have gone!
But this is all I have to show -
A ghost voice on a gramophone:
 "Dear Dad, I love you so."

The saddest part of loss 'tis said,
Is that time tempers our regret;
But that is treason to the dead -
I'll not forget, I'll not forget.
Sole souvenir of golden years,
'Twas best to break this disc in two,
And spare myself a spate of tears . . .
 But this I cannot do.

So I will play it every day,
And it will seem that she is near,
And once again I'll hear her say:
I love you so, Oh Daddy dear."
And then her kiss - a stab of woe.
The record ends . . . I breathe a plea:
"Oh God, speed me to where I know
 Wee lass, you wait for me."

Robert William Service

The Red Retreat

Tramp, tramp, the grim road, the road from Mons to Wipers
(I've 'ammered out this ditty with me bruised and bleedin' feet);
Tramp, tramp, the dim road -- we didn't 'ave no pipers,
And bellies that was 'oller was the drums we 'ad to beat.
Tramp, tramp, the bad road, the bits o' kiddies cryin' there,
The fell birds a-flyin' there, the 'ouses all aflame;
Tramp, tramp, the sad road, the pals I left a-lyin' there,
Red there, and dead there. . . . Oh blimy, it's a shame!

A-singin' "'Oo's Yer Lady Friend?" we started out from 'Arver,
A-singin' till our froats was dry -- we didn't care a 'ang;
The Frenchies 'ow they lined the way, and slung us their palaver,
And all we knowed to arnser was the one word "vang";
They gave us booze and caporal, and cheered for us like crazy,
And all the pretty gels was out to kiss us as we passed;
And 'ow they all went dotty when we 'owled the Marcelaisey!
Oh, Gawd! Them was the 'appy days, the days too good to last.

We started out for God Knows Where, we started out a-roarin';
We 'ollered: "'Ere We Are Again", and 'struth! but we was dry.
The dust was gummin' up our ears, and 'ow the sweat was pourin';
The road was long, the sun was like a brazier in the sky.
We wondered where the 'Uns was -- we wasn't long a-wonderin',
For down a scruff of 'ill-side they rushes like a flood;
Then oh! 'twas music 'eavenly, our batteries a-thunderin',
And arms and legs went soarin' in the fountain of their blood.

For on they came like bee-swarms, a-hochin' and a-singin';
We pumped the bullets into 'em, we couldn't miss a shot.
But though we mowed 'em down like grass, like grass was they a-springin',
And all our 'ands was blistered, for our rifles was so 'ot.
We roared with battle-fury, and we lammed the stuffin' out of 'em,
And then we fixed our bay'nets and we spitted 'em like meat.
You should 'ave 'eard the beggars squeal; you should 'ave seen the rout of 'em,
And 'ow we cussed and wondered when the word came: Retreat!

Retreat! That was the 'ell of it. It fair upset our 'abits,
A-runnin' from them blighters over 'alf the roads of France;
A-scurryin' before 'em like a lot of blurry rabbits,

And knowin' we could smash 'em if we just 'ad 'alf a chance.
Retreat! That was the bitter bit, a-limpin' and a-blunderin';
All day and night a-hoofin' it and sleepin' on our feet;
A-fightin' rear guard actions for a bit o' rest, and wonderin'
If sugar beets or mangels was the 'olesomest to eat.

Ho yus, there isn't many left that started out so cheerily;
There was no bands a-playin' and we 'ad no autmobeels.
Our tummies they was 'oller, and our 'eads was 'angin' wearily,
And if we stopped to light a fag the 'Uns was on our 'eels.
That rotten road! I can't forget the kids and mothers flyin' there,
The bits of barns a-blazin' and the 'orrid sights I sor;
The stiffs that lined the wayside, me own pals a-lyin' there,
Their faces covered over wiv a little 'eap of stor.

Tramp, tramp, the red road, the wicked bullets 'ummin'
(I've panted out this ditty with me 'ot 'ard breath.)
Tramp, tramp, the dread road, the Boches all a-comin',
The lootin' and the shootin' and the shrieks o' death.
Tramp, tramp, the fell road, the mad 'orde pursuin' there,
And 'ow we 'urled it back again, them grim, grey waves;
Tramp, tramp, the 'ell road, the 'orror and the ruin there,
The graves of me mateys there, the grim, sour graves.

Robert William Service

The Release

To-day within a grog-shop near
I saw a newly captured linnet,
Who beat against his cage in fear,
And fell exhausted every minute;
And when I asked the fellow there
If he to sell the bird were willing,
He told me with a careless air
That I could have it for a shilling.

And so I bought it, cage and all
(Although I went without my dinner),
And where some trees were fairly tall
And houses shrank and smoke was thinner,
The tiny door I open threw,
As down upon the grass I sank me:
Poor little chap! How quick he flew . . .
He didn't even wait to thank me.

Life's like a cage; we beat the bars,
We bruise our breasts, we struggle vainly;
Up to the glory of the stars
We strain with flutterings ungainly.
And then -- God opens wide the door;
Our wondrous wings are arched for flying;
We poise, we part, we sing, we soar . . .
Light, freedom, love. . . . Fools call it -- Dying.

Robert William Service

The Return

They turned him loose; he bowed his head,
A felon, bent and grey.
His face was even as the Dead,
He had no word to say.

He sought the home of his old love,
To look on her once more;
And where her roses breathed above,
He cowered beside the door.

She sat there in the shining room;
Her hair was silver grey.
He stared and stared from out the gloom;
He turned to go away.

Her roses rustled overhead.
She saw, with sudden start.
"I knew that you would come," she said,
And held him to her heart.

Her face was rapt and angel-sweet;
She touched his hair of grey;

.

But he, sob-shaken, at her feet,
Could only pray and pray.

Robert William Service

The Revelation

The same old sprint in the morning, boys, to the same old din and smut;
Chained all day to the same old desk, down in the same old rut;
Posting the same old greasy books, catching the same old train:
Oh, how will I manage to stick it all, if I ever get back again?

We've bidden good-bye to life in a cage, we're finished with pushing a pen;
They're pumping us full of bellicose rage, they're showing us how to be men.
We're only beginning to find ourselves; we're wonders of brawn and thew;
But when we go back to our Sissy jobs, -- oh, what are we going to do?

For shoulders curved with the counter stoop will be carried erect and square;
And faces white from the office light will be bronzed by the open air;
And we'll walk with the stride of a new-born pride, with a new-found joy in our eyes,
Scornful men who have dived with death under the naked skies.

And when we get back to the dreary grind, and the bald-headed boss's call,
Don't you think that the dingy window-blind, and the dingier office wall,
Will suddenly melt to a vision of space, of violent, flame-scarred night?
Then . . . oh, the joy of the danger-thrill, and oh, the roar of the fight!

Don't you think as we peddle a card of pins the counter will fade away,
And again we'll be seeing the sand-bag rims, and the barb-wire's misty grey?
As a flat voice asks for a pound of tea, don't you fancy we'll hear instead
The night-wind moan and the soothing drone of the packet that's overhead?

Don't you guess that the things we're seeing now will haunt us through all the years;
Heaven and hell rolled into one, glory and blood and tears;
Life's pattern picked with a scarlet thread, where once we wove with a grey
To remind us all how we played our part in the shock of an epic day?

Oh, we're booked for the Great Adventure now, we're pledged to the Real Romance;
We'll find ourselves or we'll lose ourselves somewhere in giddy old France;
We'll know the zest of the fighter's life; the best that we have we'll give;
We'll hunger and thirst; we'll die . . . but first -- we'll live; by the gods, we'll live!

We'll breathe free air and we'll bivouac under the starry sky;

We'll march with men and we'll fight with men, and we'll see men laugh and die;
We'll know such joy as we never dreamed; we'll fathom the deeps of pain:
But the hardest bit of it all will be -- when we come back home again.

For some of us smirk in a chiffon shop, and some of us teach in a school;
Some of us help with the seat of our pants to polish an office stool;
The merits of somebody's soap or jam some of us seek to explain,
But all of us wonder what we'll do when we have to go back again.

Robert William Service

The Rhyme Of The Remittance Man

There's a four-pronged buck a-swinging in the shadow of my cabin,
And it roamed the velvet valley till to-day;
But I tracked it by the river, and I trailed it in the cover,
And I killed it on the mountain miles away.
Now I've had my lazy supper, and the level sun is gleaming
On the water where the silver salmon play;
And I light my little corn-cob, and I linger, softly dreaming,
In the twilight, of a land that's far away.

Far away, so faint and far, is flaming London, fevered Paris,
That I fancy I have gained another star;
Far away the din and hurry, far away the sin and worry,
Far away -- God knows they cannot be too far.
Gilded galley-slaves of Mammon -- how my purse-proud brothers taunt me!
I might have been as well-to-do as they
Had I clutched like them my chances, learned their wisdom, crushed my fancies,
Starved my soul and gone to business every day.

Well, the cherry bends with blossom and the vivid grass is springing,
And the star-like lily nestles in the green;
And the frogs their joys are singing, and my heart in tune is ringing,
And it doesn't matter what I might have been.
While above the scented pine-gloom, piling heights of golden glory,
The sun-god paints his canvas in the west,
I can couch me deep in clover, I can listen to the story
Of the lazy, lapping water -- it is best.

While the trout leaps in the river, and the blue grouse thrills the cover,
And the frozen snow betrays the panther's track,
And the robin greets the dayspring with the rapture of a lover,
I am happy, and I'll nevermore go back.
For I know I'd just be longing for the little old log cabin,
With the morning-glory clinging to the door,
Till I loathed the city places, cursed the care on all the faces,
Turned my back on lazar London evermore.

So send me far from Lombard Street, and write me down a failure;
Put a little in my purse and leave me free.
Say: "He turned from Fortune's offering to follow up a pale lure,

He is one of us no longer -- let him be."
I am one of you no longer; by the trails my feet have broken,
The dizzy peaks I've scaled, the camp-fire's glow;
By the lonely seas I've sailed in -- yea, the final word is spoken,
I am signed and sealed to nature. Be it so.

Robert William Service

The Rhyme Of The Restless Ones

We couldn't sit and study for the law;
The stagnation of a bank we couldn't stand;
For our riot blood was surging, and we didn't need much urging
To excitements and excesses that are banned.
So we took to wine and drink and other things,
And the devil in us struggled to be free;
Till our friends rose up in wrath, and they pointed out the path,
And they paid our debts and packed us o'er the sea.

Oh, they shook us off and shipped us o'er the foam,
To the larger lands that lure a man to roam;
And we took the chance they gave
Of a far and foreign grave,
And we bade good-by for evermore to home.

And some of us are climbing on the peak,
And some of us are camping on the plain;
By pine and palm you'll find us, with never claim to bind us,
By track and trail you'll meet us once again.

We are the fated serfs to freedom -- sky and sea;
We have failed where slummy cities overflow;
But the stranger ways of earth know our pride and know our worth,
And we go into the dark as fighters go.

Yes, we go into the night as brave men go,
Though our faces they be often streaked with woe;
Yet we're hard as cats to kill,
And our hearts are reckless still,
And we've danced with death a dozen times or so.

And you'll find us in Alaska after gold,
And you'll find us herding cattle in the South.
We like strong drink and fun, and, when the race is run,
We often die with curses in our mouth.
We are wild as colts unbroke, but never mean.
Of our sins we've shoulders broad to bear the blame;
But we'll never stay in town and we'll never settle down,
And we'll never have an object or an aim.

No, there's that in us that time can never tame;
And life will always seem a careless game;
 And they'd better far forget --
 Those who say they love us yet --
Forget, blot out with bitterness our name.

Robert William Service

The Robbers

Alas! I see that thrushes three
 Are ravishing my old fig tree,
In whose green shade I smoked my pipe
 And waited for the fruit to ripe;
From green to purple softly swell
 Then drop into my lap to tell
That it is succulently sweet
 And excellent to eat.

And now I see the crimson streak,
 The greedy gash of yellow beak.
And look! the finches come in throng,
 In wavy passage, light with song;
Of course I could scare them away,
 But with a shrug: 'The heck!' I say.
I owe them something for their glee,
 So let them have their spree.

For all too soon in icy air
 My fig tree will be bleak and bare,
Until it wake from Winter sleep
 And button buds begin to peep.
Then broad leaves come to shelter me
 In luminous placidity.
Then figs will ripen with a rush
 And brash will come the thrush.

But what care I though birds destroy
My fruit,--they pay me back with joy.

Robert William Service

The Rover

Oh, how good it is to be
Foot-loose and heart-free!
Just my dog and pipe and I, underneath the vast sky;
Trail to try and goal to win, white road and cool inn;
Fields to lure a lad afar, clear spring and still star;
Lilting feet that never tire, green dingle, fagot fire;
None to hurry, none to hold, heather hill and hushed fold;
Nature like a picture book, laughing leaf and bright brook;
Every day a jewel bright, set serenely in the night;
Every night a holy shrine, radiant for a day divine.

Weathered cheek and kindly eye, let the wanderer go by.
Woman-love and wistful heart, let the gipsy one depart.
For the farness and the road are his glory and his goad.
Oh, the lilt of youth and Spring! Eyes laugh and lips sing.

Yea, but it is good to be
Foot-loose and heart-free!

II

Yet how good it is to come
Home at last, home, home!
On the clover swings the bee, overhead's the hale tree;
Sky of turquoise gleams through, yonder glints the lake's blue.
In a hammock let's swing, weary of wandering;
Tired of wild, uncertain lands, strange faces, faint hands.
Has the wondrous world gone cold? Am I growing old, old?
Grey and weary . . . let me dream, glide on the tranquil stream.
Oh, what joyous days I've had, full, fervid, gay, glad!
Yet there comes a subtle change, let the stripling rove, range.
From sweet roving comes sweet rest, after all, home's best.
And if there's a little bit of woman-love with it,
I will count my life content, God-blest and well spent. . . .

Oh but it is good to be
Foot-loose and heart-free!
Yet how good it is to come
Home at last, home, home!

Robert William Service

The Sacrifices

Twin boys I bore, my joy, my care,
My hope, my life they were to me;
Their father, dashing, debonair,
Fell fighting at Gallipoli.
His daring gallantry, no doubt,
They 'herited in equal share:
So when the Second War broke out,
With eagerness they chose the air.

Said Dick: "The sea's too bally slow;
A flying ship's the one for me."
Said Peter: "Land! Foot-slogging - no!
The jolly sky's my cup of tea."
Well, Dick bailed out in Channel flight,
His foam-flailed body never found;
While Peter, with his plane alight,
Dashed down to death on Kentish ground.

Gay lads they were, and tall and fair,
And had they chosen land or sea,
Shirking the hazards of the air,
They might still have been left to me.
But nothing could I say or do
To move their scorn of sea and land;
Like eagles to the sun they flew -
Why? Only they could understand.

Hw day and night I prayed for them!
But knew that it was ll in vain;
They measured with heroic men,
Yet . . . I will never pray again.
Though time may grieve my hair to grey,
My lips will never kiss the rod. . . .
Only in dying I may say
In pity - "I forgive you, God."

Robert William Service

The Sceptic

My Father Christmas passed away
When I was barely seven.
At twenty-one, alack-a-day,
I lost my hope of heaven.

Yet not in either lies the curse:
The hell of it's because
I don't know which loss hurt the worse --
My God or Santa Claus.

Robert William Service

The Score

Because I've come to eighty odd,
I must prepare to meet you, God.
What should I do? I cannot pray,
I have no pious words to say;
And though the Bible I might read,
 Scriptures don't meet my need.

Please tell me God what can I do
To be acceptable to you?
I've put in order my affairs,
And left their portion to my heirs;
And what remains I've willed to be
 A gift to Charity.

What must I do? I cannot kneel,
Although a sense of you I feel,
I will not show a coward's fear,
Waiting until the end be near
To pester you with mercy plea,
 --You'd be despising me.

I hope I have been kind and true;
I've helped to happiness a few.
I've made a mother's eye to smile,
I've played with little ones a while.
I do not know what is the score;
Of good I might have done much more:
But now I guess my exit's due;--
 Dear God, it's up to You!

Robert William Service

The Scribe's Prayer

When from my fumbling hand the tired pen falls,
And in the twilight weary droops my head;
While to my quiet heart a still voice calls,
Calls me to join my kindred of the Dead:
Grant that I may, O Lord, ere rest be mine,
Write to Thy praise one radiant, ringing line.

For all of worth that in this clay abides,
The leaping rapture and the ardent flame,
The hope, the high resolve, the faith that guides:
All, all is Thine, and liveth in Thy name:
Lord, have I dallied with the sacred fire!
Lord, have I trailed Thy glory in the mire!

E'en as a toper from the dram-shop reeling,
Sees in his garret's blackness, dazzling fair,
All that he might have been, and, heart-sick, kneeling,
Sobs in the passion of a vast despair:
So my ideal self haunts me alway --
When the accounting comes, how shall I pay?

For in the dark I grope, nor understand;
And in my heart fight selfishness and sin:
Yet, Lord, I do not seek Thy helping hand;
Rather let me my own salvation win:
Let me through strife and penitential pain
Onward and upward to the heights attain.

Yea, let me live my life, its meaning seek;
Bear myself fitly in the ringing fight;
Strive to be strong that I may aid the weak;
Dare to be true -- O God! the Light, the Light!
Cometh the Dark so soon. I've mocked Thy Word;
Yet do I know Thy Love: have mercy, Lord. . . .

FINIS

Robert William Service

The Seance

"The spirits do not like the light,"
The medium said, and turned the switch;
The little lady on my right
Clutched at my hand with nervous twitch.
(She seemed to be a pretty bitch.)

The moustached women on my left,
With spirits on hr heavy breath,
Lasciviously leaned her heft
On me as one who languisheth.
The sordid room was still as death.

"A shape I see," the medium cried,
"Whose face and name I do not know . . ."
"Tis Robert service," soft replied
A voice - "I passed a month ago,
And I've come back to let you know.

"The Other Side is gay and bright;
We are so happy there and free,
And Dan McGrew I oft recite,
And follow up with Sam McGee . . .
But now excuse me, I must flee."

The fat dame leaned to get my ear,
(Her breast was soft as feather bed.)
"I love his verses; oh dear, dear,
I didn't know that he was dead."
"No more did I," I sourly said.

The little lady grabbed me hard;
(She looked to me a "yesful" dear.)
Said she: "Don't you adore the Bard?"
Said I: "Before he fades, I fear
I'd like to kick his astral rear."

So then I bravely broke away
From spooks and ectoplasic gauze.
Yet in the brazen light of day

I had to pinch myself because
Really! I wondered if I was.

Robert William Service

The Search

I bought a young and lovely bride,
 Paying her father gold;
Lamblike she rested by my side,
 As cold as ice is cold.
No love in her could I awake,
 Even for pity's sake.

I bought rich books I could not read,
 And pictures proud and rare;
Reproachfully they seemed to plead
 And hunger for my care;
But to their beauty I was blind,
 Even as is a hind.

The bearded merchants heard my cry:
 'I'll give all I possess
If only, only I can buy
 A little happiness.'
Alas! I sought without avail:
 They had not that for sale.

I gave my riches to the poor
 And dared the desert lone;
Now of God's heaven I am sure
 Though I am rag and bone . . .
Aye, richer than the Aga Khan,
 At last--a happy man.

Robert William Service

The Seed

I was a seed that fell
 In silver dew;
And nobody could tell,
 For no one knew;
No one could tell my fate,
 As I grew tall;
None visioned me with hate,
 No, none at all.

A sapling I became,
 Blest by the sun;
No rumour of my shame
 Had any one.
Oh I was proud indeed,
 And sang with glee,
When from a tiny seed
 I grew a tree.

I was so stout and strong
 Though still so young,
When sudden came a throng
 With angry tongue;
They cleft me to the core
 With savage blows,
And from their ranks a roar
 Of rage arose.

I was so proud a seed
 A tree to grow;
Surely there was no need
 To lay me low.
Why did I end so ill,
 The midst of three
Black crosses on a hill
 Called Calvary?

Robert William Service

The Sewing-Girl

The humble garret where I dwell
Is in that Quarter called the Latin;
It isn't spacious -- truth to tell,
There's hardly room to swing a cat in.
But what of that! It's there I fight
For food and fame, my Muse inviting,
And all the day and half the night
You'll find me writing, writing, writing.

Now, it was in the month of May
As, wrestling with a rhyme rheumatic,
I chanced to look across the way,
And lo! within a neighbor attic,
A hand drew back the window shade,
And there, a picture glad and glowing,
I saw a sweet and slender maid,
And she was sewing, sewing, sewing.

So poor the room, so small, so scant,
Yet somehow oh, so bright and airy.
There was a pink geranium plant,
Likewise a very pert canary.
And in the maiden's heart it seemed
Some fount of gladness must be springing,
For as alone I sadly dreamed
I heard her singing, singing, singing.

God love her! how it cheered me then
To see her there so brave and pretty;
So she with needle, I with pen,
We slaved and sang above the city.
And as across my streams of ink
I watched her from a poet's distance,
She stitched and sang . . . I scarcely think
She was aware of my existence.

And then one day she sang no more.
That put me out, there's no denying.
I looked -- she labored as before,

But, bless me! she was crying, crying.
Her poor canary chirped in vain;
Her pink geranium drooped in sorrow;
"Of course," said I, "she'll sing again.
Maybe," I sighed, "she will to-morrow."

Poor child; 'twas finished with her song:
Day after day her tears were flowing;
And as I wondered what was wrong
She pined and peaked above her sewing.
And then one day the blind she drew,
Ah! though I sought with vain endeavor
To pierce the darkness, well I knew
My sewing-girl had gone for ever.

And as I sit alone to-night
My eyes unto her room are turning . . .
I'd give the sum of all I write
Once more to see her candle burning,
Once more to glimpse her happy face,
And while my rhymes of cheer I'm ringing,
Across the sunny sweep of space
To hear her singing, singing, singing.

Robert William Service

The Shooting Of Dan McGrew

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon;
The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a jag-time tune;
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan McGrew,
And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the lady that's known as Lou.

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and into the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty, and loaded for bear.
He looked like a man with a foot in the grave and scarcely the strength of a
louse,
Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar, and he called for drinks for the house.
There was none could place the stranger's face, though we searched ourselves
for a clue;
But we drank his health, and the last to drink was Dangerous Dan McGrew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes, and hold them hard like a spell;
And such was he, and he looked to me like a man who had lived in hell;
With a face most hair, and the dreary stare of a dog whose day is done,
As he watered the green stuff in his glass, and the drops fell one by one.
Then I got to figgering who he was, and wondering what he'd do,
And I turned my head -- and there watching him was the lady that's known as
Lou.

His eyes went rubbering round the room, and he seemed in a kind of daze,
Till at last that old piano fell in the way of his wandering gaze.
The rag-time kid was having a drink; there was no one else on the stool,
So the stranger stumbles across the room, and flops down there like a fool.
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
Then he clutched the keys with his talon hands -- my God! but that man could
play.

Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear,
And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence you most could HEAR;
With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped there in the cold,
A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold;
While high overhead, green, yellow and red, the North Lights swept in bars? --
Then you've a haunch what the music meant . . . hunger and night and the stars.

And hunger not of the belly kind, that's banished with bacon and beans,
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home and all that it means;

For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls and a roof above;
But oh! so cramful of cosy joy, and crowned with a woman's love --
A woman dearer than all the world, and true as Heaven is true --
(God! how ghastly she looks through her rouge, -- the lady that's known as Lou.)

Then on a sudden the music changed, so soft that you scarce could hear;
But you felt that your life had been looted clean of all that it once held dear;
That someone had stolen the woman you loved; that her love was a devil's lie;
That your guts were gone, and the best for you was to crawl away and die.
'Twas the crowning cry of a heart's despair, and it thrilled you through and
through --
"I guess I'll make it a spread misere," said Dangerous Dan McGrew.

The music almost died away . . . then it burst like a pent-up flood;
And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay," and my eyes were blind with blood.
The thought came back of an ancient wrong, and it stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill . . . then the music stopped with a crash,
And the stranger turned, and his eyes they burned in a most peculiar way;

In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;
Then his lips went in in a kind of grin, and he spoke, and his voice was calm,
And "Boys," says he, "you don't know me, and none of you care a damn;
But I want to state, and my words are straight, and I'll bet my poke they're true,
That one of you is a hound of hell . . . and that one is Dan McGrew."

Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out, and two guns blazed in the
dark,
And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two men lay stiff and stark.
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was Dangerous Dan McGrew,
While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the breast of the lady that's
known as Lou.

