

Embers, Volume 3.

Gilbert Parker

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EMBERS

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

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IN CAMDEN TOWN

How many years of sun and snow
Have come to Camden Town,
Since through its streets and in its shade,
I wandered up and down.

Not many more than to you here
These verses hapless flung,
Yet of the Long Ago they seem
To me who am yet young.

We strive to measure life by Time,
And con the seasons o'er,
To find, alas! that days are years,
And years for evermore.

The joys that thrill, the ill that thralls,
Pressed down on heart and brain-
These are the only horologues,
The Age's loss or gain.

And I am old in all of these,

And wonder if I know
The man begotten of the boy,
Who loved that long ago.

A lilac bush close to the gate,
A locust at the door,
A low, wide window flower-filled,
With ivy covered o'er.

A face--O love of childhood dreams,
Lily in form and name--
It comes back now in these day-dreams,
The same yet not the same.

My childhood's friend! Well gathered are
The sheaves of many days,
But this one sheaf is garnered in,
Bound by my love always.

Where have you wandered, child, since when
Together merrily,
We gathered cups of columbine
By lazy Rapanee?

The green spears of the flagflower,
Down by the old mill-race,
Are weapons now for other hands,
Who mimic warfare chase.

You were so tender, yet so strong,
So gentle, yet so free,
Your every word, whenever heard,
Seemed wondrous wise to me.

You marvelled if the dead could hear
Our steps, that passed at will
Their low green houses in the elm-
Crowned churchyard on the hill.

And I, whom your sweet childhood's trust,
Esteemed as most profound,
Thought that they heard, as in a dream,
The shadow of a sound.

We drew the long, rank grass away
From tombstones mossy grown,
To read the verses crude and quaint,
And make the words our own.

One tottering marble, willow-spread,
I well remember yet,
With only this engraved thereon,
"By Joseph to Jeanette."

It held us wondering oft, as we
Peeped through the pickets old:
There was some mystery, we knew,
Some history untold.

Well, better far those simple words,
Where weeping phrase is not,
Than burdened tablet, and the rest
Forgetting and forgot.

And Lily Minden, do you lie
In some forgotten grave,
Where only strangers' feet pass o'er
Your temple's architrave?

Or, by some hearthstone, have you learned
The worst and best of life,
And found sweet greetings in the name
Of mother and of wife?

I cannot tell: I know you but
As bee the clover bloom,
That sips content, and straightway builds
Its mansion and its tomb.

So took I in child-innocence,
So build the House of Life,
And in low tone to thee alone,
As dead or maid or wife,

I sing this song, borne all along
A space of wasted breath;
And build me on from room to room
Unto the House of Death,

Where portals swing forever in
To weary pilgrim guest,
And hearts that here were inly dear
Shall find a Room of Rest.

JEAN

Three times round has the sun gone, Jean,
Since on your lips I pressed
Mute farewells; if that pain was keen
Fair were you in your nest.

Smiling, sweetheart, I left you there;
You had no word to say;
One last touch to your brow and hair,
Then I went on my way.

Time it was when the leaves were grown
Your rose-colour, my queen;
Ere the birds to the south had flown,
While yet the grass was green.

Eyes demure, do you ever yearn,
Bird-wise to summer lands?

Is it to meet your look I turn,
Saying, "She understands,"

Saying, "She waits in her quiet place
Patient till I shall come,
The old sweet grace in her dreaming face
That made a Heav'n her home"?

No! She is there 'neath Northern skies,
And no word does she send;
But near to my heart her image lies,
And shall lie there to the end.

Come what will I am not bereft
Of the memory of that time,
When in her hands my heart I left
There, in a colder clime.

And to my eyes no face is fair,
For one face comes between;
And if a song has a low sweet air,
Through it there whispers, "Jean."

Better for me the world would say,
If I had broke the charm,
Set in the circle she one day
Made by her round white arm.

Never a king in days of eld
Gathered about his throat
Such a circlet; no queen e'er held
Necklace so clear of mote.

It sufficeth the charm was set;
And if it chance that one
Still remembers, though one forget,
Then is the worst thing done--

Done, and I still can say "Let be;
I have no word of blame;
Though her heart is no more for me,
Mine shall be still the same."

I have my life to live and she--
Well, if it be so--so;
She may welcome or banish me
And if I go, I go.