These are the simple facts of the case, and I guess I ought to know.
They say that the stranger was crazed with "hooch", and I'm not denying it's so.
I'm not so wise as the lawyer guys, but strictly between us two --
The woman that kissed him and -- pinched his poke -- was the lady that's known
as Lou.

Robert William Service

The Shorter Catechism

I burned my fingers on the stove
 And wept with bitterness;
But poor old Auntie Maggie strove
 To comfort my distress.
Said she: 'Think, lassie, how you'll burn
 Like any wicked besom
In fires of hell if you don't learn
 Your Shorter Catechism.'

A man's chief end is it began,
 (No mention of a woman's),
To glorify--I think it ran,
 The God who made poor humans.
And as I learned, I thought: if this--
 (My distaste growing stronger),
The Shorter Catechism is,
 Lord save us from the longer.

The years have passed and I begin
 (Although I'm far from clever),
To doubt if when we die in sin
 Our bodies grill forever.
Now I've more surface space to burn,
 Since I am tall and lissom,
I think it's hell enough to learn
 The Shorter Catechism.

Robert William Service

The Sightless Man

Out of the night a crash,
A roar, a rampart of light;
A flame that leaped like a lash,
Searing forever my sight;
Out of the night a flash,
Then, oh, forever the Night!

Here in the dark I sit,
I who so loved the sun;
Supple and strong and fit,
In the dark till my days be done;
Aye, that's the hell of it,
Stalwart and twenty-one.

Marie is stanch and true,
Willing to be my wife;
Swears she has eyes for two . . .
Aye, but it's long, is Life.
What is a lad to do
With his heart and his brain at strife?

There now, my pipe is out;
No one to give me a light;
I grope and I grope about.
Well, it is nearly night;
Sleep may resolve my doubt,
Help me to reason right. . . .

(He sleeps and dreams.)

I heard them whispering there by the bed . . .
Oh, but the ears of the blind are quick!
Every treacherous word they said
Was a stab of pain and my heart turned sick.
Then lip met lip and they looked at me,
Sitting bent by the fallen fire,
And they laughed to think that I couldn't see;
But I felt the flame of their hot desire.
He's helping Marie to work the farm,

A dashing, upstanding chap, they say;
And look at me with my flabby arm,
And the fat of sloth, and my face of clay --
Look at me as I sit and sit,
By the side of a fire that's seldom lit,
Sagging and weary the livelong day,
When every one else is out on the field,
Sowing the seed for a golden yield,
Or tossing around the new-mown hay. . . .

Oh, the shimmering wheat that frets the sky,
Gold of plenty and blue of hope,
I'm seeing it all with an inner eye
As out of the door I grope and grope.
And I hear my wife and her lover there,
Whispering, whispering, round the rick,
Mocking me and my sightless stare,
As I fumble and stumble everywhere,
Slapping and tapping with my stick;
Old and weary at thirty-one,
Heartsick, wishing it all was done.
Oh, I'll tap my way around to the byre,
And I'll hear the cows as they chew their hay;
There at least there is none to tire,
There at least I am not in the way.
And they'll look at me with their velvet eyes
And I'll stroke their flanks with my woman's hand,
And they'll answer to me with soft replies,
And somehow I fancy they'll understand.
And the horses too, they know me well;
I'm sure that they pity my wretched lot,
And the big fat ram with the jingling bell . . .
Oh, the beasts are the only friends I've got.
And my old dog, too, he loves me more,
I think, than ever he did before.
Thank God for the beasts that are all so kind,
That know and pity the helpless blind!

Ha! they're coming, the loving pair.
My hand's a-shake as my pipe I fill.
What if I steal on them unaware
With a reaping-hook, to kill, to kill? . . .

I'll do it . . . they're there in the mow of hay,
I hear them saying: "He's out of the way!"
Hark! how they're kissing and whispering. . . .
Closer I creep . . . I crouch . . . I spring. . . .

(He wakes.)

Ugh! What a horrible dream I've had!
And it isn't real . . . I'm glad, I'm glad!
Marie is good and Marie is true . . .
But now I know what it's best to do.
I'll sell the farm and I'll seek my kind,
I'll live apart with my fellow-blind,
And we'll eat and drink, and we'll laugh and joke,
And we'll talk of our battles, and smoke and smoke;
And brushes of bristle we'll make for sale,
While one of us reads a book of Braille.
And there will be music and dancing too,
And we'll seek to fashion our life anew;
And we'll walk the highways hand in hand,
The Brotherhood of the Sightless Band;
Till the years at last shall bring respite
And our night is lost in the Greater Night.

Robert William Service

The Silent Ones

I'm just an ordinary chap
Who comes home to his tea,
And mostly I don't care a rap
What people think of me;
I do my job and take my pay,
And love of peace expound;
But as I go my patient way,
--Don't push me round.

Though I respect authority
And order never flout,
When Law and Justice disagree
You can include me out.
The Welfare State I tolerate
If it is kept in bound,
But if you wish to rouse my hate
--Just push me round.

And that's the way with lots of us:
We want to feel we're free;
So labour governments we cuss
And mock at monarchy.
Yea, we are men of secret mirth,
And fury seldom sound;
But if you value peace on earth
--Don't push us round.

Robert William Service

The Smoking Frog

Three men I saw beside a bar,
Regarding o'er their bottle,
A frog who smoked a rank cigar
They'd jammed within its throttle.

A Pasha frog it must have been
So big it as and bloated;
And from its lips the nicotine
In graceful festoon floated.

And while the trio jeered and joked,
As if it quite enjoyed it,
Impassively it smoked and smoked,
(It could now well avoid it).

A ring of fire its lips were nigh
Yet it seemed all unwitting;
It could not spit, like you and I,
Who've learned the art of spitting.

It did not wink, it did not shrink,
As there serene it squatted'
Its eyes were clear, it did not fear
The fate the Gods allotted.

It squatted there with calm sublime,
Amid their cruel guying;
Grave as a god, and all the time
It knew that it was dying.

And somehow then it seemed to me
These men expectorating,
Were infinitely less than he,
The dumb thing they were baiting.

It seemed to say, despite their jokes:
"This is my hour of glory.
It isn't every frog that smokes:
My name will live in story."

Before its nose the smoke arose;
The flame grew nigher, nigher;
And then I saw its bright eyes close
Beside that ring of fire.

They turned it on its warty back,
From off its bloated belly;
Its legs jerked out, then dangled slack;
It quivered like a jelly.

And then the fellows went away,
Contented with their joking;
But even as in death it lay,
The frog continued smoking.

Life's like a lighted fag, thought I;
We smoke it stale; then after
Death turns our belly to the sky:
The Gods must have their laughter.

Robert William Service

The Sniper

Because back home in Tennessee
I was a champeen shot,
They made a sniper outa me
An' ninety krouts I got:
I wish to Christ I'd not!

Athinkin' o' them blasted lives
It's kindo' blue I be;
Them lads no doubt had kids an' wives
An' happy home like me:
Them stiffs I still can see.

Aye, ninety men or more my hand
Has hustled down to hell;
They've loaded me with medals and
They tell me I done well:
A hero for a spell.

But Heaven help me to forget
Them fellow men I've slain,
The bubbling flow of blood I've let . . .
I'll never kill again:
To swat flies gives me pain.

Just let me dream when we will see
And end of soldierin';
When flags of famous victory
Will be amoulderin':
An' lethal steel an' battle blast
Be nightmares of the past.

Robert William Service

The Soldier Of Fortune

'Deny your God! ' they ringed me with their spears;
Blood-crazed were they, and reeking from the strife;
Hell-hot their hate, and venom-fanged their sneers,
And one man spat on me and nursed a knife.
And there was I, sore wounded and alone,
I, the last living of my slaughtered band.
Oh sinister the sky, and cold as stone!
In one red laugh of horror reeled the land.
And dazed and desperate I faced their spears,
And like a flame out-leaped that naked knife,
And like a serpent stung their bitter jeers:
'Deny your God, and we will give you life.'

Deny my God! Oh life was very sweet!
And it is hard in youth and hope to die;
And there my comrades dear lay at my feet,
And in that blur of blood soon must I lie.
And yet... I almost laughed - it seemed so odd,
For long and long had I not vainly tried
To reason out and body forth my God,
And prayed for light, and doubted - and denied:
Denied the Being I could not conceive,
Denied a life-to-be beyond the grave....
And now they ask me, who do not believe,
Just to deny, to voice my doubt, to save
This life of mine that sings so in the sun,
The bloom of youth yet red upon my cheek,
My only life! - O fools! 'tis easy done,
I will deny... and yet I do not speak.

'Deny your God! ' their spears are all a gleam,
And I can see their eyes with blood-lust shine;
Their snarling voices shrill into a scream,
And, mad to slay, they quiver for the sign.
Deny my God! yes, I could do it well;
Yet if I did, what of my race, my name?
How they would spit on me, these dogs of hell!
Spurn me, and put on me the brand of shame.
A white man's honour! what of that, I say?

Shall these black curs cry 'Coward' in my face?
They who would perish for their gods of clay -
Shall I defile my country and my race?
My country! what's my country to me now?
Soldier of Fortune, free and far I roam;
All men are brothers in my heart, I vow;
The wide and wondrous world is all my home.
My country! reverent of her splendid Dead,
Her heroes proud, her martyrs pierced with pain:
For me her puissant blood was vainly shed;
For me her drums of battle beat in vain,
And free I fare, half-heedless of her fate:
No faith, no flag I owe - then why not seek
This last loop-hole of life? Why hesitate?
I will deny... and yet I do not speak.

'Deny your God! ' their spears are poised on high,
And tense and terrible they wait the word;
And dark and darker glooms the dreary sky,
And in that hush of horror no thing stirred.
Then, through the ringing terror and sheer hate
Leaped there a vision to me - Oh, how far!
A face, Her face... through all my stormy fate
A joy, a strength, a glory and a star.
Beneath the pines, where lonely camp-fires gleam,
In seas forlorn, amid the deserts drear,
How I had gladdened to that face of dream!
And never, never had it seemed so dear.
O silken hair that veils the sunny brow!
O eyes of grey, so tender and so true!
O lips of smiling sweetness! must I now
For ever and for ever go from you?
Ah, yes, I must... for if I do this thing,
How can I look into your face again?
Knowing you think me more than half a king,
I with my craven heart, my honour slain.

No! no! my mind's made up. I gaze above,
Into that sky insensate as a stone;
Not for my creed, my country, but my Love
Will I stand up and meet my death alone.
Then though it be to utter dark I sink,

The God that dwells in me is not denied;
'Best' triumphs over 'Beast', - and so I think
Humanity itself is glorified....

'And now, my butchers, I embrace my fate.
Come! let my heart's blood slake the thirsty sod.
Curst be the life you offer! Glut your hate!
Strike! Strike, you dogs! I'll not deny my God.'

I saw the spears that seemed a-leap to slay,
All quiver earthward at the headman's nod;
And in a daze of dream I heard him say:
'Go, set him free who serves so well his God! '

Robert William Service

The Song Of The Camp-Fire

Heed me, feed me, I am hungry, I am red-tongued with desire;
Boughs of balsam, slabs of cedar, gummy fagots of the pine,
Heap them on me, let me hug them to my eager heart of fire,
Roaring, soaring up to heaven as a symbol and a sign.
Bring me knots of sunny maple, silver birch and tamarack;
Leaping, sweeping, I will lap them with my ardent wings of flame;
I will kindle them to glory, I will beat the darkness back;
Streaming, gleaming, I will goad them to my glory and my fame.
Bring me gnarly limbs of live-oak, aid me in my frenzied fight;
Strips of iron-wood, scaly blue-gum, writhing redly in my hold;
With my lunge of lurid lances, with my whips that flail the night,
They will burgeon into beauty, they will foliate in gold.
Let me star the dim sierras, stab with light the inland seas;
Roaming wind and roaring darkness! seek no mercy at my hands;
I will mock the marly heavens, lamp the purple prairies,
I will flaunt my deathless banners down the far, unhouseled lands.
In the vast and vaulted pine-gloom where the pillared forests frown,
By the sullen, bestial rivers running where God only knows,
On the starlit coral beaches when the combers thunder down,
In the death-spell of the barrens, in the shudder of the snows;
In a blazing belt of triumph from the palm-leaf to the pine,
As a symbol of defiance lo! the wilderness I span;
And my beacons burn exultant as an everlasting sign
Of unending domination, of the mastery of Man;
I, the Life, the fierce Uplifter, I that weaned him from the mire;
I, the angel and the devil, I, the tyrant and the slave;
I, the Spirit of the Struggle; I, the mighty God of Fire;
I, the Maker and Destroyer; I, the Giver and the Grave.

II

Gather round me, boy and grey-beard, frontiersman of every kind.
Few are you, and far and lonely, yet an army forms behind:
By your camp-fires shall they know you, ashes scattered to the wind.

Peer into my heart of solace, break your bannock at my blaze;
Smoking, stretched in lazy shelter, build your castles as you gaze;
Or, it may be, deep in dreaming, think of dim, unhappy days.

Let my warmth and glow caress you, for your trails are grim and hard;
Let my arms of comfort press you, hunger-hewn and battle-scarred:
O my lovers! how I bless you with your lives so madly marred!

For you seek the silent spaces, and their secret lore you glean:
For you win the savage races, and the brutish Wild you wean;
And I gladden desert places, where camp-fire has never been.

From the Pole unto the Tropics is there trail ye have not dared?
And because you hold death lightly, so by death shall you be spared,
(As the sages of the ages in their pages have declared).

On the roaring Arkilunik in a leaky bark canoe;
Up the cloud of Mount McKinley, where the avalanche leaps through;
In the furnace of Death Valley, when the mirage glimmers blue.

Now a smudge of wiry willows on the weary Kuskoquim;
Now a flare of gummy pine-knots where Vancouver's scaur is grim;
Now a gleam of sunny ceiba, when the Cuban beaches dim.

Always, always God's Great Open: lo! I burn with keener light
In the corridors of silence, in the vestibules of night;
'Mid the ferns and grasses gleaming, was there ever gem so bright?

Not for weaklings, not for women, like my brother of the hearth;
Ring your songs of wrath around me, I was made for manful mirth,
In the lusty, gusty greatness, on the bald spots of the earth.

Men, my masters! men, my lovers! ye have fought and ye have bled;
Gather round my ruddy embers, softly glowing is my bed;
By my heart of solace dreaming, rest ye and be comforted!

III

I am dying, O my masters! by my fitful flame ye sleep;
My purple plumes of glory droop forlorn.
Grey ashes choke and cloak me, and above the pines there creep
The stealthy silver moccasins of morn.
There comes a countless army, it's the Legion of the Light;
It tramps in gleaming triumph round the world;
And before its jewelled lances all the shadows of the night
Back in to abysmal darkneses are hurled.

Leap to life again, my lovers! ye must toil and never tire;
The day of daring, doing, brightens clear,
When the bed of spicy cedar and the jovial camp-fire
Must only be a memory of cheer.
There is hope and golden promise in the vast portentous dawn;
There is glamour in the glad, effluent sky:
Go and leave me; I will dream of you and love you when you're gone;
I have served you, O my masters! let me die.

A little heap of ashes, grey and sodden by the rain,
Wind-scattered, blurred and blotted by the snow:
Let that be all to tell of me, and glorious again,
Ye things of greening gladness, leap and glow!
A black scar in the sunshine by the palm-leaf or the pine,
Blind to the night and dead to all desire;
Yet oh, of life and uplift what a symbol and a sign!
Yet oh, of power and conquest what a destiny is mine!
A little heap of ashes -- Yea! a miracle divine,
The foot-print of a god, all-radiant Fire.

Robert William Service

The Song Of The Mouth-Organ

(With apologies to the singer of the "Song of the Banjo".)

I'm a homely little bit of tin and bone;
I'm beloved by the Legion of the Lost;
I haven't got a "vox humana" tone,
And a dime or two will satisfy my cost.
I don't attempt your high-falutin' flights;
I am more or less uncertain on the key;
But I tell you, boys, there's lots and lots of nights
When you've taken mighty comfort out of me.

I weigh an ounce or two, and I'm so small
You can pack me in the pocket of your vest;
And when at night so wearily you crawl
Into your bunk and stretch your limbs to rest,
You take me out and play me soft and low,
The simple songs that trouble your heartstrings;
The tunes you used to fancy long ago,
Before you made a rotten mess of things.

Then a dreamy look will come into your eyes,
And you break off in the middle of a note;
And then, with just the dreariest of sighs,
You drop me in the pocket of your coat.
But somehow I have bucked you up a bit;
And, as you turn around and face the wall,
You don't feel quite so spineless and unfit--
You're not so bad a fellow after all.

Do you recollect the bitter Arctic night;
Your camp beside the canyon on the trail;
Your tent a tiny square of orange light;
The moon above consumptive-like and pale;
Your supper cooked, your little stove aglow;
You tired, but snug and happy as a child?
Then 'twas "Turkey in the Straw" till your lips were nearly raw,
And you hurled your bold defiance at the Wild.

Do you recollect the flashing, lashing pain;
The gulf of humid blackness overhead;
The lightning making rapiers of the rain;
The cattle-horns like candles of the dead
You sitting on your bronco there alone,
In your slicker, saddle-sore and sick with cold?
Do you think the silent herd did not hear "The Mocking Bird",
Or relish "Silver Threads among the Gold"?

Do you recollect the wild Magellan coast;
The head-winds and the icy, roaring seas;
The nights you thought that everything was lost;
The days you toiled in water to your knees;
The frozen ratlines shrieking in the gale;
The hissing steeps and gulfs of livid foam:
When you cheered your messmates nine with "Ben Bolt" and "Clementine",
And "Dixie Land" and "Seeing Nellie Home"?

Let the jammy banjo voice the Younger Son,
Who waits for his remittance to arrive;
I represent the grimy, gritty one,
Who sweats his bones to keep himself alive;
Who's up against the real thing from his birth;
Whose heritage is hard and bitter toil;
I voice the weary, smeary ones of earth,
The helots of the sea and of the soil.

I'm the Steinway of strange mischief and mischance;
I'm the Stradivarius of blank defeat;
In the down-world, when the devil leads the dance,
I am simply and symbolically meet;
I'm the irrepressive spirit of mankind;
I'm the small boy playing knuckle down with Death;
At the end of all things known, where God's rubbish-heap is thrown,
I shrill impudent triumph at a breath.

I'm a humble little bit of tin and horn;
I'm a byword, I'm a plaything, I'm a jest;
The virtuoso looks on me with scorn;
But there's times when I am better than the best.
Ask the stoker and the sailor of the sea;
Ask the mucker and the hewer of the pine;

Ask the herder of the plain, ask the gleaner of the grain--
There's a lowly, loving kingdom--and it's mine.

Robert William Service

The Song Of The Pacifist

What do they matter, our headlong hates, when we take the toll of our Dead?
Think ye our glory and gain will pay for the torrent of blood we have shed?
By the cheers of our Victory will the heart of the mother be comforted?

If by the Victory all we mean is a broken and brooding foe;
Is the pomp and power of a glitt'ring hour, and a truce for an age or so:
By the clay-cold hand on the broken blade we have smitten a bootless blow!

If by the Triumph we only prove that the sword we sheathe is bright;
That justice and truth and love endure; that freedom's throned on the height;
That the feebler folks shall be unafraid; that Might shall never be Right;

If this be all: by the blood-drenched plains, by the havoc of fire and fear,
By the rending roar of the War of Wars, by the Dead so doubly dear. . . .
Then our Victory is a vast defeat, and it mocks us as we cheer.

Victory! there can be but one, hallowed in every land:
When by the graves of our common dead we who were foemen stand;
And in the hush of our common grief hand is tendered to hand.

Triumph! Yes, when out of the dust in the splendour of their release
The spirits of those who fell go forth and they hallow our hearts to peace,
And, brothers in pain, with world-wide voice, we clamour that War shall cease.

Glory! Ay, when from blackest loss shall be born most radiant gain;
When over the gory fields shall rise a star that never shall wane:
Then, and then only, our Dead shall know that they have not fall'n in vain.

When our children's children shall talk of War as a madness that may not be;
When we thank our God for our grief to-day, and blazon from sea to sea
In the name of the Dead the banner of Peace . . . that will be Victory.

Robert William Service

The Song Of The Soldier-Born

Give me the scorn of the stars and a peak defiant;
Wail of the pines and a wind with the shout of a giant;
Night and a trail unknown and a heart reliant.

Give me to live and love in the old, bold fashion;
A soldier's billet at night and a soldier's ration;
A heart that leaps to the fight with a soldier's passion.

For I hold as a simple faith there's no denying:
The trade of a soldier's the only trade worth plying;
The death of a soldier's the only death worth dying.

So let me go and leave your safety behind me;
Go to the spaces of hazard where nothing shall bind me;
Go till the word is War - and then you will find me.

Then you will call me and claim me because you will need me;
Cheer me and gird me and into the battle-wrath speed me....
And when it's over, spurn me and no longer heed me.

For guile and a purse gold-greased are the arms you carry;
With deeds of paper you fight and with pens you parry;
You call on the hounds of the law your foes to harry.

You with your 'Art for its own sake', posing and prinking;
You with your 'Live and be merry', eating and drinking;
You with your 'Peace at all hazard', from bright blood shrinking.

Fools! I will tell you now: though the red rain patters,
And a million of men go down, it's little it matters....
There's the Flag upflung to the stars, though it streams in tatters.

There's a glory gold never can buy to yearn and to cry for;
There's a hope that's as old as the sky to suffer and sigh for;
There's a faith that out-dazzles the sun to martyr and die for.

Ah no! it's my dream that War will never be ended;
That men will perish like men, and valour be splendid;
That the Flag by the sword will be served, and honour defended.

That the tale of my fights will never be ancient story;
That though my eye may be dim and my beard be hoary,
I'll die as a soldier dies on the Field of Glory.

So give me a strong right arm for a wrong's swift righting;
Stave of a song on my lips as my sword is smiting;
Death in my boots may-be, but fighting, fighting.

Robert William Service

The Song Of The Wage-Slave

When the long, long day is over, and the Big Boss gives me my pay,
I hope that it won't be hell-fire, as some of the parsons say.
And I hope that it won't be heaven, with some of the parsons I've met --
All I want is just quiet, just to rest and forget.
Look at my face, toil-furrowed; look at my calloused hands;
Master, I've done Thy bidding, wrought in Thy many lands --
Wrought for the little masters, big-bellied they be, and rich;
I've done their desire for a daily hire, and I die like a dog in a ditch.
I have used the strength Thou hast given, Thou knowest I did not shirk;
Threescore years of labor -- Thine be the long day's work.
And now, Big Master, I'm broken and bent and twisted and scarred,
But I've held my job, and Thou knowest, and Thou will not judge me hard.
Thou knowest my sins are many, and often I've played the fool --
Whiskey and cards and women, they made me the devil's tool.
I was just like a child with money; I flung it away with a curse,
Feasting a fawning parasite, or glutting a harlot's purse;
Then back to the woods repentant, back to the mill or the mine,
I, the worker of workers, everything in my line.
Everything hard but headwork (I'd no more brains than a kid),
A brute with brute strength to labor, doing as I was bid;
Living in camps with men-folk, a lonely and loveless life;
Never knew kiss of sweetheart, never caress of wife.
A brute with brute strength to labor, and they were so far above --
Yet I'd gladly have gone to the gallows for one little look of Love.
I, with the strength of two men, savage and shy and wild --
Yet how I'd ha' treasured a woman, and the sweet, warm kiss of a child!
Well, 'tis Thy world, and Thou knowest. I blaspheme and my ways be rude;
But I've lived my life as I found it, and I've done my best to be good;
I, the primitive toiler, half naked and grimed to the eyes,
Sweating it deep in their ditches, swining it stark in their styes;
Hurling down forests before me, spanning tumultuous streams;
Down in the ditch building o'er me palaces fairer than dreams;
Boring the rock to the ore-bed, driving the road through the fen,
Resolute, dumb, uncomplaining, a man in a world of men.
Master, I've filled my contract, wrought in Thy many lands;
Not by my sins wilt Thou judge me, but by the work of my hands.
Master, I've done Thy bidding, and the light is low in the west,
And the long, long shift is over . . . Master, I've earned it -- Rest.

The Spell Of The Yukon

I wanted the gold, and I sought it,
I scrabbled and mucked like a slave.
Was it famine or scurvy -- I fought it;
I hurled my youth into a grave.
I wanted the gold, and I got it --
Came out with a fortune last fall, --
Yet somehow life's not what I thought it,
And somehow the gold isn't all.