Friend, I pray you repress those tears,
Comfort from this derive:
I am a score--and more-of years
And Jean is only five.

From buckwheat fields the summer sun
Drew honeyed breezes over
The lanes where happy children run
With bare feet in the clover.

The schoolhouse stood with pines about
Upon the hill, and ever
A creek, where hid the speckled trout,
Ran past it to the river.

And rosy faces gathered there,
With rustic good around them;
With breath of balm blown everywhere,
Pure, ere the world had found them.

Behind sweet purple ambuscades
Of lilacs, laws were broken;
And here a desk with knives was frayed,
There passed forbidden token.

One slipped a butternut between
His pearly teeth; a maiden
Dove-eyed, caressed her cheek; 'twas e'en
With maple sugar laden--

A flock that caught at wiles, because
The shepherd's hand that drove them,
Reached little toward wise human laws,
And less to God above them.

With eyebrows bent and surly look
He only saw before him,
The rule, the lesson, and the book,
Not nature brooding o'er him.

One day through drone of locusts fell
The wood-bird's fitful tapping,
And in his chair at "dinner-spell,"
The teacher grim sat napping.

An urchin creeping in beholds
The tyrant slumber-smitten,
And in his pocket's ample folds
He thrusts the school-yard kitten.

At length the master waked, and clanged
His bell with anger fitting;
His sleep had made it double-fanged,
And crossed like needles knitting.

Slow to their seats the children file,
And wait "Prepare for classes,"
A score of lads across the aisle
From twice a score of lasses.

But two within the throng betray
A mirth suppressed; the sinner,
And Rafe Ridall, the chief at play,

At books the easy winner:

The wildest boy in all the school,
In mischief first and ever,
His daily seat the penance-stool,
Disgraced for weeks together.

Just sound of bone and strong of heart,
Staunch friend and noble foeman;
In life to play the kingly part,
True both to man and woman.

Joe's secret now he holds; a deed
With just enough of danger,
To win his--ah, what's that? 'Tis freed,
The pocket-prisoned stranger!

A moment's riot laughter-filled,
Then fear, white-visaged, follows;
And through the silence there is trilled
The shrill note of the swallows.

And now a fierce form fronts them all,
Two fierce eyes search their faces,
Then flash their fire on Rafe Ridall,
Whose mirth no peril chases.

"You did it, sir!" "Not !!" "You did!"
"No!" "You've one chance for showing
Who in my coat the kitten hid,
Or be well thrashed for knowing."

The master paused, the birch he grasped
Against his trousers flicking;
Rafe said, with hands behind him clasped,
"I'd rather take the licking."

Full many a year has passed since then,
The lilacs still are blooming,
Awaiting childish hands again,
But they are long in coming.

Now wandering swallows build their nests
Where doors and roofs decaying,
No more shut in the master's zest,
Nor out the children's playing.

All, all are gone who gathered there;
Some toil among the masses,
Some, overworn with pain and care,
Wait Death's "Prepare for classes."

And some--the sighing pines sway on
Above them, dreamless lying;
And 'mong them sleeps the master, gone
His anger and their crying.

And Rafe Ridall, brave then, brave now,
Amid the jarring courses

Of man's misrule, still takes the blow
For those of weaker forces.

IN CAMP AT JUNIPER COVE

A little brown sparrow came tripping
Across the green grass at my feet;
A kingfisher poised, and was peering
Where current and calm water meet;

The clouds hung in passionless clusters
Above the green hills of the south;
A bobolink fluttered to leeward
With a twinkle of bells in its mouth.

Ah, the morning was silver with glory
As I lay by my tent on the shore;
And the soft air was drunken with odours,
And my soul lifted up to adore.

Is there wonder I took me to dreaming
Of the gardens of Greece and old Rome,
Of the fair watered meadows of Ida,
And the hills where the gods made their home?

Of the Argonauts sung to by Sirens,
Of Andromache, Helen of Troy,
Of Proserpine, Iphigenia,
And the Fates that build up and destroy?

Of the phantom isle, green Theresea,
And the Naiads and Dryads that give
To the soul of the poet, the dreamer,
The visions of fancy that live

In the lives and the language of mortals
Unconscious, but sure as the sea,
And that make for great losses repayment
To wandering singers like me?

But a little brown sparrow came tripping
Across the green grass at my feet;
And a kingfisher poised, and was peering
Where current and calm water meet;

And Alice, sweet Alice, my neighbour,
Stands musing beneath the pine tree;
And her look says--"I have a lover
Who sails on the turbulent sea:

Does he dream as I dream night and daytime
Of a face that is tender and true;
Will he come to me e'en as he left me?"
Yes, Alice, sweet Alice, for you,

Is the sunlight, and not the drear shadow,
The gentle and fortunate peace:
But he who thus revels in rhyming
Has shadows that never shall cease.

JUNIPER COVE TWENTY YEARS AFTER

The bay gleams softly in the sun,
The morning widens o'er the world:
The bluebird's song is just begun,
And down the skies white clouds are furled.

The boat lies idly by the shore,
The shed I built with happy care
Is fallen; and I see no more
The white tents in the eager air.

The goldenrod holds up its plumes
In the long stretch of meadow grass,
The briarrose shakes its sweet perfumes,
In coverts where the sparrows pass.

Far off, above, the sapphire gleams,
Far off, below, the sapphire flows,
And this, my place of morning dreams,
The bank where my vain visions rose!

Sweet Alice, he came back again,
Across the waste of summer sea,
What time the fields were full of grain,
But not to thee; but not to thee.

She comes no more when evening falls,
To watch the stars wheel up the sky;
Then love and light were over all;
Alas! that light and love should die.

I feel her hand upon my arm,
I see her eyes shine through the mist;
Her life was passionate and warm
As the red jewels at her wrist.

Hearts do not break, the world has said,
Though love lie stark and light be flown;
But still it counts its lost and dead,
And in the solitudes makes moan.

We school our lips to make our hearts
Seem other than in truth they are;
Before the lights we play our part,
And paint the flesh to hide the scar.

Masquers and mummers all, and yet

The slaves of some dead passion's fires,
Of hopes the soul can ne'er forget
Still sobbing in life's trembling wires.

Fate puts our dear desires in pawn,
Youth passes, unredeemed they lie;
The leaves drop from our rose of dawn,
And storms fall from the mocking sky.

I shall come back no more; my ship
Waits for me by the sundering sea;
A prayer for her is on my lip--
And the old life is dead to me.

LISTENING

I have lain beneath the pine trees just to hear the thrush's calling,
I have waited for the throstle where the harvest fields were brown,
I have caught the lark's sweet trilling from the depths of cloud-land
falling
And the piping of the linnet through the willow branches blown.

But you have some singing graces, you who sing because you love it,
That are higher than the throstle, or the linnet, or the lark;
And, however far my soul may reach, your song is far above it;
And I falter while I follow as a child does in the dark.

In elder days, when all the world was silent save the beating
Of the tempest-gathered ocean 'gainst the grey volcanic walls,
When the light had met the darkness and the mountains sent their greeting
To each other in sharp flashes as the vivid lightning falls,

Then the high gods said, "In token that we love the earth we fashioned,
We will set the white stars singing, and teach man the art of song":
And there rose up from the valleys sounds of love and life impassioned,
Till men cried, with arms uplifted, "Now from henceforth we are strong!"

Adown the ages there have come the sounds of that first singing,
Lifting up the weary-hearted in the fever of the time;
And I, who wait and wander far, felt all my soul upspringing,
To but touch those ancient forces and the energies sublime,

When I heard you who had heard it--that first song--perhaps in dreaming,
Till it filled you with fine fervour and the hopes of its refrain;
And I knew that God was gracious and had led me in the gleaming
Of a song-shine that is holy and that quiets all my pain.

Though the birds sing in the meadows and fill all the air with sweetness,
They sing only in the present, and they sing because they must;
They are wanton in their pureness, and in all their fine completeness,
They trill out their lives forgotten to the silence of the dust.

But if you should pass to-morrow where your songs could never reach us,
There would still be throbbing through us all the music of your voice;

And your spirit would speak through the chords, as though it would
beseech us
To remember that the noblest ends have ever noblest choice.

NEVERTHELESS

In your onward march, O men,
White of face, in promise whiter,
You unsheathe the sword, and then
Blame the wronged as the fighter.

Time, ah, Time, rolls onward o'er
All these foetid fields of evil,
While hard at the nation's core
Eat the burning rust and weevil!