No! There's the land. (Have you seen it?)
It's the cussedest land that I know,
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it
To the deep, deathlike valleys below.
Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe; but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth -- and I'm one.

You come to get rich (damned good reason);
You feel like an exile at first;
You hate it like hell for a season,
And then you are worse than the worst.
It grips you like some kinds of sinning;
It twists you from foe to a friend;
It seems it's been since the beginning;
It seems it will be to the end.

I've stood in some mighty-mouthed hollow
That's plumb-full of hush to the brim;
I've watched the big, husky sun wallow
In crimson and gold, and grow dim,
Till the moon set the pearly peaks gleaming,
And the stars tumbled out, neck and crop;
And I've thought that I surely was dreaming,
With the peace o' the world piled on top.

The summer -- no sweeter was ever;
The sunshiny woods all athrill;
The grayling aleap in the river,

The bighorn asleep on the hill.
The strong life that never knows harness;
The wilds where the caribou call;
The freshness, the freedom, the farness --
O God! how I'm stuck on it all.

The winter! the brightness that blinds you,
The white land locked tight as a drum,
The cold fear that follows and finds you,
The silence that bludgeons you dumb.
The snows that are older than history,
The woods where the weird shadows slant;
The stillness, the moonlight, the mystery,
I've bade 'em good-by -- but I can't.

There's a land where the mountains are nameless,
And the rivers all run God knows where;
There are lives that are erring and aimless,
And deaths that just hang by a hair;
There are hardships that nobody reckons;
There are valleys unpeopled and still;
There's a land -- oh, it beckons and beckons,
And I want to go back -- and I will.

They're making my money diminish;
I'm sick of the taste of champagne.
Thank God! when I'm skinned to a finish
I'll pike to the Yukon again.
I'll fight -- and you bet it's no sham-fight;
It's hell! -- but I've been there before;
And it's better than this by a damnsite --
So me for the Yukon once more.

There's gold, and it's haunting and haunting;
It's luring me on as of old;
Yet it isn't the gold that I'm wanting
So much as just finding the gold.
It's the great, big, broad land 'way up yonder,
It's the forests where silence has lease;
It's the beauty that thrills me with wonder,
It's the stillness that fills me with peace.

The Spirit Of The Unborn Babe

The Spirit of the Unborn Babe peered through the window-pane,
Peered through the window-pane that glowed like beacon in the night;
For, oh, the sky was desolate and wild with wind and rain;
And how the little room was crammed with coziness and light!
Except the flirting of the fire there was no sound at all;
The Woman sat beside the hearth, her knitting on her knee;
The shadow of her husband's head was dancing on the wall;
She looked with staring eyes at it, she looked yet did not see.
She only saw a childish face that topped the table rim,
A little wistful ghost that smiled and vanished quick away;
And then because her tender eyes were flooding to the brim,
She lowered her head. . . . "Don't sorrow, dear," she heard him softly say;
"It's over now. We'll try to be as happy as before
(Ah! they who little children have, grant hostages to pain).
We gave Life chance to wound us once, but never, never more. . . ."
The Spirit of the Unborn Babe fled through the night again.

The Spirit of the Unborn Babe went wildered in the dark;
Like termagants the winds tore down and whirled it with the snow.
And then amid the writhing storm it saw a tiny spark,
A window broad, a spacious room all goldenly aglow,
A woman slim and Paris-gowned and exquisitely fair,
Who smiled with rapture as she watched her jewels catch the blaze;
A man in faultless evening dress, young, handsome, debonnaire,
Who smoked his cigarette and looked with frank admiring gaze.
"Oh, we are happy, sweet," said he; "youth, health, and wealth are ours.
What if a thousand toil and sweat that we may live at ease!
What if the hands are worn and torn that strew our path with flowers!
Ah, well! we did not make the world; let us not think of these.
Let's seek the beauty-spots of earth, Dear Heart, just you and I;
Let other women bring forth life with sorrow and with pain.
Above our door we'll hang the sign: `No children need apply. . . .'"
The Spirit of the Unborn Babe sped through the night again.

The Spirit of the Unborn Babe went whirling on and on;
It soared above a city vast, it swept down to a slum;
It saw within a grimy house a light that dimly shone;
It peered in through a window-pane and lo! a voice said: "Come!"
And so a little girl was born amid the dirt and din,

And lived in spite of everything, for life is ordered so;
A child whose eyes first opened wide to swinishness and sin,
A child whose love and innocence met only curse and blow.
And so in due and proper course she took the path of shame,
And gladly died in hospital, quite old at twenty years;
And when God comes to weigh it all, ah! whose shall be the blame
For all her maimed and poisoned life, her torture and her tears?
For oh, it is not what we do, but what we have not done!
And on that day of reckoning, when all is plain and clear,
What if we stand before the Throne, blood-guilty every one? . . .
Maybe the blackest sins of all are Selfishness and Fear.

Robert William Service

The Squaw Man

The cow-moose comes to water, and the beaver's overbold,
The net is in the eddy of the stream;
The teepee stars the vivid sward with russet, red and gold,
And in the velvet gloom the fire's a-gleam.
The night is ripe with quiet, rich with incense of the pine;
From sanctuary lake I hear the loon;
The peaks are bright against the blue, and drenched with sunset wine,
And like a silver bubble is the moon.

Cloud-high I climbed but yesterday; a hundred miles around
I looked to see a rival fire a-gleam.
As in a crystal lens it lay, a land without a bound,
All lure, and virgin vastitude, and dream.
The great sky soared exultantly, the great earth bared its breast,
All river-veined and patterned with the pine;
The heedless hordes of caribou were streaming to the West,
A land of lustrous mystery -- and mine.

Yea, mine to frame my Odyssey: Oh, little do they know
My conquest and the kingdom that I keep!
The meadows of the musk-ox, where the laughing grasses grow,
The rivers where the careless conies leap.
Beyond the silent Circle, where white men are fierce and few,
I lord it, and I mock at man-made law;
Like a flame upon the water is my little light canoe,
And yonder in the fireglow is my squaw.

A squaw man! yes, that's what I am; sneer at me if you will.
I've gone the grilling pace that cannot last;
With bawdry, bridge and brandy -- Oh, I've drank enough to kill
A dozen such as you, but that is past.
I've swung round to my senses, found the place where I belong;
The City made a madman out of me;
But here beyond the Circle, where there's neither right or wrong,
I leap from life's straight-jacket, and I'm free.

Yet ever in the far forlorn, by trails of lone desire;
Yet ever in the dawn's white leer of hate;
Yet ever by the dripping kill, beside the drowsy fire,

There comes the fierce heart-hunger for a mate.
There comes the mad blood-clamour for a woman's clinging hand,
Love-humid eyes, the velvet of a breast;
And so I sought the Bonnet-plumes, and chose from out the band
The girl I thought the sweetest and the best.

O wistful women I have loved before my dark disgrace!
O women fair and rare in my home land!
Dear ladies, if I saw you now I'd turn away my face,
Then crawl to kiss your foot-prints in the sand!
And yet -- that day the rifle jammed -- a wounded moose at bay --
A roar, a charge . . . I faced it with my knife:
A shot from out the willow-scrub, and there the monster lay. . . .
Yes, little Laughing Eyes, you saved my life.

The man must have the woman, and we're all brutes more or less,
Since first the male ape shinned the family tree;
And yet I think I love her with a husband's tenderness,
And yet I know that she would die for me.
Oh, if I left you, Laughing Eyes, and nevermore came back,
God help you, girl! I know what you would do. . . .
I see the lake wan in the moon, and from the shadow black,
There drifts a little, empty birch canoe.

We're here beyond the Circle, where there's never wrong nor right;
We aren't spliced according to the law;
But by the gods I hail you on this hushed and holy night
As the mother of my children, and my squaw.
I see your little slender face set in the firelight glow;
I pray that I may never make it sad;
I hear you croon a baby song, all slumber-soft and low --
God bless you, little Laughing Eyes! I'm glad.

Robert William Service

The Stretcher-Bearer

My stretcher is one scarlet stain,
And as I tries to scrape it clean,
I tell you wot -- I'm sick with pain
For all I've 'eard, for all I've seen;
Around me is the 'ellish night,
And as the war's red rim I trace,
I wonder if in 'Eaven's height,
Our God don't turn away 'Is Face.

I don't care 'oose the Crime may be;
I 'olds no brief for kin or clan;
I 'ymns no 'ate: I only see
As man destroys his brother man;
I waves no flag: I only know,
As 'ere beside the dead I wait,
A million 'earts is weighed with woe,
A million 'omes is desolate.

In drippin' darkness, far and near,
All night I've sought them woeful ones.
Dawn shudders up and still I 'ear
The crimson chorus of the guns.
Look! like a ball of blood the sun
'Angs o'er the scene of wrath and wrong. . . .
"Quick! Stretcher-bearers on the run!"
O Prince of Peace! 'ow long, 'ow long?

Robert William Service

The Summing Up

When you have sailed the seven seas
And looped the ends of earth,
You'll long at last for slippered ease
Beside a bonny hearth;
A cosy cottage in the sun,
A pleasant page to read -
You'll find when all is said and done,
That's nearly all you need.

You may have pow-wowed with the Great
And played a potent part
In serious affairs of state,
But now with quiet heart
You bide beside a rosy fire
And blether with a friend,
Discovering that you require
So little in the end.

And all your days of fevered flight
For glory, gold or gear
Will seem so futile when the Night
Draws dolorously near;
And you will only ask to be
With modest comfort blest,
With sweetness of simplicity,
With rich reward of rest.

Robert William Service

The Sum-Up

It is not power and fame
 That make success;
It is not rank or name
 Rate happiness.
It is not honour due
 Nor pile of pelf:
The pay-off is: Did you
 Enjoy yourself?

A pal of days gone by
 I reckon more
Of a success than I
 Who've gold in store
His life, though none too long,
 Was never dull:
Of woman, wine and song
 Bill had his full.

Friend, you are a success
 If you can say:
"A heap of happiness
 Has come my way.
No cheers have made me glad,
 No wealth I've won;
But oh how I have had
 A heap of FUN!"

Robert William Service

The Super

When I was with a Shakespeare show
I played the part of Guildenstern,
Or Rosenkrantz - at least I know
It wasn't difficult to learn;
By Reader, do not at me scoff,
For futhermore I should explain
I was the understudy of
The understudy of the Dane.

Oh how it crabbed me just to think
They barred me from that role divine;
And how I longed to have them drink
A cup of slightly poisoned wine!
At every night with struts and rants
I strove my quid a week to earn,
And put my soul in Rosenkrantz -
Or was it haply, Guildenstern.

Alas! I might have spared by breath,
I never played the noble Dane;
And yet when Irving staged Macbeth
I bore a tree of Dunsinane,
And yearned for that barn-storming day,
Of hopes and dreams and patchy pants,
When Guildenstern I'd proudly play -
Or was, maybe, Rosenkrantz?

Robert William Service

The Telegraph Operator

I will not wash my face;
I will not brush my hair;
I "pig" around the place--
There's nobody to care.
Nothing but rock and tree;
Nothing but wood and stone,
Oh, God, it's hell to be
Alone, alone, alone!

Snow-peaks and deep-gashed draws
Corral me in a ring.
I feel as if I was
The only living thing
On all this blighted earth;
And so I frowst and shrink,
And crouching by my hearth
I hear the thoughts I think.

I think of all I miss--
The boys I used to know;
The girls I used to kiss;
The coin I used to blow:
The bars I used to haunt;
The racket and the row;
The beers I didn't want
(I wish I had 'em now).

Day after day the same,
Only a little worse;
No one to grouch or blame--
Oh, for a loving curse!
Oh, in the night I fear,
Haunted by nameless things,
Just for a voice to cheer,
Just for a hand that clings!

Faintly as from a star
Voices come o'er the line;
Voices of ghosts afar,

Not in this world of mine;
Lives in whose loom I grope;
Words in whose weft I hear
Eager the thrill of hope,
Awful the chill of fear.

I'm thinking out aloud;
I reckon that is bad;
(The snow is like a shroud)--
Maybe I'm going mad.
Say! wouldn't that be tough?
This awful hush that hugs
And chokes one is enough
To make a man go "bugs".

There's not a thing to do;
I cannot sleep at night;
No wonder I'm so blue;
Oh, for a friendly fight!
The din and rush of strife;
A music-hall aglow;
A crowd, a city, life--
Dear God, I miss it so!

Here, you have moped enough!
Brace up and play the game!
But say, it's awful tough--
Day after day the same
(I've said that twice, I bet).
Well, there's not much to say.
I wish I had a pet,
Or something I could play.

Cheer up! don't get so glum
And sick of everything;
The worst is yet to come;
God help you till the Spring.
God shield you from the Fear;
Teach you to laugh, not moan.
Ha! ha! it sounds so queer--
Alone, alone, alone!

The Thinker

Of all the men I ever knew
The tinkingest was Uncle Jim;
If there were any chores to do
We couldn't figure much on him.
He'd have a thinking job on hand,
And on the rocking-chair he'd sit,
And think and think to beat the band,
And snap his galusus and spit.

We kids regarded him with awe -
His beard browned by tobacco stains,
His hayseed had of faded straw
The covered such a bunch of brains.
When some big problem claimed his mind
He'd wrestle with it for a fall;
But some solution he would find,
To be on hand for supper call.

A mute, inglorious Einstein he,
A rocking-chair philosopher;
I often wondered what, maybe,
His mighty meditations were.
No weighty work he left behind,
No words of wisdom or of wit;
Yet how I see him in my mind
Snap on his galusus and spit.

Robert William Service

The Three Bares

Ma tried to wash her garden slacks but couldn't get 'em clean
And so she thought she'd soak 'em in a bucket o' benzine.
It worked all right. She wrung 'em out then wondered what she'd do
With all that bucket load of high explosive residue.
She knew that it was dangerous to scatter it around,
For Grandpa liked to throw his lighted matches on the ground.
Somehow she didn't dare to pour it down the kitchen sink,
And what the heck to do with it, poor Ma jest couldn't think.

Then Nature seemed to give the clue, as down the garden lot
She spied the edifice that graced a solitary spot,
Their Palace of Necessity, the family joy and pride,
Enshrined in morning-glory vine, with graded seats inside;
Jest like that cabin Goldylocks found occupied by three,
But in this case B-E-A-R was spelt B-A-R-E----
A tiny seat for Baby Bare, a medium for Ma,
A full-sized section sacred to the Bare of Grandpapa.

Well, Ma was mighty glad to get that worry off her mind,
And hefting up the bucket so combustibly inclined,
She hurried down the garden to that refuge so discreet,
And dumped the liquid menace safely through the centre seat.

Next morning old Grandpa arose; he made a hearty meal,
And sniffed the air and said: 'By Gosh! how full of beans I feel.
Darned if I ain't as fresh as paint; my joy will be complete
With jest a quiet session on the usual morning seat;
To smoke me pipe an' meditate, an' maybe write a pome,
For that's the time when bits o' rhyme gits jiggin' in me dome.'

He sat down on that special seat slicked shiny by his age,
And looking like Walt Whitman, jest a silver-whiskered sage,
He filled his corn-cob to the brim and tapped it snugly down,
And chuckled: 'Of a perfect day I reckon this the crown.'
He lit the weed, it soothed his need, it was so soft and sweet:
And then he dropped the lighted match clean through the middle seat.

His little grand-child Rosyleen cried from the kichen door:
'Oh, Ma, come quick; there's sompin wrong; I heared a dreffel roar;

Oh, Ma, I see a sheet of flame; it's rising high and higher...
Oh, Mummy dear, I sadly fear our comfort-cot's caught fire.'

Poor Ma was thrilled with horror at them words o' Rosyleen.
She thought of Grandpa's matches and that bucket of benzine;
So down the garden geared on high, she ran with all her power,
For regular was Grandpa, and she knew it was his hour.
Then gaspin' gaspin' Rosyleen she peered into the fire,
A roarin' soarin' furnace now, perchance old Grandpa's pyre....

But as them twain expressed their pain they heard a hearty cheer----
Behold the old rapsallion squattinn' in the duck pond near,
His silver whiskers singed away, a gosh-almighty wreck,
Wi' half a yard o' toilet seat entwined about his neck....

He cried: 'Say, folks, oh, did ye hear the big blow-out I made?
It scared me stiff - I hope you-uns was not too much afraid?
But now I best be crawlin' out o' this dog-gasted wet....
For what I aim to figger out is----WHAT THE HECK I ET?'

Robert William Service

The Three Tommies

That Barret, the painter of pictures, what feeling for color he had!
And Fanning, the maker of music, such melodies mirthful and mad!
And Harley, the writer of stories, so whimsical, tender and glad!

To hark to their talk in the trenches, high heart unfolding to heart,
Of the day when the war would be over, and each would be true to his part,
Upbuilding a Palace of Beauty to the wonder and glory of Art . . .

Yon's Barret, the painter of pictures, yon carcass that rots on the wire;
His hand with its sensitive cunning is crisped to a cinder with fire;
His eyes with their magical vision are bubbles of glutinous mire.

Poor Fanning! He sought to discover the symphonic note of a shell;
There are bits of him broken and bloody, to show you the place where he fell;
I've reason to fear on his exquisite ear the rats have been banqueting well.

And speaking of Harley, the writer, I fancy I looked on him last,
Sprawling and staring and writhing in the roar of the battle blast;
Then a mad gun-team crashed over, and scattered his brains as it passed.

Oh, Harley and Fanning and Barret, they were bloody good mates o' mine;
Their bodies are empty bottles; Death has guzzled the wine;
What's left of them's filth and corruption. . . . Where is the Fire Divine?

I'll tell you. . . . At night in the trenches, as I watch and I do my part,
Three radiant spirits I'm seeing, high heart revealing to heart,
And they're building a peerless palace to the splendor and triumph of Art.

Yet, alas! for the fame of Barret, the glory he might have trailed!
And alas! for the name of Fanning, a star that beacons and pales,
Poor Harley, obscure and forgotten. . . . Well, who shall say that they failed!

No, each did a Something Grander than ever he dreamed to do;
And as for the work unfinished, all will be paid their due;
The broken ends will be fitted, the balance struck will be true.

So painters, and players, and penmen, I tell you: Do as you please;
Let your fame outleap on the trumpets, you'll never rise up to these --
To three grim and gory Tommies, down, down on your bended knees!

Robert William Service

The Three Voices

The waves have a story to tell me,
As I lie on the lonely beach;
Chanting aloft in the pine-tops,
The wind has a lesson to teach;
But the stars sing an anthem of glory
I cannot put into speech.

The waves tell of ocean spaces,
Of hearts that are wild and brave,
Of populous city places,
Of desolate shores they lave,
Of men who sally in quest of gold
To sink in an ocean grave.

The wind is a mighty roamer;
He bids me keep me free,
Clean from the taint of the gold-lust,
Hardy and pure as he;
Cling with my love to nature,
As a child to the mother-knee.

But the stars throng out in their glory,
And they sing of the God in man;
They sing of the Mighty Master,
Of the loom his fingers span,
Where a star or a soul is a part of the whole,
And weft in the wondrous plan.

Here by the camp-fire's flicker,
Deep in my blanket curled,
I long for the peace of the pine-gloom,
When the scroll of the Lord is unfurled,
And the wind and the wave are silent,
And world is singing to world.

Robert William Service

The Trail Of Ninety-Eight

Gold! We leapt from our benches. Gold! We sprang from our stools.
Gold! We wheeled in the furrow, fired with the faith of fools.
Fearless, unfound, unfitted, far from the night and the cold,
Heard we the clarion summons, followed the master-lure--Gold!

Men from the sands of the Sunland; men from the woods of the West;
Men from the farms and the cities, into the Northland we pressed.
Graybeards and striplings and women, good men and bad men and bold,
Leaving our homes and our loved ones, crying exultantly--"Gold!"

Never was seen such an army, pitiful, futile, unfit;
Never was seen such a spirit, manifold courage and grit.
Never has been such a cohort under one banner unrolled
As surged to the ragged-edged Arctic, urged by the arch-tempter--Gold.

"Farewell!" we cried to our dearests; little we cared for their tears.
"Farewell!" we cried to the humdrum and the yoke of the hireling years;
Just like a pack of school-boys, and the big crowd cheered us good-bye.
Never were hearts so uplifted, never were hopes so high.

The spectral shores flitted past us, and every whirl of the screw
Hurled us nearer to fortune, and ever we planned what we'd do--
Do with the gold when we got it--big, shiny nuggets like plums,
There in the sand of the river, gouging it out with our thumbs.

And one man wanted a castle, another a racing stud;
A third would cruise in a palace yacht like a red-necked prince of blood.
And so we dreamed and we vaunted, millionaires to a man,
Leaping to wealth in our visions long ere the trail began.

II

We landed in wind-swept Skagway. We joined the weltering mass,
Clamoring over their outfits, waiting to climb the Pass.
We tightened our girths and our pack-straps; we linked on the Human Chain,
Struggling up to the summit, where every step was a pain.

Gone was the joy of our faces, grim and haggard and pale;

The heedless mirth of the shipboard was changed to the care of the trail.
We flung ourselves in the struggle, packing our grub in relays,
Step by step to the summit in the bale of the winter days.

Floundering deep in the sump-holes, stumbling out again;
Crying with cold and weakness, crazy with fear and pain.
Then from the depths of our travail, ere our spirits were broke,
Grim, tenacious and savage, the lust of the trail awoke.

"Klondike or bust!" rang the slogan; every man for his own.
Oh, how we flogged the horses, staggering skin and bone!
Oh, how we cursed their weakness, anguish they could not tell,
Breaking their hearts in our passion, lashing them on till they fell!

For grub meant gold to our thinking, and all that could walk must pack;
The sheep for the shambles stumbled, each with a load on its back;
And even the swine were burdened, and grunted and squealed and rolled,
And men went mad in the moment, huskily clamoring "Gold!"

Oh, we were brutes and devils, goaded by lust and fear!
Our eyes were strained to the summit; the weaklings dropped to the rear,
Falling in heaps by the trail-side, heart-broken, limp and wan;
But the gaps closed up in an instant, and heedless the chain went on.

Never will I forget it, there on the mountain face,
Antlike, men with their burdens, clinging in icy space;
Dogged, determined and dauntless, cruel and callous and cold,
Cursing, blaspheming, reviling, and ever that battle-cry--"Gold!"

Thus toiled we, the army of fortune, in hunger and hope and despair,
Till glacier, mountain and forest vanished, and, radiantly fair,
There at our feet lay Lake Bennett, and down to its welcome we ran:
The trail of the land was over, the trail of the water began.

III

We built our boats and we launched them. Never has been such a fleet;
A packing-case for a bottom, a mackinaw for a sheet.
Shapeless, grotesque, lopsided, flimsy, makeshift and crude,
Each man after his fashion builded as best he could.

Each man worked like a demon, as prow to rudder we raced;
The winds of the Wild cried "Hurry!" the voice of the waters, "Haste!"
We hated those driving before us; we dreaded those pressing behind;
We cursed the slow current that bore us; we prayed to the God of the wind.

Spring! and the hillsides flourished, vivid in jewelled green;
Spring! and our hearts' blood nourished envy and hatred and spleen.
Little cared we for the Spring-birth; much cared we to get on--
Stake in the Great White Channel, stake ere the best be gone.

The greed of the gold possessed us; pity and love were forgot;
Covetous visions obsessed us; brother with brother fought.
Partner with partner wrangled, each one claiming his due;
Wrangled and halved their outfits, sawing their boats in two.

Thuswise we voyaged Lake Bennett, Tagish, then Windy Arm,
Sinister, savage and baleful, boding us hate and harm.
Many a scow was shattered there on that iron shore;
Many a heart was broken straining at sweep and oar.

We roused Lake Marsh with a chorus, we drifted many a mile;
There was the canyon before us--cave-like its dark defile;
The shores swept faster and faster; the river narrowed to wrath;
Waters that hissed disaster reared upright in our path.

Beneath us the green tumult churning, above us the cavernous gloom;
Around us, swift twisting and turning, the black, sullen walls of a tomb.
We spun like a chip in a mill-race; our hearts hammered under the test;
Then--oh, the relief on each chill face!--we soared into sunlight and rest.

Hand sought for hand on the instant. Cried we, "Our troubles are o'er!"
Then, like a rumble of thunder, heard we a canorous roar.
Leaping and boiling and seething, saw we a cauldron afume;
There was the rage of the rapids, there was the menace of doom.