Nathless, out beyond the stars
Reigns the Wiser and the Stronger,
Seeing in all strifes and wars
Who the wronged, who the wronger.

ISHMAEL

"No man cared for my soul."

Blind, Lord, so blind! I wander far
From Thee among the haunts of men,
Most like some lone, faint, flickering star
Gone from its place, nor knoweth when
The sun shall give it shining dole
Lord! no man careth for my soul.

Blind, Lord, so blind! In loneliness
By crowded mart or busy street,
I fold my hands and feel how less
Am I to any one I meet,
Than to Thee one lost billow's roll:
Lord! no man careth for my soul.

Blind, Lord, so blind! And I have knelt
'Mong myriads in Thy house of prayer;
And still sad desolation felt,
Though heavy freighted was the air
With litanies of love: one ghoul
Cried, "No man careth for thy soul!"

Blind, Lord, so blind! The world is blind;
It feeds me, fainting, with a stone:
I cry for bread. Before, behind,

Are hurrying feet; yet all alone
I walk, and no one points the goal
Lord! no man careth for my soul.

Blind, Lord, Oh very blind am I!
If sin of mine sets up the wall
Between my poor sight and Thy sky,
O Friend of man, Who cares for all,
Send sweet peace ere the last bell toll--
Yea, Lord, Thou carest for my soul!

OVER THE HILLS

Over the hills they are waiting to greet us,
They who have scanned all the ultimate places,
Fathomed the world and the things that defeat us--
Evils and graces.

They have no thought for the toiling or spinning,
Striving for bread that is dust in the gaining,
They have won all that is well worth the winning--
Past all distaining.

Now they have done with the pain and the error,
Nevermore here shall the dark things assail them,
Void man's devices and dreams have no terror--
Shall we bewail them?

They have cast off all the strife and derision,
They have put on all the joy of our yearning;
We falter feebly from vision to vision,
Never discerning.

Faint light before us, and shadows to grope in,
Stretching out hands to the starbeams to guide us,
Finding no place but our life's loves to hope in,
Doubt to deride us--

So we climb upward with eyes growing dimmer,
Looking back only to sigh through our smiling,
Wondering still if the palpitant glimmer
Leads past defiling.

They whom we loved have gone over the mountains,
Hands beckon to us like wings of the swallow,
Voices we knew from delectable fountains
Cry to us, "Follow!"

Some were so young when they left us, that morning
Seemed to have flashed and then died into gloaming,
Leaving us wearier 'neath the world's scorning,
Blinder in roaming.

Some, in the time when the manhood is bravest,

Strongest to bear and the hands to endeavour,
When all the life is the firmest and gravest,
Left us for ever.

Some, when the Springtime had grown to December,
Said, "It is done: now the last thing befall me;
I shall sleep well--ah! dear hearts but remember:
Farewell, they call me!"

So the tale runs, and the end, who shall fear it?
Is it not better to sleep than to sorrow?
Tokens will come from the bourne as we near it--
Time's peace, to-morrow.

THE DELIVERER

How has the cloud fallen, and the leaf withered on the tree,
The lemontree, that standeth by the door?
The melon and the date have gone bitter to the taste,
The weevil, it has eaten at the core--
The core of my heart, the mildew findeth it;
My music, it is but the drip of tears,
The garner empty standeth, the oven hath no fire,
Night filleth me with fears.
O Nile that floweth deeply, hast thou not heard his voice?
His footsteps hast thou covered with thy flood?
He was as one who lifteth up the yoke,
He was as one who taketh off the chain,
As one who sheltereth from the rain,
As one who scattereth bread to the pigeons flying.
His purse was at his side, his mantle was for me,
For any who passeth were his mantle and his purse,
And now like a gourd is he withered from our eyes.
His friendship, it was like a shady wood--
Whither has he gone?--Who shall speak for us?
Who shall save us from the kourbash and the stripes?
Who shall proclaim us in the palace?
Who shall contend for us in the gate?
The sakkia turneth no more; the oxen they are gone;
The young go forth in chains, the old waken in the night,
They waken and weep, for the wheel turns backward,
And the dark days are come again upon us--
Will he return no more?
His friendship was like a shady wood,
O Nile that floweth deeply, hast thou not heard his voice?
Hast thou covered up his footsteps with thy flood?
The core of my heart, the mildew findeth it!
When his footsteps were among us there was peace;
War entered not the village, nor the call of war:
Now our homes are as those that have no roofs.
As a nest decayed, as a cave forsaken,
As a ship that lieth broken on the beach,
Is the house where we were born.
Out in the desert did we bury our gold,