The river springs like a racer, sweeps through a gash in the rock;
Buts at the boulder-ribbed bottom, staggers and rears at the shock;
Leaps like a terrified monster, writhes in its fury and pain;
Then with the crash of a demon springs to the onset again.

Dared we that ravening terror; heard we its din in our ears;
Called on the Gods of our fathers, juggled forlorn with our fears;

Sank to our waists in its fury, tossed to the sky like a fleece;
Then, when our dread was the greatest, crashed into safety and peace.

But what of the others that followed, losing their boats by the score?
Well could we see them and hear them, strung down that desolate shore.
What of the poor souls that perished? Little of them shall be said--
On to the Golden Valley, pause not to bury the dead.

Then there were days of drifting, breezes soft as a sigh;
Night trailed her robe of jewels over the floor of the sky.
The moonlit stream was a python, silver, sinuous, vast,
That writhed on a shroud of velvet--well, it was done at last.

There were the tents of Dawson, there the scar of the slide;
Swiftly we poled o'er the shallows, swiftly leapt o'er the side.
Fires fringed the mouth of Bonanza; sunset gilded the dome;
The test of the trail was over--thank God, thank God, we were Home!

Robert William Service

The Trail Of No Return

So now I take a bitter road
 Whereon no bourne I see,
And wearily I lift the load
 That once I bore with glee.
For me no more by sea or shore
 Adventure's star shall burn,
As I forsake wild ways to take
 The Trail of No Return.

Such paths of peril I have trod:
 In sun and shade they lay.
And some went wistfully to God,
 And some the devil's way.
But there is one I may not shun,
 Though long my life's sojourn:
A dawn will break when I must take
 The Trail of No Return.

Farewell to friends, good-bye to foes,
 Adieu to smile or frown;
My voyaging is nigh its close,
 And dark is drifting down.
With weary feet my way I beat,
 Yet holy light discern . . .
So let me take without heart-break
 The Trail of No Return.

Robert William Service

The Tramps

Can you recall, dear comrade, when we tramped God's land together,
And we sang the old, old Earth-song, for our youth was very sweet;
When we drank and fought and lusted, as we mocked at tie and tether,
Along the road to Anywhere, the wide world at our feet --

Along the road to Anywhere, when each day had its story;
When time was yet our vassal, and life's jest was still unstale;
When peace unfathomed filled our hearts as, bathed in amber glory,
Along the road to Anywhere we watched the sunsets pale?

Alas! the road to Anywhere is pitfalled with disaster;
There's hunger, want, and weariness, yet O we loved it so!
As on we tramped exultantly, and no man was our master,
And no man guessed what dreams were ours, as, swinging heel and toe,
We tramped the road to Anywhere, the magic road to Anywhere,
The tragic road to Anywhere, such dear, dim years ago.

Robert William Service

The Trapper's Christmas Eve

It's mighty lonesome-like and drear.
Above the Wild the moon rides high,
And shows up sharp and needle-clear
The emptiness of earth and sky;
No happy homes with love a-glow;
No Santa Claus to make believe:
Just snow and snow, and then more snow;
It's Christmas Eve, it's Christmas Eve.

And here am I where all things end,
And Undesirables are hurled;
A poor old man without a friend,
Forgot and dead to all the world;
Clean out of sight and out of mind . . .
Well, maybe it is better so;
We all in life our level find,
And mine, I guess, is pretty low.

Yet as I sit with pipe alight
Beside the cabin-fir
take to-night
The backward trail of fifty year.
The school-house and the Christmas tree;
The children with their cheeks a-glow;
Two bright blue eyes that smile on me . . .
Just half a century ago.

Again (it's maybe forty years),
With faith and trust almost divine,
These same blue eyes, abrim with tears,
Through depths of love look into mine.
A parting, tender, soft and low,
With arms that cling and lips that cleave . . .
Ah me! it's all so long ago,
Yet seems so sweet this Christmas Eve.

Just thirty years ago, again . . .
We say a bitter, last good-bye;
Our lips are white with wrath and pain;

Our little children cling and cry.
Whose was the fault? it matters not,
For man and woman both deceive;
It's buried now and all forgot,
Forgiven, too, this Christmas Eve.

And she (God pity me) is dead;
Our children men and women grown.
I like to think that they are wed,
With little children of their own,
That crowd around their Christmas tree . . .
I would not ever have them grieve,
Or shed a single tear for me,
To mar their joy this Christmas Eve.

Stripped to the buff and gaunt and still
Lies all the land in grim distress.
Like lost soul wailing, long and shrill,
A wolf-howl cleaves the emptiness.
Then hushed as Death is everything.
The moon rides haggard and forlorn . . .
"O hark the herald angels sing!"
God bless all men -- it's Christmas morn.

Robert William Service

The Trust

Because I've eighty years and odd,
 And darkling is my day,
I now prepare to meet my God,
 And for forgiveness pray.
Not for salvation is my plea,
 Nor Heaven hope,--just rest:
Begging: "Dear Father, pardon me,
 I did not do my best.

"I did not measure with the Just
 To serve my fellow men;
But unto levity and lust
 I loaned my precious pen.
I sorrow for the sacred touch,
 And though I toiled with zest,
Dear God, have mercy, in-as-much
 I did not do my best.

"I bless You for the gift you gave
 That brought me golden joy;
Yet here beside the gentle grave
 I grieve for its employ.
Have pity, Lord,--so well I know
 I failed you in the test,
And my last thought is one of woe:
 I did not do my best."

Robert William Service

The Tunnel

Toil's a tunnel, there's no way out
For fellows, the like o' me;
A beggar wi' only a crust an' a clout
At the worst o' the worst is free;
but I work to eat, an' I eat to work;
It's always the same old round,
And I dassent fail for the day I shirk
They'll shovel me underground.

I guess God meant it to be that way,
For a man must make his bread;
I was born to bondage, to earn my pay,
To slave to the day I'm dead;
To live in a tunnel, to die in a ditch -
That's just what us fellows do;
For the poor must be makin' the rich more rich,
An' the many must serve the few.

Aye, we live in a tunnel, most o' us,
A-fearin' to lose our job;
But who has the right to gripe an' cuss
So the goblet's hot on the hob.
An' I mustn't be havin' the wife complain,
An' I can't let the childer fast:
So I'll toil in my tunnel an' drag my chain,
Clank! Clank! Clank! to the last.

Robert William Service

The Twa Jocks

Says Bauldy MacGreegor frae Gleska tae Hecky MacCrimmon frae Skye:
"That's whit I hate maist about fechtin' -- it makes ye sae deevilish dry;
Noo jist hae a keek at yon ferm-hoose them Gairmans are poundin' sae fine,
Weel, think o' it, doon in the dunnie there's bottles and bottles o' wine.
A' hell's fairly belchin' oot yonner, but oh, lad, I'm ettlin' tae try. . . ."
"If it's poose she'll be with ye whateffer," says Hecky MacCrimmon
frae Skye.~

Says Bauldy MacGreegor frae Gleska: "Whit price fur a funeral wreath?
We're dodgin' a' kinds o' destruction, an' jist by the skin o' oor teeth.
Here, spread yersel oot on yer belly, and slither along in the glaur;
Confoond ye, ye big Hielan' deevil! Ye don't realize there's a war.
Ye think that ye're back in Dunvegan, and herdin' the wee bits o' kye."
"She'll neffer trink wine in Dunfegan," says Hecky MacCrimmon frae
Skye.~

Says Bauldy MacGreegor frae Gleska: "Thank goodness! the ferm-hoose at
last;
There's no muckle left but the cellar, an' even that's vanishin' fast.
Look oot, there's the corpse o' a wumman, sair mangelt and deid by her lane.
Quick! Strike a match. . . . Whit did I tell ye! A hale bonny box o' shampane;
Jist knock the heid aff o' a bottle. . . . Haud on, mon, I'm hearing a cry. . .
."
"She'll think it's a wean that wass greetin'," says Hecky MacCrimmon
frae Skye.~

Says Bauldy MacGreegor frae Gleska: "Ma conscience! I'm hanged but yer
richt.
It's yin o' thae waifs of the war-field, a' sobbin' and shakin' wi' fricht.
Wheesht noo, dear, we're no gaun tae hurt ye. We're takin' ye hame, my wee
doo!
We've got tae get back wi' her, Hecky. Whit mercy we didna get fou!
We'll no touch a drap o' that likker -- that's hard, man, ye canna deny. . .
."
"It's the last thing she'll think o' denyin'," says Hecky MacCrimmon
frae Skye.

Says Bauldy MacGreegor frae Gleska: "If I should get struck frae the rear,
Ye'll tak' and ye'll shield the wee lassie, and rin for the lines like a deer.

God! Wis that the breenge o' a bullet? I'm thinkin' it's cracket ma spine.
I'm doon on ma knees in the glabber; I'm fearin', auld man, I've got mine.
Here, quick! Pit yer erms roon the lassie. Noo, rin, lad! good luck and good-by. .
. .
"Hoots, mon! it's ye baith she'll be takin'," says Hecky MacCrimmon
frae Skye.~

Says Corporal Muckle frae Rannoch: "Is that no' a picture tae frame?
Twa sair woundit Jocks wi' a lassie jist like ma wee Jeannie at hame.
We're prood o' ye baith, ma brave heroes. We'll gie ye a medal, I think."
Says Bauldy MacGreegor frae Gleska: "I'd raither ye gied me a drink.
I'll no speak for Private MacCrimmon, but oh, mon, I'm perishin' dry. . . ."
"She'll wush that Loch Lefen wass whuskey," says Hecky
MacCrimmon frae Skye.~

Robert William Service

The Twins

There were two brothers, John and James,
And when the town went up in flames,
To save the house of James dashed John,
Then turned, and lo! his own was gone.

And when the great World War began,
To volunteer John promptly ran;
And while he learned live bombs to lob,
James stayed at home and -- sneaked his job.

John came home with a missing limb;
That didn't seem to worry him;
But oh, it set his brain awirl
To find that James had -- sneaked his girl!

Time passed. John tried his grief to drown;
To-day James owns one-half the town;
His army contracts riches yield;
And John? Well, search the Potter's Field.

Robert William Service

The Twins Of Lucky Strike

I've sung of Violet de Vere, that slinky, minky dame,
Of Gertie of the Diamond Tooth, and Touch-the-Button Nell,
And Maye Lamore,--at eighty-four I oughta blush wi' shame
That in my wild and wooly youth I knew them ladies well.
And Klondike Kit, and Gumboot Sue, and many I've forgot;
They had their faults, as I recall, the same as you and me;
But come to take them all in all, the daisy of the lot,
The glamour queen of dance-hall dames was Montreal Maree.
And yet her heart was bigger than a barn, the boys would say;
Always the first to help the weak, and so with words of woe,
She put me wise that Lipstick Lou was in the family way:
"An' who ze baby's fazzaire ees, only ze bon Dieu know."
Then on a black and bitter night passed on poor Lipstick Lou;
And by her bedside, midwife wise, wi' tears aflowin' free,
A holdin' out the newly born,--an' by gosh! there was two:
"Helas! I am zere mossaire now," said Montreal Maree.

Said One-eyed Mike: "In Lucky Strike we've never yet had twins,"
As darin' inundation he held one upon each knee.
"Say, boys, ain't they a purty sight, as like's a pair o' pins--
We gotta hold a christinin' wi' Father Tim McGee."
"I aim to be their Godpa," bellowed Black Moran from Nome.
"The guy wot don't love childer is a blasted S.O.B.:
So long as I can tot a gun them kids won't lack a home."
"I sink zey creep into my heart," said Montreal Maree.

'Twas hectic in the Nugget Bar, the hooch was flowin' free,
An' Lousetown Liz was singin' of how someone done her wrong,
Wi' sixty seeded sourdoughs all ahollerin' their glee,
When One-eyed Mike uprose an' called suspension of the song.
Says he: "Aloodin' to them twins, their age in months is two,
An' I propose wi' Christmas close, we offer them a tree.
'Twill sure be mighty pleasin' to the ghost o' Lipstick Lou . . ."
"Zen you will be ze Père Noël," said Montreal Maree.

The dance hall of the Nugget Bar erupted joy an' light,
An' set upon the stage them twins was elegant to see,
Like angel cherubs in their robes of pure baptismal white,
Abaskin' in the sunny smile o' Father tim McGee.

Then on the bar stood Santa Claus, says he: "We'll form a Trust;
So all you sourdoughs heft your pokes an' hang 'em on the Tree.
To give them kids a chance in life we'll raise enough or bust!"
"For zem I pray ze Lord to bless," said Montreal Maree.

You never saw a Christmas Tree so swell as that, I vow,
Wi' sixty sweaty sourdoughs ringin' round them infants two;
Their solid pokes o' virgin gold aweighin' down each bough,
All singin' Christ Is Risen, for the soul o' Lipstick Lou,
"Lo! Death is a deliverer, the purger of our sins,
And Motherhood leads up to God," said Father Tim McGee.
Then all the Ladies of the Line bent down to kiss them twins,
Clasped to the breast, Madonna-like, of Montreal Maree.

Sure 'tis the love of childer makes for savin' of the soul,
And in Maternity the hope of humankind we see;
So though she wears no halo, headin' out for Heaven's goal,
Awheelin' of a double pram,--bless Montreal Maree!

Robert William Service

The Under-Dogs

What have we done, Oh Lord, that we
 Are evil starred?
How have we erred and sinned to be
 So scourged and scarred?
Lash us, Oh Lord, with scorpion whips,
 We can but run;
But harken to our piteous lips:
 What have we done?

How have we sinned to rouse your wrath,
 To earn your scorn?
Stony and steep has been our path
 Since we were born.
Oh for a sign, a hope, a word,
 A heaven glance;
Why is your hand against us, Lord?
 Give us a chance.

What shall we do, Oh God, to gain
 Your mercy seat?
Shall we live out our lives in pain
 And dark defeat?
Shall we in servitude bow low
 Unto the end?
How we would hope, could we but know
 You are our friend!

We are the disinherited,
 The doomed, the lost.
For breath with dust and ashes fed,
 We pay the cost.
Dumb mouths! Yet though we bleed, with prayer
 We kiss the sword;
Aye, even dying we forbear
 To curse Thee, Lord.

Robert William Service

The Undying

She was so wonderful I wondered
If wedding me she had not blundered;
She was so pure, so high above me,
I marvelled how she came to love me:
Or did she? Well, in her own fashion -
Affection, pity, never passion.

I knew I was not worth her love;
Yet oh, how wistfully I strove
To be her equal in some way;
She knew I tried, and I would pray
Some day she'd hold her head in pride,
And stand with praising by my side.

A Weakling, I - she made me strong;
My finest thoughts to her belong;
Through twenty years she mothered me,
And then one day she smothered me
With kisses, saying wild with joy:
"Soon we'll be three - let's hope, a boy."

"Too old to bear a child," they said;
Well, they were right, for both are dead. . . .
Ah no, not dead - she is with me,
And by my side she'll ever be;
Her spirit lingers, half divine:
All good I do is hers, not mine.

God, by my works O let me strive
To keep her gentleness alive!
Let in my heart her spirit glow,
And by my thoughts for others show
She is not dead: she'll never die
While love for humankind have I.

Robert William Service

The Visionary

If fortune had not granted me
 To suck the Muse's teats,
I think I would have liked to be
 A sweeper of the streets;
And city gutters glad to groom,
 Have heft a bonny broom.

There--as amid the crass and crush
 The limousines swished by,
I would have leaned upon my brush
 With visionary eye:
Deeming despite their loud allure
 That I was rich, they poor.

Aye, though in garb terrestrial,
 To Heaven I would pray,
And dream with broom celestial
 I swept the Milky Way;
And golden chariots would ring,
 And harps of Heaven sing.

And all the strumpets passing me,
 And heelers of the Ward
Would glorified Madonnas be,
 And angels of the Lord;
And all the brats in gutters grim
 Be rosy cherubim.

Robert William Service

The Volunteer

Sez I: My Country calls? Well, let it call.

I grins perlately and declines wiv thanks.
Go, let 'em plaster every blighted wall,
'Ere's ONE they don't stampede into the ranks.
Them politicians with their greasy ways;
Them empire-grabbers -- fight for 'em? No fear!
I've seen this mess a-comin' from the days
Of Algyserious and Aggydear:
I've felt me passion rise and swell,
But . . . wot the 'ell, Bill? Wot the 'ell?

Sez I: My Country? Mine? I likes their cheek.

Me mud-bespattered by the cars they drive,
Wot makes my measly thirty bob a week,
And sweats red blood to keep meself alive!
Fight for the right to slave that they may spend,
Them in their mansions, me 'ere in my slum?
No, let 'em fight wot's something to defend:
But me, I've nothin' -- let the Kaiser come.
And so I cusses 'ard and well,
But . . . wot the 'ell, Bill? Wot the 'ell?

Sez I: If they would do the decent thing,
And shield the missis and the little 'uns,
Why, even I might shout "God save the King",
And face the chances of them 'ungry guns.
But we've got three, another on the way;
It's that wot makes me snarl and set me jor:
The wife and nippers, wot of 'em, I say,
If I gets knocked out in this blasted war?
Gets proper busted by a shell,
But . . . wot the 'ell, Bill? Wot the 'ell?

Ay, wot the 'ell's the use of all this talk?
To-day some boys in blue was passin' me,
And some of 'em they 'ad no legs to walk,
And some of 'em they 'ad no eyes to see.
And -- well, I couldn't look 'em in the face,
And so I'm goin', goin' to declare

I'm under forty-one and take me place
To face the music with the bunch out there.
A fool, you say! Maybe you're right.
I'll 'ave no peace unless I fight.
I've ceased to think; I only know
I've gotta go, Bill, gotta go.

Robert William Service

The Walkers

(He speaks.)

Walking, walking, oh, the joy of walking!
Swinging down the tawny lanes with head held high;
Striding up the green hills, through the heather stalking,
Swishing through the woodlands where the brown leaves lie;
Marveling at all things -- windmills gaily turning,
Apples for the cider-press, ruby-hued and gold;
Tails of rabbits twinkling, scarlet berries burning,
Wedge of geese high-flying in the sky's clear cold,
Light in little windows, field and furrow darkling;
Home again returning, hungry as a hawk;
Whistling up the garden, ruddy-cheeked and sparkling,
Oh, but I am happy as I walk, walk, walk!

(She speaks.)

Walking, walking, oh, the curse of walking!
Slouching round the grim square, shuffling up the street,
Slinking down the by-way, all my graces hawking,
Offering my body to each man I meet.
Peering in the gin-shop where the lads are drinking,
Trying to look gay-like, crazy with the blues;
Halting in a doorway, shuddering and shrinking
(Oh, my draggled feather and my thin, wet shoes).
Here's a drunken drover: "Hullo, there, old dearie!"
No, he only curses, can't be got to talk. . . .
On and on till daylight, famished, wet and weary,
God in Heaven help me as I walk, walk, walk!

Robert William Service

The Wanderlust

The Wanderlust has lured me to the seven lonely seas,
Has dumped me on the tailing-piles of dearth;
The Wanderlust has haled me from the morris chairs of ease,
Has hurled me to the ends of all the earth.
How bitterly I've cursed it, oh, the Painted Desert knows,
The wraithlike heights that hug the pallid plain,
The all-but-fluid silence, -- yet the longing grows and grows,
And I've got to glut the Wanderlust again.

Soldier, sailor, in what a plight I've been!
Tinker, tailor, oh what a sight I've seen!
And I'm hitting the trail in the morning, boys,
And you won't see my heels for dust;
For it's "all day" with you
When you answer the cue
Of the Wan-der-lust.

The Wanderlust has got me . . . by the belly-aching fire,
By the fever and the freezing and the pain;
By the darkness that just drowns you, by the wail of home desire,
I've tried to break the spell of it -- in vain.
Life might have been a feast for me, now there are only crumbs;
In rags and tatters, beggar-wise I sit;
Yet there's no rest or peace for me, imperious it drums,
The Wanderlust, and I must follow it.

Highway, by-way, many a mile I've done;
Rare way, fair way, many a height I've won;
But I'm pulling my freight in the morning, boys,
And it's over the hills or bust;
For there's never a cure
When you list to the lure
Of the Wan-der-lust.

The Wanderlust has taught me . . . it has whispered to my heart
Things all you stay-at-homes will never know.
The white man and the savage are but three short days apart,
Three days of cursing, crawling, doubt and woe.
Then it's down to chewing muclucs, to the water you can eat,

To fish you bolt with nose held in your hand.
When you get right down to cases, it's King's Grub that rules the races,
And the Wanderlust will help you understand.

Haunting, taunting, that is the spell of it;
Mocking, baulking, that is the hell of it;
But I'll shoulder my pack in the morning, boys,
And I'm going because I must;
For it's so-long to all
When you answer the call
 Of the Wan-der-lust.

The Wanderlust has blest me . . . in a ragged blanket curled,
I've watched the gulf of Heaven foam with stars;
I've walked with eyes wide open to the wonder of the world,
I've seen God's flood of glory burst its bars.
I've seen the gold a-blinding in the ruffles of the sky,
Till I fancied me a bloated plutocrat;
But I'm freedom's happy bond-slave, and I will be till I die,
And I've got to thank the Wanderlust for that.

Wild heart, child heart, all of the world your home.
Glad heart, mad heart, what can you do but roam?
Oh, I'll beat it once more in the morning, boys,
With a pinch of tea and a crust;
For you cannot deny
When you hark to the cry
 Of the Wan-der-lust.

The Wanderlust will claim me at the finish for its own.
I'll turn my back on men and face the Pole.
Beyond the Arctic outposts I will venture all alone;
Some Never-never Land will be my goal.
Thank God! there's none will miss me, for I've been a bird of flight;
And in my moccasins I'll take my call;
For the Wanderlust has ruled me,
And the Wanderlust has schooled me,
And I'm ready for the darkest trail of all.

Grim land, dim land, oh, how the vastness calls!
Far land, star land, oh, how the stillness falls!
For you never can tell if it's heaven or hell,

And I'm taking the trail on trust;
But I haven't a doubt
That my soul will leap out
 On its Wan-der-lust.

Robert William Service

The Wedding Ring

I pawned my sick wife's wedding ring,
To drink and make myself a beast.
I got the most that it would bring,
Of golden coins the very least.
With stealth into her room I crept
And stole it from her as she slept.

I do not think that she will know,
As in its place I left a band
Of brass that has a brighter glow
And gleamed upon her withered hand.
I do not think that she can tell
The change - she does not see too well.

Pray God, she doesn't find me out.
I'd rather far I would be dead.
Yet yesterday she seemed to doubt,
And looking at me long she said:
"My finger must have shrunk, because
My ring seems bigger than it was."

She gazed at it so wistfully,
And one big tear rolled down her cheek.
Said she: "You'll bury it with me . . ."
I was so moved I could not speak.
Oh wretched me! How whisky can
Bring out the devil in a man!"

And yet I know she loves me still,
As on the morn that we were wed;
And darkly guess I also will
Be doomed the day that she is dead.
And yet I swear, before she's gone,
I will retrieve her ring from pawn.

I'll get it though I have to steal,
Then when to ease her bitter pain
They give her sleep oh I will feel
Her hand and slip it on again;

Through tears her wasted face I'll see,
And pray to God: "Oh pity me!"

Robert William Service

The Wee Shop

She risked her all, they told me, bravely sinking
The pinched economies of thirty years;
And there the little shop was, meek and shrinking,
The sum of all her dreams and hopes and fears.
Ere it was opened I would see them in it,
The gray-haired dame, the daughter with her crutch;
So fond, so happy, hoarding every minute,
Like artists, for the final tender touch.

The opening day! I'm sure that to their seeming
Was never shop so wonderful as theirs;
With pyramids of jam-jars rubbed to gleaming;
Such vivid cans of peaches, prunes and pears;
And chocolate, and biscuits in glass cases,
And bon-bon bottles, many-hued and bright;
Yet nothing half so radiant as their faces,
Their eyes of hope, excitement and delight.

I entered: how they waited all a-flutter!
How awkwardly they weighed my acid-drops!
And then with all the thanks a tongue could utter
They bowed me from the kindest of shops.
I'm sure that night their customers they numbered;
Discussed them all in happy, breathless speech;
And though quite worn and weary, ere they slumbered,
Sent heavenward a little prayer for each.