We buried it where no man robbed us, for his arm was strong.
Now are the jars empty, gold did not avail
To save our young men, to keep them from the chains.
God hath swallowed his voice, or the sea hath drowned it,
Or the Nile hath covered him with its flood;
Else would he come when our voices call.
His word was honey in the prince's ear--
Will he return no more?

THE DESERT ROAD

In the sands I lived in a hut of palm,
There was never a garden to see;
There was never a path through the desert calm,
Nor a way through its storms for me.

Tenant was I of a lone domain;
The far pale caravans wound
To the rim of the sky, and vanished again;
My call in the waste was drowned.

The vultures came and hovered and fled;
And once there stole to my door
A white gazelle, but its eyes were dread
With the hurt of the wounds it bore.

It passed in the dusk with a foot of fear,
And the white cold mists rolled in;
And my heart was the heart of a stricken deer,
Of a soul in the snare of sin.

My days they withered like rootless things,
And the sands rolled on, rolled wide;
Like a pelican I, with broken wings,
Like a drifting barque on the tide.

But at last, in the light of a rose-red day,
In the windless glow of the morn,
From over the hills and from far away,
You came-ah, the joy of the morn!

And wherever your footsteps fell there crept
A path--it was fair and wide;
A desert road which no sands have swept,
Where never a hope has died.

I followed you forth, and your beauty held
My heart like an ancient song,
By that desert road to the blossoming plains
I came, and the way was long.

So, I set my course by the light of your eyes;
I care not what fate may send;
On the road I tread shine the love-starred skies,

The road with never an end.

A SON OF THE NILE

Oh, the garden where to-day we, sow and to-morrow we reap;
Oh, the sakkia turning by the garden walls;
Oh, the onion-field and the date-tree growing,
And my hand on the plough--by the blessing of God;
Strength of my soul, O my brother, all's well!

A FAREWELL FROM THE HAREM

Take thou thy flight, O soul! Thou hast no more
The gladness of the morning: ah, the perfumed roses
My love laid on my bosom as I slept!
How did he wake me with his lips upon mine eyes,
How did the singers carol, the singers of my soul,
That nest among the thoughts of my beloved!
All silent now, the choruses are gone,
The windows of my soul are closed; no more
Mine eyes look gladly out to see my lover come.
There is no more to do, no more to say
Take flight, my soul, my love returns no more!

AN ARAB LOVE SONG

The bed of my love I will sprinkle with attar of roses,
The face of my love I will touch with the balm,
With the balm of the tree from the farthest wood,
From the wood without end, in the world without end.
My love holds the cup to my lips, and I drink of the cup,
And the attar of roses I sprinkle will soothe like the evening dew,
And the balm will be healing and sleep, and the cup I will drink,
I will drink of the cup my love holds to my lips.

THE CAMEL-DRIVER TO HIS CAMEL

Fleet is thy foot: thou shalt rest by the etl tree;
Water shalt thou drink from the blue-deep well;

Allah send his gard'ner with the green bersim,
For thy comfort, fleet one, by the etl tree.
As the stars fly, have thy footsteps flown--
Deep is the well, drink, and be still once more;
Till the pursuing winds, panting, have found thee
And, defeated, sink still beside thee--
By the well and the etl tree.

THE TALL DAKOON

The Tall Dakoon, the bridle rein he shook, and called aloud,
His Arab steed sprang down the mists which wrapped them like a
shroud;
But up there rang the clash of steel, the clanking silver chain,
The war-cry of the Tall Dakoon, the moaning of the slain.

And long they fought--the Tall Dakoon, the children of the mist,
But he was swift with lance and shield, and supple of the wrist,
Yet if he rose, or if he fell, no man hath proof to show--
And wide the world beyond the mists, and deep the vales below!

For when a man, because of love, hath wrecked and burned his ships,
And when a man for hate of love hath curses on his lips,
Though he should be the peasant born, or be the Tall Dakoon,
What matters then, of hap, or place, the mist comes none too soon!