And so I watched with interest redoubled
That little shop, spent in it all I had;
And when I saw it empty I was troubled,
And when I saw them busy I was glad.
And when I dared to ask how things were going,
They told me, with a fine and gallant smile:
"Not badly . . . slow at first . . . There's never knowing . . .
'Twill surely pick up in a little while."

I'd often see them through the winter weather,
Behind the shutters by a light's faint speck,
Poring o'er books, their faces close together,

The lame girl's arm around her mother's neck.
They dressed their windows not one time but twenty,
Each change more pinched, more desperately neat;
Alas! I wondered if behind that plenty
The two who owned it had enough to eat.

Ah, who would dare to sing of tea and coffee?
The sadness of a stock unsold and dead;
The petty tragedy of melting toffee,
The sordid pathos of stale gingerbread.
Ignoble themes! And yet -- those haggard faces!
Within that little shop. . . . Oh, here I say
One does not need to look in lofty places
For tragic themes, they're round us every day.

And so I saw their agony, their fighting,
Their eyes of fear, their heartbreak, their despair;
And there the little shop is, black and blighting,
And all the world goes by and does not care.
They say she sought her old employer's pity,
Content to take the pittance he would give.
The lame girl? yes, she's working in the city;
She coughs a lot -- she hasn't long to live.

Robert William Service

The Whistle Of Sandy McGraw

You may talk o' your lutes and your dulcimers fine,
Your harps and your tabors and cymbals and a',
But here in the trenches jist gie me for mine
The wee penny whistle o' Sandy McGraw.

Oh, it's: "Sandy, ma lad, will you lilt us a tune?"

And Sandy is willin' and trillin' like mad;
Sae silvery sweet that we a' throng aroun',
And some o' it's gay, but the maist o' it's sad.

Jist the wee simple airs that sink intae your hert,
And grup ye wi' love and wi' longin' for hame;
And ye glour like an owl till you're feelin' the stert
O' a tear, and you blink wi' a feelin' o' shame.

For his song's o' the heather, and here in the dirt
You listen and dream o' a land that's sae braw,
And he mak's you forget a' the harm and the hurt,
For he pipes like a laverock, does Sandy McGraw.

* * * * *

At Eepers I mind me when rank upon rank
We rose from the trenches and swept like the gale,
Till the rapid-fire guns got us fell on the flank
And the murderin' bullets came swishin' like hail:
Till a' that were left o' us faltered and broke;
Till it seemed for a moment a panicky rout,
When shrill through the fume and the flash and the smoke
The wee valiant voice o' a whistle piped out.
'The Campbells are Comin'': Then into the fray
We bounded wi' bayonets reekin' and raw,
And oh we fair revelled in glory that day,
Jist thanks to the whistle o' Sandy McGraw.

* * * * *

At Loose, it wis after a sconnersome fecht,
On the field o' the slain I wis crawlin' aboot;
And the rockets were burnin' red holes in the nicht;
And the guns they were veciously thunderin' oot;
When sudden I heard a bit sound like a sigh,

And there in a crump-hole a kiltie I saw:
"Whit ails ye, ma lad? Are ye woundit?" says I.
"I've lost ma wee whustle," says Sandy McGraw.
"'Twas oot by yon bing where we pressed the attack,
It drapped frae ma pooch, and between noo and dawn
There isna much time so I'm jist crawlin' back. . . ."
"Ye're daft, man!" I telt him, but Sandy wis gone.
Weel, I waited a wee, then I crawled oot masel,
And the big stuff wis gorin' and roarin' around,
And I seemed tae be under the oxter o' hell,
And Creation wis crackin' tae bits by the sound.
And I says in ma mind: "Gang ye back, ye auld fule!"
When I thrilled tae a note that wis saucy and sma';
And there in a crater, collected and cool,
Wi' his wee penny whistle wis Sandy McGraw.
Ay, there he wis playin' as gleg as could be,
And listenin' hard wis a spectacled Boche;
Then Sandy turned roon' and he noddit tae me,
And he says: "Dinna blab on me, Sergeant McTosh.
The auld chap is deein'. He likes me tae play.
It's makin' him happy. Jist see his een shine!"
And thrillin' and sweet in the hert o' the fray
Wee Sandy wis playin' The Watch on the Rhine.

* * * * *

The last scene o' a' -- 'twas the day that we took
That bit o' black ruin they ca' Labbiesell.
It seemed the hale hillside jist shivered and shook,
And the red skies were roarin' and spewin' oot shell.
And the Sergeants were cursin' tae keep us in hand,
And hard on the leash we were strainin' like dugs,
When upward we shot at the word o' command,
And the bullets were dingin' their songs in oor lugs.
And onward we swept wi' a yell and a cheer,
And a' wis destruction, confusion and din,
And we knew that the trench o' the Boches wis near,
And it seemed jist the safest bit hole tae be in.
So we a' tumbled doon, and the Boches were there,
And they held up their hands, and they yelled: "Kamarad!"
And I merched aff wi' ten, wi' their palms in the air,
And my! I wis prood-like, and my! I wis glad.

And I thocht: if ma lassie could see me jist then. . . .

When sudden I sobered at somethin' I saw,
And I stopped and I stared, and I halted ma men,
For there on a stretcher wis Sandy McGraw.
Weel, he looks in ma face, jist as game as ye please:

"Ye ken hoo I hate tae be workin'," says he;
"But noo I can play in the street for bawbees,
Wi' baith o' ma legs taken aff at the knee."
And though I could see he wis rackit wi' pain,
He reached for his whistle and stertit tae play;
And quaverin' sweet wis the pensive refrain:
The floors o' the forest are a' wede away.
Then sudden he stoppit: "Man, wis it no grand
Hoo we took a' them trenches?" . . . He shakit his heid:
"I'll -- no -- play -- nae -- mair ----" feebly doon frae his hand
Slipped the wee penny whistle and -- Sandy wis deid.

* * * * *

And so you may talk o' your Steinways and Strads,
Your wonderful organs and brasses sae braw;
But oot in the trenches jist gie me, ma lads,
Yon wee penny whistle o' Sandy McGraw.

Robert William Service

The Widow

I don't think men of eighty odd
Should let a surgeon operate;
Better to pray for peace with God,
And reconcile oneself to Fate:
At four-score years we really should
Be quite prepared to go for good.

That's what I told my husband but
He had a hearty lust for life,
And so he let a surgeon cut
Into his innards with a knife.
The sawbones swore: "The man's so fat
His kidneys take some getting at."

And then (according to a nurse),
They heard him petulantly say:
"Adipose tissue is curse:
It's hard to pack them tripes away."
At last he did; sewed up the skin,
But left, some say, a swab within.

I do not doubt it could be so,
For Lester did not long survive.
But for mishap, I think with woe
My hubby might still be alive.
And while they praise the surgeon's skill,
My home I've sold--to pay his bill.

Robert William Service

The Widower

Oh I have worn my mourning out,
And on her grave the green grass grows;
So I will hang each sorry clout
High in the corn to scare the crows.
And I will buy a peacock tie,
And coat of cloth of Donegal;
Then to the Farmer's Fair I'll hie
And peek in at the Barley Ball.

But though the fiddlers saw a jig
I used to foot when I was wed,
I'll walk me home and feed the pig,
And go a lonesome man to bed.

So I will wait another year,
As any decent chap would do,
Till I can think without a tear
Of her whose eyes were cornflower blue.

Then to the Harvest Ball I'll hie,
And I will wear a flower-sprigged vest;
For Maggie has a nut-brown eyes,
And we will foot it with the best.

And if kind-minded she should be
To wife me - 'tis the will if God . . .
But Oh the broken heart f me
For her who lies below the sod!

Robert William Service

The Wife

"Tell Annie I'll be home in time
To help her with her Christmas-tree."
That's what he wrote, and hark! the chime
Of Christmas bells, and where is he?
And how the house is dark and sad,
And Annie's sobbing on my knee!

The page beside the candle-flame
With cruel type was overfilled;
I read and read until a name
Leapt at me and my heart was stilled:
My eye crept up the column -- up
Unto its hateful heading: Killed.

And there was Annie on the stair:
"And will he not be long?" she said.
Her eyes were bright and in her hair
She'd twined a bit of riband red;
And every step was daddy's sure,
Till tired out she went to bed.

And there alone I sat so still,
With staring eyes that did not see;
The room was desolate and chill,
And desolate the heart of me;
Outside I heard the news-boys shrill:
"Another Glorious Victory!"

A victory. . . . Ah! what care I?
A thousand victories are vain.
Here in my ruined home I cry
From out my black despair and pain,
I'd rather, rather damned defeat,
And have my man with me again.

They talk to us of pride and power,
Of Empire vast beyond the sea;
As here beside my hearth I cower,
What mean such words as these to me?

Oh, will they lift the clouds that low'r,
Or light my load in years to be?

What matters it to us poor folk?
Who win or lose, it's we who pay.
Oh, I would laugh beneath the yoke
If I had him at home to-day;
One's home before one's country comes:
Aye, so a million women say.

"Hush, Annie dear, don't sorrow so."
(How can I tell her?) "See, we'll light
With tiny star of purest glow
Each little candle pink and white."
(They make mistakes. I'll tell myself
I did not read that name aright.)
Come, dearest one; come, let us pray
Beside our gleaming Christmas-tree;
Just fold your little hands and say
These words so softly after me:
"God pity mothers in distress,
And little children fatherless."

"God pity mothers in distress,
And little children fatherless."

.

What's that? -- a step upon the stair;
A shout! -- the door thrown open wide!
My hero and my man is there,
And Annie's leaping by his side. . . .
The room reels round, I faint, I fall. . . .
"O God! Thy world is glorified."

Robert William Service

The Wildy Ones

The sheep are in the silver wood,
The cows are in the broom;
The goats are in the wild mountain
And won't be home by noon.

My mother sang that olden tune
Most every night,
And to her newest she would croon
By candle light;
While cuddling in the velvet gloom
I'd dream of cows
That sought each dawn 'mid golden broom
To gently browse.

Or I would glimpse the silver wood,
The birchen glade,
Where pearly sheep in quiet mood
Cropped unafraid;
But how I loved in lapsing drowse
The mountain wild!
The goats were more than sheep and cows
To one wee child.

For cows and sheep are shelter-wise,
And love the lea;
While goats have starlight in their eyes,
In cragland free . . .
And now on edge of endless sleep
Wryly I note
How less I'm kin to kine and sheep
Than rebel goat!

Robert William Service

The Wistful One

I sought the trails of South and North,
I wandered East and West;
But pride and passion drove me forth
And would not let me rest.
And still I seek, as still I roam,
A snug roof overhead;
Four walls, my own; a quiet home. . . .
"You'll have it -- when you're dead."

Robert William Service

The Woman And The Angel

An angel was tired of heaven, as he lounged in the golden street;
His halo was tilted sideways, and his harp lay mute at his feet;
So the Master stooped in His pity, and gave him a pass to go,
For the space of a moon, to the earth-world, to mix with the men below.

He doffed his celestial garments, scarce waiting to lay them straight;
He bade good by to Peter, who stood by the golden gate;
The sexless singers of heaven chanted a fond farewell,
And the imps looked up as they pattered on the red-hot flags of hell.

Never was seen such an angel -- eyes of heavenly blue,
Features that shamed Apollo, hair of a golden hue;
The women simply adored him; his lips were like Cupid's bow;
But he never ventured to use them -- and so they voted him slow.

Till at last there came One Woman, a marvel of loveliness,
And she whispered to him: "Do you love me?" And he answered that woman,
"Yes."

And she said: "Put your arms around me, and kiss me, and hold me -- so --"
But fiercely he drew back, saying: "This thing is wrong, and I know."

Then sweetly she mocked his scruples, and softly she him beguiled:
"You, who are verily man among men, speak with the tongue of a child.
We have outlived the old standards; we have burst, like an over-tight thong,
The ancient, outworn, Puritanic traditions of Right and Wrong."

Then the Master feared for His angel, and called him again to His side,
For oh, the woman was wondrous, and oh, the angel was tried!
And deep in his hell sang the Devil, and this was the strain of his song:
"The ancient, outworn, Puritanic traditions of Right and Wrong."

Robert William Service

The Woman At The Gate

"Where is your little boy to-day?"

I asked her at the gate.

"I used to see him at his play,

And often I would wait:

He was so beautiful, so bright,

I watched him with delight.

"He had a tiny motor-car

And it was painted red;

He wound it up; it ran so far,

So merrily it sped.

I think he told me that it was

A gift from Santa Claus."

The woman said: "It ran so far

He followed it with joy.

Then came a real motor-car,--

He sought to save his toy . . .

My little boy is far away

Where angel children play.

"His father perished in the War;

Now I am all alone,

And death is all I'm longing for . . ."

So said with face of stone

That woman. "Curse their crazy cars

And cruel wars!"

Robert William Service

The Womb

Up from the evil day
Of wattle and of woad,
Along man's weary way
Dark Pain has been the goad.
Back from the age of stone,
Within his brutish brain,
What pleasure he has known
 Is ease from Pain.

Behold in Pain the force
That haled Man from the Pit,
And set him such a course
No mind can measure it.
To angel from the ape
No human pang was vain
In that divine escape
 To joy through Pain.

See Pain with stoic eyes
And patient fortitude,
A blessing in disguise,
An instrument of good.
Aye, though with hearts forlorn
We to despair be fain,
Believe that Joy is born
 From Womb of Pain.

Robert William Service

The Wonderer

I wish that I could understand
The moving marvel of my Hand;
I watch my fingers turn and twist,
The supple bending of my wrist,
The dainty touch of finger-tip,
The steel intensity of grip;
A tool of exquisite design,
With pride I think: "It's mine! It's mine!"

Then there's the wonder of my Eyes,
Where hills and houses, seas and skies,
In waves of light converge and pass,
And print themselves as on a glass.
Line, form and color live in me;
I am the Beauty that I see;
Ah! I could write a book of size
About the wonder of my Eyes.

What of the wonder of my Heart,
That plays so faithfully its part?
I hear it running sound and sweet;
It does not seem to miss a beat;
Between the cradle and the grave
It never falters, stanch and brave.
Alas! I wish I had the art
To tell the wonder of my Heart.

Then oh! but how can I explain
The wondrous wonder of my Brain?
That marvelous machine that brings
All consciousness of wonderings;
That lets me from myself leap out
And watch my body walk about;
It's hopeless -- all my words are vain
To tell the wonder of my Brain.

But do not think, O patient friend,
Who reads these stanzas to the end,
That I myself would glorify. . . .

You're just as wonderful as I,
And all Creation in our view
Is quite as marvelous as you.
Come, let us on the sea-shore stand
And wonder at a grain of sand;
And then into the meadow pass
And marvel at a blade of grass;
Or cast our vision high and far
And thrill with wonder at a star;
A host of stars -- night's holy tent
Huge-glittering with wonderment.

If wonder is in great and small,
Then what of Him who made it all?
In eyes and brain and heart and limb
Let's see the wondrous work of Him.
In house and hill and sward and sea,
In bird and beast and flower and tree,
In everything from sun to sod,
The wonder and the awe of God.

Robert William Service

The Wood-Cutter

The sky is like an envelope,
 One of those blue official things;
And, sealing it, to mock our hope,
 The moon, a silver wafer, clings.
What shall we find when death gives leave
 To read--our sentence or reprieve?

I'm holding it down on God's scrap-pile, up on the fag-end of earth;
 O'er me a menace of mountains, a river that grits at my feet;
Face to face with my soul-self, weighing my life at its worth;
 Wondering what I was made for, here in my last retreat.

Last! Ah, yes, it's the finish. Have ever you heard a man cry?
 (Sobs that rake him and rend him, right from the base of the chest.)
That's how I've cried, oh, so often; and now that my tears are dry,
 I sit in the desolate quiet and wait for the infinite Rest.

Rest! Well, it's restful around me; it's quiet clean to the core.
 The mountains pose in their ermine, in golden the hills are clad;
The big, blue, silt-freighted Yukon seethes by my cabin door,
 And I think it's only the river that keeps me from going mad.

By day it's a ruthless monster, a callous, insatiate thing,
 With oily bubble and eddy, with sudden swirling of breast;
By night it's a writhing Titan, sullenly murmuring,
 Ever and ever goaded, and ever crying for rest.

It cries for its human tribute, but me it will never drown.
 I've learned the lore of my river; my river obeys me well.
I hew and I launch my cordwood, and raft it to Dawson town,
 Where wood means wine and women, and, incidentally, hell.

Hell and the anguish thereafter. Here as I sit alone
 I'd give the life I have left me to lighten some load of care:
(The bitterest part of the bitter is being denied to atone;
 Lips that have mocked at Heaven lend themselves ill to prayer.)

Impotent as a beetle pierced on the needle of Fate;
 A wretch in a cosmic death-cell, peaks for my prison bars;

'Whelmed by a world stupendous, lonely and listless I wait,
Drowned in a sea of silence, strewn with confetti of stars.

See! from far up the valley a rapier pierces the night,
The white search-ray of a steamer. Swiftly, serenely it nears;
A proud, white, alien presence, a glittering galley of light,
Confident-poised, triumphant, freighted with hopes and fears.

I look as one looks on a vision; I see it pulsating by;
I glimpse joy-radiant faces; I hear the thresh of the wheel.
Hoof-like my heart beats a moment; then silence swoops from the sky.
Darkness is piled upon darkness. God only knows how I feel.

Maybe you've seen me sometimes; maybe you've pitied me then--
The lonely waif of the wood-camp, here by my cabin door.
Some day you'll look and see not; futile and outcast of men,
I shall be far from your pity, resting forevermore.

My life was a problem in ciphers, a weary and profitless sum.
Slipshod and stupid I worked it, dazed by negation and doubt.
Ciphers the total confronts me. Oh, Death, with thy moistened thumb,
Stoop like a petulant schoolboy, wipe me forever out!

Robert William Service

The World's All Right

Be honest, kindly, simple, true;
Seek good in all, scorn but pretence;
Whatever sorrow come to you,
Believe in Life's Beneficence!

The World's all right; serene I sit,
And cease to puzzle over it.
There's much that's mighty strange, no doubt;
But Nature knows what she's about;
And in a million years or so
We'll know more than to-day we know.
Old Evolution's under way --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

Could things be other than they are?
All's in its place, from mote to star.
The thistledown that flits and flies
Could drift no hair-breadth otherwise.
What is, must be; with rhythmic laws
All Nature chimes, Effect and Cause.
The sand-grain and the sun obey --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

Just try to get the Cosmic touch,
The sense that "you" don't matter much.
A million stars are in the sky;
A million planets plunge and die;
A million million men are sped;
A million million wait ahead.
Each plays his part and has his day --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

Just try to get the Chemic view:
A million million lives made "you".
In lives a million you will be
Immortal down Eternity;
Immortal on this earth to range,
With never death, but ever change.
You always were, and will be aye --

What ho! the World's all right, I say.

Be glad! And do not blindly grope
For Truth that lies beyond our scope:
A sober plot informeth all
Of Life's uproarious carnival.
Your day is such a little one,
A gnat that lives from sun to sun;
Yet gnat and you have parts to play --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

And though it's written from the start,
Just act your best your little part.
Just be as happy as you can,
And serve your kind, and die -- a man.
Just live the good that in you lies,
And seek no guerdon of the skies;
Just make your Heaven here, to-day --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

Remember! in Creation's swing
The Race and not the man's the thing.
There's battle, murder, sudden death,
And pestilence, with poisoned breath.
Yet quick forgotten are such woes;
On, on the stream of Being flows.
Truth, Beauty, Love uphold their sway --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

The World's all right; serene I sit,
And joy that I am part of it;
And put my trust in Nature's plan,
And try to aid her all I can;
Content to pass, if in my place
I've served the uplift of the Race.
Truth! Beauty! Love! O Radiant Day --
 What ho! the World's all right, I say.

Robert William Service

The Younger Son

If you leave the gloom of London and you seek a glowing land,
Where all except the flag is strange and new,
There's a bronzed and stalwart fellow who will grip you by the hand,
And greet you with a welcome warm and true;
For he's your younger brother, the one you sent away
Because there wasn't room for him at home;
And now he's quite contented, and he's glad he didn't stay,
And he's building Britain's greatness o'er the foam.

When the giant herd is moving at the rising of the sun,
And the prairie is lit with rose and gold,
And the camp is all abustle, and the busy day's begun,
He leaps into the saddle sure and bold.
Through the round of heat and hurry, through the racket and the rout,
He rattles at a pace that nothing mars;
And when the night-winds whisper and camp-fires flicker out,
He is sleeping like a child beneath the stars.

When the wattle-blooms are drooping in the sombre she-oak glade,
And the breathless land is lying in a swoon,
He leaves his work a moment, leaning lightly on his spade,
And he hears the bell-bird chime the Austral noon.
The parrakeets are silent in the gum-tree by the creek;
The ferny grove is sunshine-steeped and still;
But the dew will gem the myrtle in the twilight ere he seek
His little lonely cabin on the hill.

Around the purple, vine-clad slope the argent river dreams;
The roses almost hide the house from view;
A snow-peak of the Winterberg in crimson splendor gleams;
The shadow deepens down on the karroo.
He seeks the lily-scented dusk beneath the orange tree;
His pipe in silence glows and fades and glows;
And then two little maids come out and climb upon his knee,
And one is like the lily, one the rose.

He sees his white sheep dapple o'er the green New Zealand plain,
And where Vancouver's shaggy ramparts frown,
When the sunlight threads the pine-gloom he is fighting might and main

To clinch the rivets of an Empire down.
You will find him toiling, toiling, in the south or in the west,
A child of nature, fearless, frank, and free;
And the warmest heart that beats for you is beating in his breast,
And he sends you loyal greeting o'er the sea.

You've a brother in the army, you've another in the Church;
One of you is a diplomatic swell;
You've had the pick of everything and left him in the lurch,
And yet I think he's doing very well.
I'm sure his life is happy, and he doesn't envy yours;
I know he loves the land his pluck has won;
And I fancy in the years unborn, while England's fame endures,
She will come to bless with pride -- The Younger Son.

Robert William Service

The Yukoner

He burned a hole in frozen muck,
He pierced the icy mould,
And there in six-foot dirt he struck
A sack or so of gold.

He burned holes in the Decalogue,
And then it cam about,
For Fortune's just a lousy rogue,
His "pocket" petered out.

And lo! 'twas but a year all told,
When there in a shadow grim,
In six feet deep of icy mould
They burned a hole for him.

Robert William Service

Three Wives

Said Jones: "I'm glad my wife's not clever;
Her intellect is second-rate.
If she was witty she would never
Give me a chance to scintillate;
But cap my humorous endeavour
And make me seem as addle-pate."

Said Smith: "I'm glad my wife's no beauty,
For if a siren's charm she had,
And stinted her domestic duty,
I fear that she would drive me mad:
For I am one of those sad fellows
Who are unreasonably jealous."

Said Brown: ""I know my wife's not witty,
Nor is she very long on looks;
She's neither humorous nor pretty,
But oh how she divinely cooks!
You guys must come some night to dinner -
You'll see my little girl's a winner."

So it's important in our lives,
(Exaggerating more or less),
To be content with our wives,
And prize the virtues they possess;
And with dispraise to turn one's back
On all the qualities they lack.

Robert William Service

Tick-Tock

Tick-tocking in my ear
My dollar clock I hear.
'Arise,' it seems to say:
'Behold another day
To grasp the golden key
Of Opportunity;
To turn the magic lock--
 Tick-tock!

'Another day to gain
Some goal you sought in vain;
to sing a sweeter song,
Perchance to right a wrong;
To win a height unscaled
Where yesterday you failed;
To brave a battle shock--
 Tick-tock!'

You measure out my breath,
Each beat one nearer death . . .
O God, grant unto me
A few more years to be,
That somehow I may prove
My loyalty and love:
Wind up this worn-out clock,
 Tick-tock,
 Tick-tock!

Robert William Service

Tim

My brother Tim has children ten,
While I have none.
Maybe that's why he's toiling when
To ease I've won.
But though I would some of his brood
Give hearth and care,
I know that not a one he would
Have heart to spare.

'Tis children that have kept him poor;
He's clad them neat.
They've never wanted, I am sure,
For bite to eat.
And though their future may be dim,
They laugh a lot.
Am I tearful for Brother Tim?
Oh no, I'm not.

I know he goes to work each day
With flagging feet.
'Tis hard, even with decent pay,
To make ends meet.
But when my sterile home I see,
So smugly prim,
Although my banker bows to me,
I envy Tim.

Robert William Service

Tipperary Days

Oh, weren't they the fine boys! You never saw the beat of them,
Singing all together with their throats bronze-bare;
Fighting-fit and mirth-mad, music in the feet of them,
Swinging on to glory and the wrath out there.
Laughing by and chaffing by, frolic in the smiles of them,
On the road, the white road, all the afternoon;
Strangers in a strange land, miles and miles and miles of them,
Battle-bound and heart-high, and singing this tune:

It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go;
It's a long way to Tipperary,
And the sweetest girl I know.
Good-bye, Piccadilly,
Farewell, Lester Square:
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there.

"Come, Yvonne and Juliette! Come, Mimi, and cheer for them!
Throw them flowers and kisses as they pass you by.
Aren't they the lovely lads! Haven't you a tear for them
Going out so gallantly to dare and die?
What is it they're singing so? Some high hymn of Motherland?
Some immortal chanson of their Faith and King?
'Marseillaise' or 'Brabanc,on', anthem of that other land,
Dears, let us remember it, that song they sing:

"C'est un chemin long 'to Tepararee',
C'est un chemin long, c'est vrai;
C'est un chemin long 'to Tepararee',
Et la belle fille qu'je connais.
Bonjour, Peekadeely!
Au revoir, Lestaire Squaire!
C'est un chemin long 'to Tepararee',
Mais mon coeur 'ees zaire'."

The gallant old "Contemptibles"! There isn't much remains of them,
So full of fun and fitness, and a-singing in their pride;
For some are cold as clabber and the corby picks the brains of them,

And some are back in Blighty, and a-wishing they had died.
And yet it seems but yesterday, that great, glad sight of them,
Swinging on to battle as the sky grew black and black;
But oh their glee and glory, and the great, grim fight of them! --
Just whistle Tipperary and it all comes back:

It's a long way to Tipperary
(Which means "'ome" anywhere);
It's a long way to Tipperary
(And the things wot make you care).
Good-bye, Piccadilly
('Ow I 'opes my folks is well);
It's a long, long way to Tipperary --
('R! Ain't War just 'ell?)

Robert William Service

Titine

Although I have a car of class,
 A limousine,
I also have a jenny ass
 I call Titine.

And if I had in sober sense
 To choose between,
I know I'd give the preference
 To sleek Titine.

My chauffeur drives my Cadillac
 In uniform.
I wear a worn coat on my back
 That he would scorn.
He speeds with umpty equine power,
 Like an express;
I amble at eight miles an hour,
 Or even less.

My wife can use our fancy bus
 To cut a dash;
She very definitely does,
 And blows my cash.
But this old codger seeks the sane
 And simple scene;
Content to jog along a lane
 With old Titine.

So as in country ways I go
 Wife loves the town;
But though I'm slow, serene I know
 I won't break down.
With brawn and bone I reckon mine
 The best machine:
Old folks and donkeys best combine,
 --"Giddup, Titine!"

Robert William Service

To A Stuffed Shirt

On the tide you ride head high,
Like a whale 'mid little fishes;
I should envy you as I
Help my wife to wash the dishes.
Yet frock-coat and stove-pipe hat
Cannot hide your folds of fat.

You are reckoned a success,
And the public praise you win;
There's your picture in the Press,
Pouchy eyes and triple chin.
Wealth,--of it you fairly stink;
Health,--what does your Doctor think?

Dignity is phoney stuff.
Who is dignified deep down?
Strip the pants off, call the bluff,
Common clay are king and clown.
Let a bulging belly be
Your best bid for dignity.

Miserable millionaire!
For indulgence you must pay.
Yet there's salvation in prayer,--
Down on your fat knees and pray.
Know that with your dying breath
There is dignity in death.

Robert William Service

To A Tycoon

Since much has been your mirth
 And fair your fate,
Friend, leave your lot of earth
 Less desolate.
With frailing overdue,
 Why don't you try
The bit of God in you
 To justify?

Try to discern the grace
 All greed above,
That may uplift the race
 To realm of love.
For in you is a spark,
 A heaven-glow,
That will illumine the dark
 Before you go.

Aye, though it be that you
 To Faith are blind,
There's one thing you can do,
 It's--just be kind.
The anguish understand,
 Of hearts that bleed:
Friends, lend a helping hand
 To those in need.

Robert William Service

To Frank Dodd

Since four decades you've been to me
 Both Guide and Friend,
I fondly hope you'll always be,
 Right to the end;
And though my rhymes you rarely scan
 (Oh, small the blame!)
I joy that on this Page I can
 Inscribe your name.

Robert William Service

To Sunnydale

There lies the trail to Sunnydale,
Amid the lure of laughter.
Oh, how can we unhappy be
Beneath its leafy rafter!
Each perfect hour is like a flower,
Each day is like a posy.
How can you say the skies are grey?
You're wrong, my friend, they're rosy.

With right good will let's climb the hill,
And leave behind all sorrow.
Oh, we'll be gay! a bright to-day
Will make a bright to-morrow.
Oh, we'll be strong! the way is long
That never has a turning;
The hill is high, but there's the sky,
And how the West is burning!

And if through chance of circumstance
We have to go bare-foot, sir,
We'll not repine -- a friend of mine
Has got no feet to boot, sir.
This Happiness a habit is,
And Life is what we make it:
See! there's the trail to Sunnydale!
Up, friend! and let us take it.

Robert William Service

To The Man Of The High North

My rhymes are rough, and often in my rhyming
I've drifted, silver-sailed, on seas of dream,
Hearing afar the bells of Elfland chiming,
Seeing the groves of Arcadie agleam.

I was the thrall of Beauty that rejoices
From peak snow-diademed to regal star;
Yet to mine aerie ever pierced the voices,
The pregnant voices of the Things That Are.

The Here, the Now, the vast Forlorn around us;
The gold-delirium, the ferine strife;
The lusts that lure us on, the hates that hound us;
Our red rags in the patch-work quilt of Life.

The nameless men who nameless rivers travel,
And in strange valleys greet strange deaths alone;
The grim, intrepid ones who would unravel
The mysteries that shroud the Polar Zone.

These will I sing, and if one of you linger
Over my pages in the Long, Long Night,
And on some lone line lay a calloused finger,
Saying: "Lo! It's human-true--it hits me right";
Then will I count this loving toil well spent;
Then will I dream awhile--content, content.

Robert William Service

Toilet Seats

While I am emulating Keats
My brother fabrics toilet seats,
The which, they say, are works of art,
Aesthetic features of the mart;
So exquisitely are they made
With plastic of a pastel shade,
Of topaz, ivory or rose,
Inviting to serene repose.

Rajahs I'm told have seats of gold,--
(They must, I fear, be very cold).
But Tom's have thermostatic heat,
With sympathy your grace to greet.
Like silver they are neon lit,
Making a halo as you sit:
Then lo! they play with dulcet tone
A melody by Mendelssohn.

Oh were I lyrical as Yeats
I would not sing of toilet seats,
But rather serenade a star,--
Yet I must take things as they are.
For even kings must coyly own
Them as essential as a throne:
So as I tug the Muse's teats
I envy Tom his toilet seats.

Robert William Service

Toledo

Three widows of the Middle West
We're grimly chewing gum;
The Lido chef a quail had dressed
With garlic and with rum,
And they were painfully oppressed
For they had eaten some.

Said One: "This famed El Greco guy
Gives me the blessed pip;
Them Saints look like they want to die -
Let's give our guide the slip,
And in some bodega close by
A glass of vino sip."

Said Two: "It's this Cathedral stuff
That fairly gets me down.
I think one church is quite enough
In any Spanish town;
But here there's four - that's pretty tough
No matter their renown."

Said Three: "It's that Alcázar show
That simply knocked me out;
That dismal dungeon down below,
Then ruins all about;
That funny, fat old Moscardo
Who put the Reds to rout."

Hey, Mister Guide! implored the Three,
"Return to gay Madrid."
The guide was shocked, but trained was he
To do as he was bid.
So three dames of the Middle West,
Dyspeptically glum
Went back to town, and quite depressed
The guide was chewing gum.

Robert William Service

Tom

That Tom was poor was sure a pity,
Such guts for learning had the lad;
He took to Greek like babe to titty,
And he was mathematic mad.
I loved to prime him up with knowledge,
A brighter lad I never knew;
I dreamed that he would go to college
And there be honoured too.

But no! His Dad said, "Son, I need you
To keep the kettle on the boil;
No longer can I clothe and feed you,
Buy study books and midnight oil.
I carry on as best I'm able,
A humble tailor, as you know;
And you must squat cross-legged a table
And learn to snip and sew."

And that is what poor Tom is doing.
He bravely makes the best of it;
But as he "fits" you he is knowing
That he himself is a misfit;
And thinks as he fulfils his calling,
With patient heart yet deep distaste,
Like clippings from his shears down-falling,
--He, too, is Waste.

Robert William Service

Tom Paine

An Englishman was Thomas Paine
 Who bled for liberty;
But while his fight was far from vain
 He died in poverty:
Though some are of the sober thinking
 'Twas due to drinking.

Yet this is what appeals to me:
 Cobbet, a friend, loved him so well
He sailed across the surly sea
 To raw and rigid New Rochelle:
With none to say: 'Take him not from us!'
 He raped the grave of Thomas.

And in his library he set
 These bones so woe-begone;
I have no doubt his eyes were wet
 To scan that skeleton.
That grinning skull from which in season
 Emerged the Age of Reason.

Then Cobbet in his turn lay dead,
 And auctioneering tones
Over his chattels rudely said:
 'Who wants them bloody bones?'
None did, so they were scattered far
 And God knows where they are.

A friend of Franklin and of Pitt
 He lived a stormy span;
The flame of liberty he lit
 And rang the Rights of Man.
Yet pilgrims from Vermont and Maine
In hero worship seek in vain
 The bones of Thomas Paine.

Robert William Service

Tourist

'Twas in a village in Lorraine
Whose name I quite forget,
I found I needfully was fain
To buy a serviette.
I sought a shop wherein they sell
Such articles as these,
And told a smiling mademoiselle;
'I want a towel, please.'

'Of kinds,' said she, 'I've only two,'
And took the bundles down;
And one was coloured azure blue,
And one was khaki brown.
With doubt I scratched my hoary head;
The quality was right;
The size too, yet I gravely said:
'Too bad you haven't white.'

That pretty maid had sunny hair,
Her gaze was free from guile,
And while I hesitated there
She watched me with a smile.
Then as I went to take the blue
She said 'Non' meaning no.
'Ze khaki ones are best, M'sieu:
Ze dirts zey do not show.'

Robert William Service

Tourists

In a strange town in a far land
 They met amid a throng;
They stared, they could not understand
 How life was sudden song.
As brown eyes looked in eyes of grey
 Just for a moment's space,
Twin spirits met with sweet dismay
 In that strange place.

And then the mob that swept them near
 Reft them away again;
Two hearts in all the world most dear
 Knew puzzlement and pain.
They barely brushed in passing by,
 A wildered girl and boy,
Who should have clasped with laughing cry,
 And wept for joy.

But no, the crowd cleft them apart,
 And she went East, he West;
But there was havoc in his heart
 And brooding in her breast.
In a far land, in a strange town
 Amid a mob they met;
They stared, they passed . . . But O deep down,
 Can they forget?

Robert William Service

Tranquillity

Oh if it were not for my wife
 And family increase,
How gladly would I close my life
 In monastery peace!
A sweet and scented isle I know
 Where monks in muteness dwell,
And there in sereness I would go
 And seek a cell.

On milk and oaten meal I'd live,
 With carrot, kail and cheese;
The greens that tiny gardens give,
 The bounty of the bees.
Then war might rage, I would not know,
 Or knowing would not care:
No echo of a world of woe
 Would irk me there.

And I would be forgotten too
 As mankind I forgot;
Read Shakespeare and the Bible through,
 And brood in quiet thought.
Content with birds and trees and flowers
 In mellow age to find
'Mid monastery's holy hours
 God's Peace of Mind.

Robert William Service

Treat 'Em Rough

First time I dared propose,
 A callow lad was I;
I donned my Sunday clothes,
 I wore my Old School Tie.
Awaiting me Louise
 Was dolled to beat the band,
So going on my knees
 I begged her hand.

Oh yes, she gave me her hand,--
 A box upon the ear;
I could not understand,
 I blinked away a tear.
Then scornfully she said:
 'Next time you kneel before
A maid, young man don't spread
 Your hankey on the floor.'

So next time I proposed,
 Thinks I, I'll treat 'em rough.
Her name was Lily Rose,
 I gave her he-man stuff.
I yanked her on my knee,
 And as her ear I bit,
To my amazement she
 Seemed to like it.

The old cave-men knew best;
 Grab girlies by the hair,
And though they may protest
 Drag them into your lair.
So young men seeking mates,
 Take my tip, if rejected:
A modern maid just hates
 To be respected.

Robert William Service

Trees Against The Sky

Pines against the sky,
Pluming the purple hill;
Pines . . . and I wonder why,
Heart, you quicken and thrill?
Wistful heart of a boy,
Fill with a strange sweet joy,
Lifting to Heaven nigh -
Pines against the sky.

Palms against the sky,
Failing the hot, hard blue;
Stark on the beach I lie,
Dreaming horizons new;
Heart of my youth elate,
Scorning a humdrum fate,
Keyed to adventure high -
Palms against the sky.

Oaks against the sky,
Ramparts of leaves high-hurled,
Staunch to stand and defy
All the winds of the world;
Stalwart and proud and free,
Firing the man in me
To try and again to try -
Oaks against the sky.

Olives against the sky
Of evening, limpidly bright;
Tranquil and soft and shy,
Dreaming in amber light;
Breathing the peace of life,
Ease after toil and strife . . .
Hark to their silver sigh!
Olives against the sky.

Cypresses glooming the sky,
Stark at the end of the road;
Failing and faint am I,

Lief to be eased of my load;
There where the stones peer white
in the last of the silvery light,
Quiet and cold I'll lie -
Cypresses etching the sky.

Trees, trees against the sky -
O I have loved them well!
There are pleasures you cannot buy,
Treasurers you cannot sell,
And not the smallest of these
Is the gift and glory of trees. . . .
So I gaze and I know now why
It is good to live - and to die. . . .
Trees and the Infinite Sky.

Robert William Service

Tri-Colour

Poppies, you try to tell me, glowing there in the wheat;
Poppies! Ah no! You mock me: It's blood, I tell you, it's blood.
It's gleaming wet in the grasses; it's glist'ning warm in the wheat;
It dabbles the ferns and the clover; it brims in an angry flood;
It leaps to the startled heavens; it smothers the sun; it cries
With scarlet voices of triumph from blossom and bough and blade.
See the bright horror of it! It's roaring out of the skies,
And the whole red world is a-welter. . . . Oh God! I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

Cornflowers, you say, just cornflowers, gemming the golden grain;
Ah no! You can't deceive me. Can't I believe my eyes?
Look! It's the dead, my comrades, stark on the dreadful plain,
All in their dark-blue blouses, staring up at the skies.
Comrades of canteen laughter, dumb in the yellow wheat.
See how they sprawl and huddle! See how their brows are white!
Goaded on to the shambles, there in death and defeat. . . .
Father of Pity, hide them! Hasten, O God, Thy night!

Lillies (the light is waning), only lilies you say,
Nestling and softly shining there where the spear-grass waves.
No, my friend, I know better; brighter I see than day:
It's the poor little wooden crosses over their quiet graves.
Oh, how they're gleaming, gleaming! See! Each cross has a crown.
Yes, it's true I am dying; little will be the loss. . . .
Darkness . . . but look! In Heaven a light, and it's shining down. . . .
God's accolade! Lift me up, friends. I'm going to win -- my Cross.

Robert William Service

Triumph

Why am I full of joy although
It drizzles on the links?
Why am I buying Veuve Cliquot,
And setting up the drinks?
Why stand I like a prince amid
My pals and envy none?
Ye gods of golf! Today I did
A Hole in One.

I drove my ball to heaven high,
It over-topped the hill;
I tried to guess how it would lie,
If on the fairway still.
I climbed the rise, so sure I'd hit
It straight towards the green:
I looked and looked,--no trace of it
Was to be seen.

My partner putted to the pin,
Then hoarse I heard him call;
And lo! So snug the hole within
Gleamed up my ball.
Yea, it was mine. Oh what a thrill!
What dandy drive I'd done
By luck,--well, grant a little skill,
I'd holed in one.

Say that my score is eighty odd,
And though I won't give up,--
Say that as round the course I plod,
I never win a cup.
Say that my handicap's nineteen,
And of my game make fun,
But holler: 'On the seventh green
HE HOLED IN ONE.'

Robert William Service

Trixie

Dogs have a sense beyond our ken -
At least my little Trixie had:
Tail-wagging when I laughed, and when
I sighed, eyes luminously sad.
And if I planned to go away,
She'd know, oh, days and days before:
Aye, dogs I think are sometimes fey,
They seem to sense our fate in store.

Now take the case of old Tome Low;
With flowers each week he'd call on me.
Dear Trixie used to love him so,
With joyous jump upon his knee.
Yet when he wandered in one day,
Her hair grew sudden stark with dread;
She growled, she howled, she ran away . . .
Well, ten hours later Tom was dead.

Aye, dogs hear sounds we cannot hear,
And dogs see sights we cannot see;
And that is why I took the fear
That one day she would glare at me
As if a Shape cowered on my bead,
And with each hair on end she'd creep
Beneath the couch and whine with dread . . .
And so I've had her put to sleep.

Now Trixie's gone, the only one
Who loved me in my lonely life,
And here I wait, my race nigh run,
My ill too grievous for the knife.
My hand of ice she'll never lick,
My heedless mask she'll never see:
No heartbreak - just a needle prick. . . .
Oh, Doctor, do the same for me!

Robert William Service

Two Blind Men

Two blind men met. Said one: "This earth
Has been a blackout from my birth.
Through darkness I have groped my way,
Forlorn, unknowing night from day.
But you - though War destroyed your sight,
Still have your memories of Light,
And to allay your present pain
Can live your golden youth again."

Then said the second: "Aye, it's true,
It must seem magical to you
To know the shape of things that are,
A women's lips, a rose, a star.
But therein lies the hell of it;
Better my eyes had never lit
to love of bluebells in a wood,
Or daffodils in dancing mood.

"You do not know what you have lost,
But I, alas! can count the cost -
Than memories that goad and gall,
Far better not to see at all.
And as for love, you know it not,
For pity is our sorry lot.
So there you see my point of view:
'Tis I, my friend, who envy you.

And which was right still puzzles me:
Perhaps one should be blind to see.

Robert William Service

Two Children

Give me your hand, oh little one!
Like children be we two;
Yet I am old, my day is done
That barely breaks for you.
A baby-basket hard you hold,
With in it cherries four:
You cherish them as men do gold,
And count them o'er.

And then you stumble in your walk;
The cherries scattered lie.
You pick them up with foolish talk
And foolish glad am I,
When you wipe one quite clean of dust
And give it unto me;
So in the baby-basket just
Are three.

All this is simple, I confess,
A moment piled with peace;
Yet loving men have died for less,
And will till time shall cease. . . .
A silken hand in crinkled one--
O Little Innocence!
O blessed moment in the son
E'er I go hence!

Robert William Service

Two Graves

First Ghost

To sepulcher my mouldy bones
I bough a pile of noble stones,
And half a year a sculptor spent
To hew my marble monument,
The stateliest to rear its head
In all this city of the dead.

And generations passing through
Will gape, and ask: What did he do
To earn this tomb so rich and rare,
In Attic grace beyond compare?
How was his life in honour spent,
To worthy this proud monument?

What did I do" Well, nothing much.
'Tis true I had the Midas touch.
A million pounds I made wherewith
To glorify the name: John Smith;
Yet not a soul wept for me when
Death raft me from my fellow men.
My sculptor wins undying fame,
While I, who paid, am just a name.

Second Ghost

A wooden cross surveys my bones,
With on it stenciled: Peter Jones.
And round it are five hundred more;
(A proper job did old man War!)
So young they were, so fresh, so fit,
So hopeful - that's the hell of it.

The old are sapped and ripe to die,
But in the flush of Spring was I.
I might have fathered children ten,
To come to grips with sterling men;
And now a cross in weeds to rot,

Is all to show how fierce I fought.

The old default, the young must pay;

My life was wasted, thrown away.

While people gladden, to forget

The bitterness of vein regret,

With not a soul to mourn for me

My skull grins up in mockery.

. . . Pale crosses greet the grieving stars,

And always will be - War and Wars.

Robert William Service

Two Husbands

Unpenitent, I grieve to state,
Two good men stood by heaven's gate,
Saint Peter coming to await.
The stopped the Keeper of the Keys,
Saying: "What suppliants are these,
Who wait me not on bended knees?"

"To get my heavenly Okay
A man should have been used to pray,
Or suffered in some grievous way."

"Oh I have suffered," cried the first.
"Of wives I had the wicked worst,
Who made my life a plague accurst."

"Such martyrdom no tongue can tell;
In mercy's name it is not well
To doom me to another hell."

Saint Peter said: "I comprehend;
But tribulations have their end.
The gate is open, - go my friend."

Then said the second: "What of me?
More I deserve to pass than he,
For I've been wedded twice, you see."

Saint Peter looked at him a while,
And then he answered with a smile:
"Your application I will file."

"Yet twice in double yoke you've driven . . .
Though sinners with our Saints we leaven,
We don't take IMBECILES in heaven."

Robert William Service

Two Men (J. L. And R. B.)

In the Northland there were three
Pukka Pliers of the pen;
Two of them had Fame in fee
And were loud and lusty men;
By them like a shrimp was I -
Yet alas! they had to die.

Jack was genius through and through.
Who his future could foretell?
What we sweated blood to do
He would deem a bagatelle.
Yet in youth he had to die,
And an ancient man am I.

Rex was rugged as an oak;
Story-teller born was he.
First of writing, fighting folk,
How he lived prodigiously!
Better man he was than I,
Yet forlorn he had to die.

Jack was made of god-like stuff,
Born to battle for the right;
Rex of fighting had enough
When the gods destroyed his sight . . .
Craven heart - I wonder why
Lingering alone am I?

They were men of valiant breed,
Fit and fearless in the fight,
Who in every thought and deed
Burned the flame of life too bright.
Cowards live, while heroes die . . .
They have gone and - here am I.

Robert William Service

Two Words

'God' is composed of letters three,
But if you put an 'l'
Before the last it seems to me
A synonym for Hell.
For all of envy, greed and hate
The human heart can hold
Respond unto the devil's bait
Of Gold.

When God created Gold to be
For our adorning fit,
I little think he dreamed that we
Would come to worship it.
But when you ruefully have scanned
The chronicles of Time,
You'll find that lucre lends a hand
To Crime.

So if you are a millionaire,
To be of Heaven sure,
Give every penny you can spare
Unto the sick and poor.
From Gold strike out the evil 'ell,'
And so with letters odd
You can with peace of spirit spell
Just GOD.

Robert William Service

Unforgotten

I know a garden where the lilies gleam,
And one who lingers in the sunshine there;
She is than white-stoled lily far more fair,
And oh, her eyes are heaven-lit with dream!

I know a garret, cold and dark and drear,
And one who toils and toils with tireless pen,
Until his brave, sad eyes grow weary -- then
He seeks the stars, pale, silent as a seer.

And ah, it's strange; for, desolate and dim,
Between these two there rolls an ocean wide;
Yet he is in the garden by her side
And she is in the garret there with him.

Robert William Service

Unholy Trinity

Though Virtue hurt you Vice is nice;
Aye, Parson says it's wrong,
Yet for my pleasing I'll suffice
With Women, Wine and Song.
But though it be with jocund glee
my tavern voice is ringing,
Had I to chuck on of the three,
By gad! I'd give up singing.

Bu not the vine. What draught divine
Could better souse my throttle?
God never meant that mellow wine
Should languish in the bottle.
So Cellerman, your best bring up;
Let silver cobwebs mist it;
When gold or ruby brims the cup,
Could even saint resist it?

I love the ladies, yes, I do,
I always did and will;
I like with dainty dames to coo,
And have been known to bill.
Yes, I agree it's wrong of me,
So call me grey rascalion,
But when a lusty lass I see
I whinny like a stallion.

Oh let me be a reprobate,
Your canting care defying;
I'll court that gay triumvirate
Right to the day I'm dying.
So troll until the rafter rings,
And may my life be long
To praise the Lord for precious things
like Women, Wine and Song.

Robert William Service

Vain Venture

To have a business of my own
 With toil and tears,
I wore my fingers to the bone
 For weary years.
With stoic heart, for sordid gold
 In patient pain
My life and liberty I sold
 For others gain.

I scrimped and scraped, as cent by cent
 My savings grew;
I found a faded shop for rent,
 Made it like new.
Above the door the paint was dry
 Where glowed my name:
I waited there for folks to buy--
 But no one came.

Now I am back where I began:
 Myself I sell.
I grovel to a greedy man,
 And life is hell.
An empty shop of bankrupt shame
 I pass before,
Seeing my bitter, bleary name
 Above the door.

Robert William Service

Vanity

My tangoing seemed to delight her;
With me it was love at first sight.
I mentioned That I was a writer:
She asked me: "What is it you write?"
"Oh, only best-sellers," I told her.
Their titles? . . . She shook her blonde head;
The atmosphere seemed to grow colder:
Not one of my books had she read.

Oh, she was a beauty ensnaring,
And I was an author of note;
But little I saw she'd be caring
If never a novel I wrote.
Alas for the caprice of Cupid!
Alack for the phantom of Fame!
I thought her just homely and stupid:
She didn't know even my name.

I saw her a score of years after;
She gushed as I took off my hat;
But inwardly loud was my laughter,
For she was enormously fat.
Thank heaven I'd not made that error;
I saw Love drive off in a hearse;
But I too retreated in terror . . .
She started to quote me my verse.

Robert William Service

Victory Stuff

What d'ye think, lad; what d'ye think,
As the roaring crowds go by?
As the banners flare and the brasses blare
And the great guns rend the sky?
As the women laugh like they'd all gone mad,
And the champagne glasses clink:
Oh, you're grippin' me hand so tightly, lad,
I'm a-wonderin': what d'ye think?

D'ye think o' the boys we used to know,
And how they'd have topped the fun?
Tom and Charlie, and Jack and Joe --
Gone now, every one.
How they'd have cheered as the joy-bells chime,
And they grabbed each girl for a kiss!
And now -- they're rottin' in Flanders slime,
And they gave their lives -- for this.

Or else d'ye think of the many a time
We wished we too was dead,
Up to our knees in the freezin' grime,
With the fires of hell overhead;
When the youth and the strength of us sapped away,
And we cursed in our rage and pain?
And yet -- we haven't a word to say. . . .
We're glad. We'd do it again.

I'm scared that they pity us. Come, old boy,
Let's leave them their flags and their fuss.
We'd surely be hatin' to spoil their joy
With the sight of such wrecks as us.
Let's slip away quietly, you and me,
And we'll talk of our chums out there:
You with your eyes that'll never see,
Me that's wheeled in a chair.

Robert William Service

Village Don Juan

Lord, I'm grey, my face is run,
But by old Harry, I've had my fun;
And all about, I seem to see
Lads and lassies that look like me;
Ice-blue eyes on every hand,
Handsome youngsters in the land.

"Old Stud Horse" they say of me,
But back of my beard I laugh with glee.
Far and wide have I sown my seed,
Yet by the gods I've improved the breed:
From byre and stable to joiner's bench,
From landlord's daughter to serving wench.

Ice-blue eyes and blade-straight nose,
Stamp of my virile youth are those;
Now you'll see them on every side,
Proof of my powers, far and wide:
Even the parson's handsome scamp,
And the Doctor's daughter have my stamp.

Many a matron cocks an eye
Of secret knowledge as I pass by;
As for the hubbies, what they don't know
Will never hurt them, so let them go:
The offspring most they seem to prize
Have blade-straight noses and ice-blue byes.

Yet oh, I have a haunting dread
Brother and sister lust the bed;
The Parson's and the Doctor's lass,
Yestreen in the moon I saw them pass;
The thought of them wed is like a knife. . . .
Brother and sister - man and wife.

Robert William Service

Village Virtue

Jenny was my first sweetheart;
Poor lass! she was none too smart.
Though I swore she'd never rue it,
She would never let me do it.
When I tried she mad a fuss,
So damn pure and virtuous.
Girls should cozen all they can,
Use their wiles to get their man.

June, my second, was no prude;
Too good-looking to be good;
Wanton and a giddy-gadder,
Never knew who might have had her;
Kept me mad and jumping jealous,
Tempting all the other fellows
Like a wayside flower to pluck her:
So at last I had to chuck her.

Now I'm settled down with Jill,
And we're safely married still.
She began to wail and worry,
So we wedded in a hurry.
Well, it's quite all right that way -
We're all made of common clay,
And the grey-haired folk that bore us
Just as wanton were before us.

June, I hear, now lives in London
Where, I fear, she's sadly undone.
Jenny, still as virtuous
Missed the matrimonial bus,
Where our "first" set gossips buzzin'
Jill and I now have a dozen,
Ready in their turn to prove
There's no chastity in love.

June, so fickle and so fair,
Common was as barber's chair;
Jill provides me with good grub,

Lets me go nights to the pub.
Though her silver hairs are many,
One eve I might call on Jenny . . .
She may not need too much urging:
Must be hell to die a virgin.

Robert William Service

Violet De Vere

You've heard of Violet de Vere, strip-teaser of renown,
Whose sitting-base out-faired the face of any girl in town;
Well, she was haled before the Bench for breachin' of the Peace,
Which signifies araisin' Cain, an' beatin' up the police.
So there she stood before the Court of ruddy Judge McGraw
Whom folks called Old Necessity, because he knew no law.
Aye, crackin' in a silken gown, an' sheddin' of a tear,
Ashine wi' gold an' precious stones sat Violet de Vere.
Old Judge McGraw looked dourly down an' stroked his silver beard.
Says he: "Although the Sheriff's bruised, the lady should be heard.
What can you say in your defence? We'll give you a square deal."
"I jest forget," said Violet. "Maybe it was my heel.
I always want to kick the gong when I am feelin' gay;
It's most unfortunate, I guess, his face was in the way."
Then scratchin' of his snowy pow the Judge looked down severe,
Where bright wi' paint like plaster saint sat Violet de Vere.

Says he: "I'm going to impose a twenty dollar fine."
Says Violet: "Your Honour, to your judgement I resign.
I realize I should not my agility reveal:
Next time I'll kick the Sheriff with my toe and not my heel.
I'm grateful to the Court because I'm not put in the clink;
There's twenty plunks to pay my fine,--but now I come to think:
Judge, darlin', you've been owin' me five bucks for near a year:
Take fifteen,--there! We'll call it square," said Violet de Vere.

Robert William Service

Virginity

My mother she had children five and four are dead and gone;
While I, least worthy to survive, persist in living on.
She looks at me, I must confess, sometimes with spite and bitterness.

My mother is three-score and ten, while I am forty-three,
You don't know how it hurts me when we go somewhere to tea,
And people tell her on the sly we look like sisters, she and I.

It hurts to see her secret glee; but most, because it's true.
Sometimes I think she thinks that she looks younger of the two.
Oh as I gently take her arm, how I would love to do her harm!

For ever since I cam from school she put it in my head
I was a weakling and a fool, a "born old maid" she said.
"You'll always stay at home," sighed she, "and keep your Mother company."

Oh pity is a bitter brew; I've drunk it to the lees;
For there is little else to do but do my best to please:
My life has been so little worth I curse the hour she gave me birth.

I curse the hour she gave me breath, who never wished me wife;
My happiest day will be the death of her who gave me life;
I hate her for the life she gave: I hope to dance upon her grave.

She wearing roses in her hat; I wince to hear her say:
"Poor Alice this, poor Alice that," she drains my joy away.
It seems to brace her up that she can pity, pity, pity me.

You'll see us walking in the street, with careful step and slow;
And people often say: "How sweet!" as arm in arm we go.
Like chums we never are apart - yet oh the hatred in my heart!

My chest is weak, and I might be (O God!) the first to go.
For her what triumph that would be - she thinks of it, I know.
To outlive all her kith and kin - how she would glow beneath her skin!

She says she will not make her Will, until she takes to bed;
She little thinks if thoughts could kill, to-morrow she'd be dead. . . .

"Please come to breakfast, Mother dear; Your coffee will be cold I fear."

Robert William Service

Visibility

Because my eyes were none to bright
 Strong spectacles I bought,
And lo! there sprang into my sight
 A life beyond my thought:
A world of wonder and delight
 My magic lenses brought.

Aye, sudden leaping in my sight
 The far became the near;
Life unbelievably was bright,
 And vividly was clear.
My heart was lifted with delight,
 Then--then I shrank in fear.

For faces I had thought were gay
 I saw were lined with care,
While strange corruption and decay
 Surprised me everywhere:
Dismayed I put my specs away,--
 Such truth I could not bear.

And now I do not want to see
 With clarity of view;
For while there's heaven hell may be
 More tragically true:
Though dim may be Reality,
 Sheer love shines through.

Robert William Service

Wallflower

Till midnight her needle she plied
To finish her pretty pink dress;
"Oh, bless you, my darling," she sighed;
"I hope you will be a success."
As she entered the Oddfellow's Hall
With the shy thrill of maiden romance
She felt like the belle of the Ball,
But . . . nobody asked her to dance.

Her programme was clutched in her hand;
Her smile was a tiny bit wan;
She listened, applauding the band,
Pretending she liked to look on.
Each girl had her favourite swain,
She watched them retreat and advance;
She waited and waited in vain,
but nobody asked her to dance.

Said Mother to me: "You'll agree
That any young girl who wears specs,
however so clever she be,
Is lacking in glamour of sex."
Said I: "There is one by the wall
Who doesn't seem having a chance.
She's ready to weep - Dash it all,
I'm going to ask her to dance."

I caught her just slipping away
So quietly no one would know;
But bravely she tried to seem gay,
Though her heart might be aching with woe.
Poor kid! She looked only sixteen,
And she gave me a half frightened glance
When I bowed as if she were a Queen,
And I begged: "May I please have this dance?"

She gave me her card: what a bluff!
She'd written "Sir G." and "Sir G."
So I cut out that Galahad stuff,

And I scribbled "M.E" and "M.E.";
She looked so forlorn and so frail,
Submitting like one in a trance,
So I acted the conquering male,
And guided her into the dance.

Then lo! to my joy and surprise
Her waltzing I found was divine;
And she took those damn specs from her eyes,
And behold they were jewels a-shine;
No lipstick nor rouge she had on,
But no powder or paint could enhance
On her cheeks the twin roses shone
As I had with her dance after dance.

Then all of a sudden I knew
As we waltzed and reversed round the hall
That all eyes were watching us two,
And that she was the Belle of the Ball.
The fellows came buzzing like bees,
With swagger and posture and prance,
But her programme was full of "M.E."s,
So she couldn't afford them a dance.

Said mother: "You've been a nice boy,
But had a good time I suppose.
You've filled that poor kid's heart with joy,
From now she'll have plenty of beaus." . . .
So fellows, please listen to me:
Don't look at a wallflower askance;
If a girl sitting lonely you see,
Just bow, smile and beg for a dance.

Robert William Service

Warsaw

I was in Warsaw when the first bomb fell;
I was in Warsaw when the Terror came -
Havoc and horror, famine, fear and flame,
Blasting from loveliness a living hell.
Barring the station towered a sentinel;
Trainward I battled, blind escape my aim.
ENGLAND! I cried. He kindled at the name:
With lion-leap he haled me. . . . All was well.

ENGLAND! they cried for aid, and cried in vain.
Vain was their valour, emptily they cried.
Bleeding, they saw their Cry crucified. . . .
O splendid soldier, by the last lone train,
To-day would you flame forth to fray me place?
Or - would you curse and spit into my face?

September, 1939

Robert William Service

Was It You?

"Hullo, young Jones! with your tie so gay
And your pen behind your ear;
Will you mark my cheque in the usual way?
For I'm overdrawn, I fear."
Then you look at me in a manner bland,
As you turn your ledger's leaves,
And you hand it back with a soft white hand,
And the air of a man who grieves. . . .

"Was it you, young Jones, was it you I saw
(And I think I see you yet)
With a live bomb gripped in your grimy paw
And your face to the parapet?
With your lips asnarl and your eyes gone mad
With a fury that thrilled you through. . . .
Oh, I look at you now and I think, my lad,
Was it you, young Jones, was it you?

"Hullo, young Smith, with your well-fed look
And your coat of dapper fit,
Will you recommend me a decent book
With nothing of War in it?"
Then you smile as you polish a finger-nail,
And your eyes serenely roam,
And you suavely hand me a thrilling tale
By a man who stayed at home.

"Was it you, young Smith, was it you I saw
In the battle's storm and stench,
With a roar of rage and a wound red-raw
Leap into the reeking trench?
As you stood like a fiend on the firing-shelf
And you stabbed and hacked and slew. . . .
Oh, I look at you and I ask myself,
Was it you, young Smith, was it you?

"Hullo, old Brown, with your ruddy cheek
And your tummy's rounded swell,
Your garden's looking jolly chic

And your kiddies awf'ly well.
Then you beam at me in your cheery way
As you swing your water-can;
And you mop your brow and you blithely say:
'What about golf, old man?'

'Was it you, old Brown, was it you I saw
Like a bull-dog stick to your gun,
A cursing devil of fang and claw
When the rest were on the run?
Your eyes aflame with the battle-hate. . . .
As you sit in the family pew,
And I see you rising to pass the plate,
I ask: Old Brown, was it you?

'Was it me and you? Was it you and me?
(Is that grammar, or is it not?)
Who groveled in filth and misery,
Who gloried and grouched and fought?
Which is the wrong and which is the right?
Which is the false and the true?
The man of peace or the man of fight?
Which is the ME and the YOU?'

Robert William Service

Washerwife

The aged Queen who passed away
Had sixty servants, so they say;
Twice sixty hands her shoes to tie:
Two soapy ones have I.

The old Queen had of beds a score;
A cot have I and ask no more.
For when the last is said and done
One can but die in one.

The old Queen rightly thought that she
Was better than the likes o' me;
And yet I'm glad despite her grace
I am not in her place.

The old Queen's gone and I am here,
To eat my tripe and drink my beer,
Athinkin' as I wash my clothes:
We must have monarchs, I suppose . . .
Well, well,--'Taint no skin off my nose!

Robert William Service

Weary

Some praise the Lord for Light,
The living spark;
I thank God for the Night
The healing dark.
When wearily I lie,
With aching sight,
With what thanksgiving I
Turn out the light!

When to night's drowsy deep
Serene I sink,
How glad am I to sleep,
To cease to think!
From care and fret set free,
In sweet respite,
With joy I peacefully
Turn out the light.

Lie down thou weary one,
And sink to rest;
Nay, grieve not for the sun,
The dark is best.
So greet with grateful breath
Eternal Night,
When soft the hand of Death
Turns out the light.

Robert William Service

Weary Waitress

Her smile ineffably is sweet,
 Devinely she is slim;
Yet oh how weary are her feet,
 How aches her every limb!
Thank God it's near to closing time,
 --Merciful midnight chime.

Then in her mackintosh she'll go
 Up seven flights of stairs,
And on her bed her body throw,
 Too tired to say her prayers;
Yet not too sleepy to forget
 Her cheap alarm to set.

She dreams . . . That lonely bank-clerk boy
 Who comes each day for tea,--
Oh how his eyes light up with joy
 Her comeliness to see!
And yet he is too shy to speak,
 Far less to touch her cheek.

He dreams . . . If only I were King
 I'd make of her my Queen.
If I were laureate I'd sing
 Her loveliness serene.
--How wistfully romance can haunt
 A city restaurant!

For as I watch that pensive pair
 There stirs within my heart
From Arcady an April air
 That shames the sordid mart:
A sense of Spring and singing rills,
 --Love mid the daffodils.

Robert William Service

What Kisses Had John Keats?

I scanned two lines with some surmise
As over Keats I chanced to pore:
'And there I shut her wild, wild eyes
 With kisses four.'

Says I: 'Why was it only four,
Not five or six or seven?
I think I would have made it more,--
 Even eleven.'

'Gee! If she'd lured a guy like me
Into her gelid grot
I'd make that Belle Dame sans Merci
 Sure kiss a lot.'

'Them poets have their little tricks;
I think John counted kisses for,
Not two or three or five or six
 To rhyme with "sore."

Robert William Service

Wheels

Since I am sick of Wheels
 That jar my day,
Unto the hush that heals
 I steal away.
Unto the core of Peace
 Nature reveals,
I go to win release
 From Wheels.

Let me beneath the moon
 Take desert trail;
Or on some lost lagoon
 Serenely sail;
Win to some peak the grey
 Storm cloud conceals . . .
Life, let me get away
 From Wheels!

Why was I born so late?
 A skin-clad man
I should have shared the fate
 Of mountain clan;
My quiet flock beside,
 When silence steals,
Unshocked in eventide
 By Wheels.

The Wheel is King today,
 And speed's a god;
Yet when I see the way
 My feet have trod,
Like pilgrims who to shrine
 Of Beauty kneels,
I pray: O Peace divine
 Damn Wheels!

Robert William Service

While The Bannock Bakes

Light up your pipe again, old chum, and sit awhile with me;
I've got to watch the bannock bake -- how restful is the air!
You'd little think that we were somewhere north of Sixty-three,
Though where I don't exactly know, and don't precisely care.
The man-size mountains palisade us round on every side;
The river is a-flop with fish, and ripples silver-clear;
The midnight sunshine brims yon cleft -- we think it's the Divide;
We'll get there in a month, maybe, or maybe in a year.

It doesn't matter, does it, pal? We're of that breed of men
With whom the world of wine and cards and women disagree;
Your trouble was a roofless game of poker now and then,
And "raising up my elbow", that's what got away with me.
We're merely "Undesirables", artistic more or less;
My horny hands are Chopin-wise; you quote your Browning well;
And yet we're fooling round for gold in this damned wilderness:
The joke is, if we found it, we would both go straight to hell.

Well, maybe we won't find it -- and at least we've got the "life".
We're both as brown as berries, and could wrestle with a bear:
(That bannock's raising nicely, pal; just jab it with your knife.)
Fine specimens of manhood they would reckon us out there.
It's the tracking and the packing and the poling in the sun;
It's the sleeping in the open, it's the rugged, unfaked food;
It's the snow-shoe and the paddle, and the campfire and the gun,
And when I think of what I was, I know that it is good.

Just think of how we've poled all day up this strange little stream;
Since life began no eye of man has seen this place before;
How fearless all the wild things are! the banks with goose-grass gleam,
And there's a bronzy musk-rat sitting sniffing at his door.
A mother duck with brood of ten comes squattering along;
The tawny, white-winged ptarmigan are flying all about;
And in that swirly, golden pool, a restless, gleaming throng,
The trout are waiting till we condescend to take them out.

Ah, yes, it's good! I'll bet that there's no doctor like the Wild:
(Just turn that bannock over there; it's getting nicely brown.)
I might be in my grave by now, forgotten and reviled,

Or rotting like a sickly cur in some far, foreign town.
I might be that vile thing I was, -- it all seems like a dream;
I owed a man a grudge one time that only life could pay;
And yet it's half-forgotten now -- how petty these things seem!
(But that's "another story", pal; I'll tell it you some day.)

How strange two "irresponsibles" should chum away up here!
But round the Arctic Circle friends are few and far between.
We've shared the same camp-fire and tent for nigh on seven year,
And never had a word that wasn't cheering and serene.
We've halved the toil and split the spoil, and borne each other's packs;
By all the Wild's freemasonry we're brothers, tried and true;
We've swept on danger side by side, and fought it back to back,
And you would die for me, old pal, and I would die for you.

Now there was that time I got lost in Rory Bory Land,
(How quick the blizzards sweep on one across that Polar sea!)
You formed a rescue crew of One, and saw a frozen hand
That stuck out of a drift of snow -- and, partner, it was Me.
But I got even, did I not, that day the paddle broke?
White water on the Coppermine -- a rock -- a split canoe --
Two fellows struggling in the foam (one couldn't swim a stroke):
A half-drowned man I dragged ashore . . . and partner, it was You.

* * * * *

In Rory Borealis Land the winter's long and black.
The silence seems a solid thing, shot through with wolfish woe;
And rowelled by the eager stars the skies vault vastly back,
And man seems but a little mite on that weird-lit plateau.
No thing to do but smoke and yarn of wild and misspent lives,
Beside the camp-fire there we sat -- what tales you told to me
Of love and hate, and chance and fate, and temporary wives!
In Rory Borealis Land, beside the Arctic Sea.

One yarn you told me in those days I can remember still;
It seemed as if I visioned it, so sharp you sketched it in;
Bellona was the name, I think; a coast town in Brazil,
Where nobody did anything but serenade and sin.
I saw it all -- the jewelled sea, the golden scythe of sand,
The stately pillars of the palms, the feathery bamboo,
The red-roofed houses and the swart, sun-dominated land,

The people ever children, and the heavens ever blue.

You told me of that girl of yours, that blossom of old Spain,
All glamour, grace and witchery, all passion, verve and glow.
How maddening she must have been! You made me see her plain,
There by our little camp-fire, in the silence and the snow.
You loved her and she loved you. She'd a husband, too, I think,
A doctor chap, you told me, whom she treated like a dog,
A white man living on the beach, a hopeless slave to drink --
(Just turn that bannock over there, that's propped against the log.)

That story seemed to strike me, pal -- it happens every day:
You had to go away awhile, then somehow it befell
The doctor chap discovered, gave her up, and disappeared;
You came back, tired of her in time . . . there's nothing more to tell.
Hist! see those willows silvering where swamp and river meet!
Just reach me up my rifle quick; that's Mister Moose, I know --
There now, I've got him dead to rights . . . but hell! we've lots to eat
I don't believe in taking life -- we'll let the beggar go.

Heigh ho! I'm tired; the bannock's cooked; it's time we both turned in.
The morning mist is coral-kissed, the morning sky is gold.
The camp-fire's a confessional -- what funny yarns we spin!
It sort of made me think a bit, that story that you told.
The fig-leaf belt and Rory Bory are such odd extremes,
Yet after all how very small this old world seems to be . . .
Yes, that was quite a yarn, old pal, and yet to me it seems
You missed the point: the point is that the "doctor chap" . . . was ME. . . .

Robert William Service

White Christmas

My folks think I'm a serving maid
Each time I visit home;
They do not dream I ply a trade
As old as Greece or Rome;
For if they found I'd fouled their name
And was not white as snow,
I'm sure that they would die of shame . . .
Please, God, they'll never know.

I clean the paint from off my face,
In sober black I dress;
Of coquetry I leave no trace
To give them vague distress;
And though it causes me a pang
To play such sorry tricks,
About my neck I meekly hang
A silver cruxifix.

And so with humble step I go
Just like a child again,
To greet their Christmas candle-glow,
A soul without a stain;
So well I play my contrite part
I make myself believe
There's not a stain within my heart
On Holy Christmas Eve.

With double natures we are vext,
And what we feel, we are;
A saint one day, a sinner next,
A red light or a star;
A prostitute or proselyte,
And in each part sincere:
So I become a vestal white
One week in every year.

For this I say without demur
From out life's lurid lore,
Each righteous women has in her

A tincture of the whore;
While every harpy of the night,
As I have learned too well;
Holds in her heart a heaven-light
To ransom her from hell.

So I'll go home and sweep and dust;
I'll make the kitchen fire,
And be a model of daughters just
The best they could desire;
I'll fondle them and cook their food,
And Mother dear will say:
"Thank God! my darling is as good
As when she went away."

But after New Year's Day I'll fill
My bag and though they grieve,
I'll bid them both good-bye until
Another Christmas Eve;
And then . . . a knock upon the door:
I'll find them waiting there,
And angel-like I'll come once more
In answer to their prayer.

Then Lo! one night when candle-light
Gleams mystic on the snow,
And music swells of Christmas bells,
I'll come, no more to go:
The old folks need my love and care,
Their gold shall gild my dross,
And evermore my breast shall bear
My little silver cross.

Robert William Service

White-Collar Spaniard

We have no heart for civil strife,
Our burdens we prefer to bear;
We long to live a peaceful life
And claim of happiness our share.
If only to be clothed and fed
And see our children laugh and play -
That means a lot when all is said,
In this grim treadmill of today.

The price of manhood is too high
When leap the sacrificial flames;
For Justice we refuse to die:
Honour and Pride are empty names.
We will not play the martyr's part,
We will not perish for a Cause;
Leave that to fools - with humble heart
We live according to the Laws.

For see! Comes up the city street,
Communion-clad a shining band
Of tiny children, angel-sweet,
Singing and holding hand in hand . . .
So let Might triumph over Right;
From sufferance content we take:
We fight because we do not fight,
And it is for our children's sake.

Robert William Service

Why Do Birds Sing?

Let poets piece prismatic words,
Give me the jewelled joy of birds!

What ecstasy moves them to sing?
Is it the lyric glee of Spring,
The dewy rapture of the rose?
Is it the worship born in those
Who are of Nature's self a part,
The adoration of the heart?

Is it the mating mood in them
That makes each crystal note a gem?
Oh mocking bird and nightingale,
Oh mavis, lark and robin - hail!
Tell me what perfect passion glows
In your inspired arpeggios?

A thrush is thrilling as I write
Its obligato of delight;
And in its fervour, as in mine,
I fathom tenderness divine,
And pity those of earthy ear
Who cannot hear . . . who cannot hear.

Let poets pattern pretty words:
For lovely largesse - bless you, Birds!

Robert William Service

Why?

He was our leader and our guide;
He was our saviour and our star.
We walked in friendship by his side,
Yet set him where our heroes are.

He taught disdain of fame and wealth;
With courage he inspired our youth;
He preached the purity of health,
And held aloft the torch of truth.

He bade us battle for the Right,
And led us in the carnage grim;
He was to us a living light,
And like a God we worshiped him.

He raised us from the grievous gloom,
And brimmed our hearts with radiant cheer;
And then he climbed up to his room,
And . . . cut his throat from ear to ear.

Let us not judge his seeming lapse;
His secret soul we could not see;
He smiled and left us, and perhaps
Death was his crowning victory.

Robert William Service

Willie

'Why did the lady in the lift
Slap that poor parson's face?'
Said Mother, thinking as she sniffed,
Of clerical disgrace.

Said Sonny Boy: 'Alas, I know.
My conscience doth accuse me;
The lady stood upon my toe,
Yet did not say--"Excuse me!"

'She hurt--and in that crowd confined
I scarcely could endure it;
So when I pinched her fat behind
She thought--it was the Curate.'

Robert William Service

Winding Wool

She'd bring to me a skein of wool
And beg me to hold out my hands;
so on my pipe I cease to pull
And watch her twine the shining strands
Into a ball so snug and neat,
Perchance a pair of socks to knit
To comfort my unworthy feet,
Or pullover my girth to fit.

As to the winding I would sway,
A poem in my head would sing,
And I would watch in dreamy way
The bright yarn swiftly slendering.
The best I liked were coloured strands
I let my pensive pipe grow cool . . .
Two active and two passive hands,
So busy wining shining wool.

Alas! Two of those hands are cold,
And in these days of wrath and wrong,
I am so wearyful and old,
I wonder if I've lived too long.
So in my loneliness I sit
And dream of sweet domestic rule . . .
When gentle women used to knit,
And men were happy winding wool.

Robert William Service

Window Shopper

I stood before a candy shop
Which with a Christmas radiance shone;
I saw my parents pass and stop
To grin at me and then go on.
The sweets were heaped in gleamy rows;
On each I feasted - what a game!
Against the glass with flatted nose,
Gulping my spittle as it came;
So still I stood, and stared and dreamed,
Savouring sweetness with my eyes,
Devouring dainties till it seemed
My candy shop was paradise.

I had, I think, but five years old,
And though three-score and ten have passed,
I still recall the craintive cold,
The grimy street, the gritty blast;
And how I stared into that shop,
Its gifts so near and yet so far,
Of marzipan and toffee drop,
Of chocolate and walnut bar;
Imagining what I would buy
Amid delights so rich and rare . . .
The glass was misted with my sigh:
"If just one penny Pop could spare!"

And then when I went home to tea
Of bread and butter sparsely spread,
Oh, how my parents twitted me:
"You stood for full an hour," they said.
"We saw you as we passed again;
Your eyes upon the sweets were glued;
Your nose was flattened to the pane,
Like someone hypnotized you stood."
But when they laughed as at a joke,
A bitterness I could not stem
Within my little heart awoke. . . .
Oh, I have long forgiven them;
For though I know they did no own

Pennies to spare, they might, it seems
More understanding love have shown
More sympathy for those vain dreams,
Which make of me with wistful gaze
God's Window Shopper all days.

Robert William Service

Wine Bibber

I would rather drink than eat,
 And though I superbly sup,
Food, I feel, can never beat
 Delectation of the cup.
Wine it is that crowns the feast;
 Fish and fowl and fancy meat
Are of my delight the least:
 I would rather drink than eat.

Though no Puritan I be,
 And have doubts of Kingdom Come,
With those fellows I agree
 Who deplore the Demon Rum.
Gin and brandy I decline,
 And I shy at whisky neat;
But give me rare vintage wine,--
 Gad! I'd rather drink than eat.

Food surfeit is of the beast;
 Wine is from the gods a gift.
All from prostitute to priest
 Can attest to its uplift.
Green and garnet glows the vine;
 Grapes grow plump in happy heat;
Gold and ruby winks the wine . . .
 Come! Let's rather drink than eat.

Robert William Service

Winnie

When I went by the meadow gate
The chestnut mare would trot to meet me,
And as her coming I would wait,
She'd whinney high as if to greet me.
And I would kiss her silky nose,
And stroke her neck until it glistened,
And speak soft words: I don't suppose
She understand - but how she listened!

Then in the war-net I was caught,
Returning three black winters older;
And when the little mare I sought
The farmer told me he had sold her.
And so time passed - when in the street
One day I heard a plaintive whinney
That roused a recollection sweet,
So then I turned and there was Winnie.

I vow she knew me, mooning there.
She raised her nose for me to fondle,
And though I'd lost an arm I'll swear
She kissed the empty sleeve a-dangle.
But oh it cut me to the heart,
Though I was awful glad to meet her,
For lo! she dragged a tinker's cart
And stumbled weakly as he beat her.

Just skin and bone, a sorry hack!
Say, fellow, you may think it funny:

I made a deal and bought her back,

Though it took all my bonus money.
And she'll be in the meadow there,
As long as I have dough for spending . . .
Gee! I'll take care of that old mare -
"Sweetheart! you'll have a happy ending."

Wistful

Oh how I'd be gay and glad
If a little house I had,
Snuggled in a shady lot,
With behind a garden plot;
Simple grub, old duds to wear,
A book, a pipe, a rocking-chair . . .
You would never hear me grouse
If I had a little house.

Oh if I had just enough
Dough to buy the needful stuff;
Milk and porridge, toast and tea,
How contented I would be!
You could have your cake and wine,
I on cabbage soup would dine,
Joking to the journey's end -
Had I just enough to spend.

Oh had I no boss to please
I'd give thanks on bended knees;
Could I to myself belong,
I would fill the day with song.
Freedom's crust is sweeter far
Than control and caviar;
How my ragged hat I'd toss
If I didn't have a boss.

So you may see my point of view,
But there's nothing I can do;
Oh the weariness of work,
Duties that I may not shirk.
Though simplicity I crave
I must go down to my grave,
Bossed by bullion, crossed by care -
Just a poor damn millionaire.

Robert William Service

Wonder

For failure I was well equipped
 And should have come to grief,
By atavism grimly gripped,
 A fool beyond belief.
But lo! the Lord was good to me,
 And with a heart to sing,
He gave me to a rare degree
 The Gift of Wondering.

I could not play a stalwart part
 My shoddy soul to save,
And should have gone with broken heart
 A begger to the grave;
But praise to my anointed sight
 As wandering I went,
I sang of living with delight
 In terms of Wonderment.

Aye, starry-eyed did I rejoice
 With marvel of a child,
And there were those who heard my voice
 Although my words were wild:
So as I go my wistful way,
 With worship let me sing,
A treasure to my farewell day
 God's Gift of Wondering.

Robert William Service

Words

If on isle of the sea
 I have to tarry,
With one book, let it be
 A Dictionary.
For though I love life's scene,
 It seems absurd,
My greatest joy has been
 The printed word.

Though painter with delight
 May colours blend,
They are but in his sight
 Means to an end.
Yet while I harmonise
 Or pattern them,
A precious word I prize
 Like to a gem.

A fiddler lures fine tone
 From gut and wood;
A sculptor from stark stone
 Shapes godlihood.
But let me just caress,
 Like silver birds,
For their own loveliness--
 Bewitching words.

Robert William Service

Work

When twenty-one I loved to dream,
 And was to loafing well inclined;
Somehow I couldn't get up steam
 To welcome work of any kind.
While students burned the midnight lamp,
 With dour ambition as their goad,
I longed to be a gayful tramp
 And greet adventure on the road.

But now that sixty years have sped,
 Behold! I toil from morn to night.
The thoughts that teem into my head
 I pray: God give me time to write.
With eager and unflagging pen
 No drudgery of desk I shirk,
And preach to all retiring men
 The gospel of unceasing work.

And yet I do not sadly grieve
 Such squandering of golden days;
For from my dreaming I believe
 Have stemmed my least unworthy lays.
Aye, toil is best when all is said,
 As age has made me understand . . .
So fitly fold, when I am dead,
 A pencil in my hand.

Robert William Service

Work And Joy

Each day I live I thank the Lord
 I do the work I love;
And in it find a rich reward,
 All price and praise above.
For few may do the work they love,
 The fond unique employ,
That fits them as a hand a glove,
 And gives them joy.

Oh gentlefolk, do you and you
 Who toil for daily hire,
Consider that the job you do
 Is to your heart's desire?
Aye, though you are to it resigned,
 And will no duty shirk,
Oh do you in your private mind
 Adore your work?

Twice happy man whose job is joy,
 Whose hand and heart combine,
In brave and excellent employ
 As radiantly as mine!
But oh the weary, dreary day,
 The wear and tear and irk
Of countless souls who cannot say:
 'I love my work.'

Robert William Service

Worms

Worms finer for fishing you couldn't be wishing;
I delved them dismayed from the velvety sod;
The rich loam upturning I gathered them squirming,
big, fat, gleamy earthworms, all ripe for my rod.
Thinks I, without waiting, my hook I'll be baiting,
And flip me a fish from the foam of the pool;
Then Mother beholding, came crying and scolding:
"You're late, ye young devil! Be off to the school."
So grabbing me bait-tin I dropped them fat worms in,
With globs of green turf for their comfort and cheer;
And there, clean forgotten, no doubt dead and rotten;
I left them to languish for nigh on a year.

One day to be cleaning the byre I was meaning,
When seeing that old rusty can on the shelf,
Says I: "To my thinking, them worms must be stinking:
Begorra! I'd better find out for myself."
So I opened the tin, held my nose and looked in;
And what did I see? Why, most nothing at all.
Just darkness and dank. and . . . a something that stank,
Tucked down in a corner, a greasy grey ball.
My worms - no, not dead, but thin as a thread,
Each seemed to reproach me, protesting its worth:
So softly I took them and tenderly shook them
Back into the bosom of mothering earth.

I'm now in the City; 'tis grand, but I pity
The weariful wretches that crawl in its grime;
The dregs and the scum and the spawn of the slum,
And the poor little children that's cradled in crime.
Sure I see them in terms of my pitiful worms,
surviving despite desperation and doom,
And I wish I was God, with a smile and a nod
To set them all down in a valley of bloom,
Saying: "Let these rejoice with a wonderful voice
For mothering earth and for fathering sea,
And healing of sun, for each weariful one
Of these poor human worms is a wee bit of me. . . .
Let your be the blame and yours be the shame:

What ye do unto them ye do also to ME."

Robert William Service

Wounded

Is it not strange? A year ago to-day,
 With scarce a thought beyond the hum-drum round,
I did my decent job and earned my pay;
 Was averagely happy, I'll be bound.
Ay, in my little groove I was content,
 Seeing my life run smoothly to the end,
With prosy days in stolid labour spent,
 And jolly nights, a pipe, a glass, a friend.
In God's good time a hearth fire's cosy gleam,
 A wife and kids, and all a fellow needs;
When presto! like a bubble goes my dream:
 I leap upon the Stage of Splendid Deeds.
I yell with rage; I wallow deep in gore:
 I, that was clerk in a drysalter's store.

Stranger than any book I've ever read.
 Here on the reeking battlefield I lie,
Under the stars, propped up with smeary dead,
 Like too, if no one takes me in, to die.
Hit on the arms, legs, liver, lungs and gall;
 Damn glad there's nothing more of me to hit;
But calm, and feeling never pain at all,
 And full of wonder at the turn of it.
For of the dead around me three are mine,
 Three foemen vanquished in the whirl of fight;
So if I die I have no right to whine,
 I feel I've done my little bit all right.
I don't know how -- but there the beggars are,
 As dead as herrings pickled in a jar.

And here am I, worse wounded than I thought;
 For in the fight a bullet bee-like stings;
You never heed; the air is metal-hot,
 And all alive with little flicking wings.
But on you charge. You see the fellows fall;
 Your pal was by your side, fair fighting-mad;
You turn to him, and lo! no pal at all;
 You wonder vaguely if he's copped it bad.
But on you charge. The heavens vomit death;

And vicious death is besoming the ground.
You're blind with sweat; you're dazed, and out of breath,
And though you yell, you cannot hear a sound.
But on you charge. Oh, War's a rousing game!
Around you smoky clouds like ogres tower;
The earth is rowelled deep with spurs of flame,
And on your helmet stones and ashes shower.
But on you charge. It's odd! You have no fear.
Machine-gun bullets whip and lash your path;
Red, yellow, black the smoky giants rear;
The shrapnel rips, the heavens roar in wrath.
But on you charge. Barbed wire all trampled down.
The ground all gored and rent as by a blast;
Grim heaps of grey where once were heaps of brown;
A ragged ditch -- the Hun first line at last.
All smashed to hell. Their second right ahead,
So on you charge. There's nothing else to do.
More reeking holes, blood, barbed wire, gruesome dead;
(Your puttee strap's undone -- that worries you).
You glare around. You think you're all alone.
But no; your chums come surging left and right.
The nearest chap flops down without a groan,
His face still snarling with the rage of fight.
Ha! here's the second trench -- just like the first,
Only a little more so, more "laid out";
More pounded, flame-corroded, death-accurst;
A pretty piece of work, beyond a doubt.
Now for the third, and there your job is done,
So on you charge. You never stop to think.
Your cursed puttee's trailing as you run;
You feel you'd sell your soul to have a drink.
The acrid air is full of cracking whips.
You wonder how it is you're going still.
You foam with rage. Oh, God! to be at grips
With someone you can rush and crush and kill.
Your sleeve is dripping blood; you're seeing red;
You're battle-mad; your turn is coming now.
See! there's the jagged barbed wire straight ahead,
And there's the trench -- you'll get there anyhow.
Your puttee catches on a strand of wire,
And down you go; perhaps it saves your life,
For over sandbag rims you see 'em fire,

Crop-headed chaps, their eyes ablaze with strife.
You crawl, you cower; then once again you plunge
With all your comrades roaring at your heels.
Have at 'em lads! You stab, you jab, you lunge;
A blaze of glory, then the red world reels.
A crash of triumph, then . . . you're faint a bit . . .
That cursed puttee! Now to fasten it. . . .

Well, that's the charge. And now I'm here alone.

I've built a little wall of Hun on Hun,
To shield me from the leaden bees that drone
(It saves me worry, and it hurts 'em none).
The only thing I'm wondering is when
Some stretcher-men will stroll along my way?
It isn't much that's left of me, but then
Where life is, hope is, so at least they say.
Well, if I'm spared I'll be the happy lad.
I tell you I won't envy any king.
I've stood the racket, and I'm proud and glad;
I've had my crowning hour. Oh, War's the thing!
It gives us common, working chaps our chance,
A taste of glory, chivalry, romance.

Ay, War, they say, is hell; it's heaven, too.

It lets a man discover what he's worth.
It takes his measure, shows what he can do,
Gives him a joy like nothing else on earth.
It fans in him a flame that otherwise
Would flicker out, these drab, discordant days;
It teaches him in pain and sacrifice
Faith, fortitude, grim courage past all praise.
Yes, War is good. So here beside my slain,
A happy wreck I wait amid the din;
For even if I perish mine's the gain. . . .
Hi, there, you fellows! won't you take me in?
Give me a fag to smoke upon the way. . . .
We've taken La Boisselle! The hell, you say!
Well, that would make a corpse sit up and grin. . . .
Lead on! I'll live to fight another day.

Robert William Service

Wrestling Match

What guts he had, the Dago lad
Who fought that Frenchman grim with guile;
For nigh an hour they milled like mad,
And mauled the mat in rare old style.
Then up and launched like catapults,
And tangled, twisted, clinched and clung,
Then tossed in savage somersaults,
And hacked and hammered, ducked and swung;
And groaned and grunted, sighed and cried,
Now knotted tight, now springing free;
To bend each other's bones they tried,
Their faces crisped in agony. . . .

Then as a rage rose, with tiger-bound,
They clashed and smashed, and flailed and flung,
And tripped and slipped, with hammer-pound,
And streamin sweat and straining lung,
The mighty mob roared out their joy,
And wild I heard a wench near-by
Shriek to the Frenchman: "Atta Boy!
Go to it, Jo-jo - kill the guy."

The boy from Rome was straight and slim,
And swift and springy as a bow;
The man from Metz was gaunt and grim,
But all the tricks he seemed to know.
'Twixt knee and calf with scissors-lock,
He gripped the lad's arm like a vice;
The prisoned hand went white as chalk,
And limp as death and cold as ice.
And then he tried to break the wrist,
And kidney-pounded with his knee,
But with a cry and lightning twist
The Roman youth had wrested free. . . .

Then like mad bulls they hooked and mauled,
And blindly butted, bone on bone;
Spread-eagled on the mat they sprawled,
And writhed and rocked with bitter moan.

Then faltered to their feet and hung
Upon the ropes with eyes of woe;
And then the Frenchman stooped and flung
The wop among the mob below,
Who helped to hoist him back again,
With cheers and jeers and course cat-calls,
To where the Gaul with might and main
Hung poised to kick his genitals
And drop him senseless in the ring. . . .
And then an old man cried: "My son!"
The maddened mob began to fling
Their chairs about - the fight was done.

Soft silver sandals tapped the sea;
Palms listened to the lack of sound;
The lucioles were liting free,
The peace was precious and profound.
Oh had it been an evil dream? . . .
A chapel of the Saints I sought,
And thee before the alter gleam
I clasped my hands and thought and thought. . . .

Robert William Service

Yellow

One pearly day in early May I walked upon the sand
And saw, say half a mile away, a man with gun in hand.
A dog was cowering to his will as slow he sought to creep
Upon a dozen ducks so still they seemed to be asleep.

When like a streak the dog dashed out, the ducks flashed up in flight.
The fellow gave a savage shout and cursed with all his might.
Then as I stood somewhat amazed and gazed with eyes agog,
With bitter rage his gun he raised and blazed and shot the dog.

You know how dogs can yelp with pain; its blood soaked in the sand,
And yet it crawled to him again, and tried to lick his hand.
'Forgive me Lord for what I've done,' it seemed as if it said,
But once again he raised his gun -- this time he shot it dead.

What could I do? What could I say? 'Twas such a lonely place.
Tongue-tied I watched him stride away, I never saw his face.
I should have bawled the bastard out, a yellow dog he slew.
But worse, he proved beyond a doubt that - I was yellow too.

Robert William Service

You And Me

I'm part of people I have known
 And they are part of me;
The seeds of thought that I have sown
 In other minds I see.
There's something of me in the throne
 And in the gallows tree.

There's something of me in each one
 With whom I work and play,
For islanded there can be none
 In this dynamic day;
And meshed with me perchance may be
 A leper in Cathay.

There's me in you and you in me,
 For deeply in us delves
Such common thought that never we
 Can call ourselves ourselves.
In coils of universal fate
 No man is isolate.

For you and I are History,
 The all that ever was;
And woven in the tapestry
 Of everlasting laws,
Persist will we in Time to be,
 Forever you and me.

Robert William Service

You Can'T Can Love

I don't know how the fishes feel, but I can't help thinking it odd,
That a gay young flapper of a female eel should fall in love with a cod.
Yet - that's exactly what she did and it only goes to prove,
That' what evr you do you can't put the lid on that crazy feeling Love.

Now that young tom-cod was a dreadful rake, and he had no wish to wed,
But he feared that her foolish heart would break, so this is what he said:
"Some fellows prize a woman's eyes, and some admire her lips,
While some have a taste for a tiny waist, but - me, what I like is HIPS."

"So you see, my dear," said that gay tom-cod, "Exactly how I feel;
Oh I hate to be unkind but I know my mind, and there ain't no hips on an eel."
"Alas! that's true," said the foolish fish, as she blushed to her finny tips:
"And with might and main, though it gives me pain, I'll try to develop hips."

So day and night with all her might she physical culturized;
But alas and alack, in the middle of her back no hump she recognized.
So - then she knew that her love eclipse was fated from the start;
For you never yet saw an eel with hips, so she died of a broken heart.

Chorus:

Oh you've gotta hand it out to Love, to Love you can't can Love
You'll find it from the bottom of the briny deep to the blue above.
From the Belgin hare to the Polar Bear, and the turtle dove,
You can look where you please, But from elephant to fleas,
You'll never put the lid on Love.

You can look where you choose, But from crabs to kangaroos,
You'll never put the lid on Love.

You can look where you like, But from polywogs to pike,
You'll never put the lid on Love.

You can look where you please, But from buffalo to bees,
You'll never put the lid on Love.

Robert William Service

Young Fellow My Lad

"Where are you going, Young Fellow My Lad,
On this glittering morn of May?"

"I'm going to join the Colours, Dad;
They're looking for men, they say."

"But you're only a boy, Young Fellow My Lad;
You aren't obliged to go."

"I'm seventeen and a quarter, Dad,
And ever so strong, you know."

* * * *

"So you're off to France, Young Fellow My Lad,
And you're looking so fit and bright."

"I'm terribly sorry to leave you, Dad,
But I feel that I'm doing right."

"God bless you and keep you, Young Fellow My Lad,
You're all of my life, you know."

"Don't worry. I'll soon be back, dear Dad,
And I'm awfully proud to go."

* * * *

"Why don't you write, Young Fellow My Lad?

I watch for the post each day;
And I miss you so, and I'm awfully sad,
And it's months since you went away.
And I've had the fire in the parlour lit,
And I'm keeping it burning bright
Till my boy comes home; and here I sit
Into the quiet night.

* * * *

"What is the matter, Young Fellow My Lad?

No letter again to-day.
Why did the postman look so sad,
And sigh as he turned away?
I hear them tell that we've gained new ground,
But a terrible price we've paid:

God grant, my boy, that you're safe and sound;
But oh I'm afraid, afraid."

* * * *

"They've told me the truth, Young Fellow My Lad:
You'll never come back again:
(Oh God! the dreams and the dreams I've had,
and the hopes I've nursed in vain!)
For you passed in the night, Young Fellow My Lad,
And you proved in the cruel test
Of the screaming shell and the battle hell
That my boy was one of the best.
"So you'll live, you'll live, Young Fellow My Lad,
In the gleam of the evening star,
In the wood-note wild and the laugh of the child,
In all sweet things that are.
And you'll never die, my wonderful boy,
While life is noble and true;
For all our beauty and hope and joy
We will owe to our lads like you."

Robert William Service

Young Mother

Her baby was so full of glee,
 And through the day
It laughed and babbled on her knee
 In happy play.
It pulled her hair all out of curl
 With noisy joy;
So peppy she was glad her girl
 Was not a boy.

Then as she longed for it to sleep,
 To her surprise
It just relaxed within her keep
 With closing eyes.
And as it lay upon her breast
 So still its breath,
So exquisite its utter rest
 It looked like death.

It seemed like it had slipped away
 To shadow land;
With tiny face like tinted clay
 And waxen hand.
No ghost of sigh, no living look . . .
 Then with an ache
Of panic fear and love she shook
 Her babe awake.

Robert William Service

Your Poem

My poem may be yours indeed
In melody and tone,
If in its rhythm you can read
A music of your own;
If in its pale woof you can weave
Your lovelier design,
'Twill make my lyric, I believe,
 More yours than mine.

I'm but a prompter at the best;
Crude cues are all I give.
In simple stanzas I suggest -
'Tis you who make them live.
My bit of rhyme is but a frame,
And if my lines you quote,
I think, although they bear my name,
 'Tis you who wrote.

Yours is the beauty that you see
In any words I sing;
The magic and the melody
'Tis you, dear friend, who bring.
Yea, by the glory and the gleam,
The loveliness that lures
Your thought to starry heights of dream,
 The poem's yours.

Robert William Service