THERE IS SORROW ON THE SEA

Our ship is a beautiful lady,
Friendly and ready and fine;
She runs her race with the storm in her face,
Like a sea-bird over the brine.

In her household work no hand does shirk,--
No need of belaying-pins,--
And the captain dear and the engineer,
They both look after the Twins:

The Twins that drive her to do her best
Where the Roaring Forties rage
From the Fastnet Height to the Liberty Light,
And the Customs landing-stage.

Where the crank-shafts pitch in the iron ditch,
Where the main-shaft swims and glides,
Where the boilers keep, in the sullen deep,
A master-hand on the Tides;

Where the reeking shuttle and booming bar

Keep time in the hum of the toiling hive,--
The men of the deep, while the travellers sleep,
Their steel-clad coursers drive.

And Davy Jones' locker is full
Of the labour that moves the world;
And brave they be who serve the sea
To keep our flags unfurled:

The Union Jack and the Stripes and Stars,
Gallant and free and true,
In a world-wide trade, and a fame well made,
And humanity's work to do.

Now list, ye landsmen, as ye roam,
To the voice of the men offshore,
Who've sailed in the old ship Never Return,
With the great First Commodore.

They fitted foreign (God keeps the sea),
They stepped aboard (God breaks the wind).
And the babe that held by his father's knee,
He leaves, with his lass, behind.

And the lad will sail as his father sailed,
And a lass she will wait again;
And he'll get his scrip in his father's ship,
And he'll sail to the Southern Main;

And he'll sail to the North, and he'll make to the East,
And he'll overhaul the West;
And he'll pass outspent as his father went
From his landbirds in the nest.

There are hearts that bleed, there are mouths to feed,
(Now one and all, ye landsmen, list)
And the rent's to pay on the quarter-day--
(What ye give will never be missed)

And you'll never regret, as your whistle you wet,
In Avenue Number Five,
That you gave your "quid" to the lonely kid
And the widow, to keep 'em alive.

So out with your golden shilling, my lad,
And your bright bank-note, my dear!
We are safe to-night near the Liberty Light,
And the mariner says, What Cheer!

THE AUSTRALIAN STOCKRIDER

I ride to the tramp and shuffle of hoofs
Away to the wild waste land,
I can see the sun on the station roofs,

And a stretch of the shifting sand;
The forest of horns is a shaking sea,
Where white waves tumble and pass;
The cockatoo screams in the myall-tree,
And the adder-head gleams in the grass.

The clouds swing out from beyond the hills
And valance the face of the sky,
And the Spirit of Winds creeps up and fills
The plains with a plaintive cry;
A boundary-rider on lonely beat
Creeps round the horizon's rim;
He has little to do, and plenty to eat,
And the world is a blank to him.

His friends are his pipe, and dog, and tea,
His wants, they are soon supplied;
And his mind, like the weeping myall-tree,
May droop on his weary ride,
But he lives his life in his quiet way,
Forgetting,--perhaps forgot,--
Till another rider will come some day,
And he will have ridden, God wot!

To the Wider Plains with the measureless bounds:
And I know, if I had my choice,
I would rather ride in those pleasant grounds,
Than to sit 'neath the spell of the voice
Of the sweetest seraph that you could find
In all the celestial place;
And I hope that the Father, whose heart is kind,
When I speak to Him face to face,

Will give me something to do up there
Among all the folks that have died,
That will give me freedom and change of air,
If it's only to boundary ride:
For I somehow think, in the Great Stampede,
When the world crowds up to the Bar,
The unluckiest mortals will be decreed
To camp on the luckiest star.

THE BRIDGE OF THE HUNDRED SPANS

It was the time that the Long Divide
Blooms and glows like an hour-old bride;
It was the days when the cattle come
Back from their winter wand'rings home;
Time when the Kicking Horse shows its teeth,
Snarls and foams with a demon's breath;
When the sun with a million levers lifts
Abodes of snow from the rocky rifts;
When the line-man's eyes, like the lynx's, scans
The lofty Bridge of the Hundred Spans.

Round a curve, down a sharp incline,
If the red-eyed lantern made no sign,
Swept the train, and upon the bridge
That binds a canon from ridge to ridge.
Never a watchman like old Carew;
Knew his duty, and did it, too;
Good at scouting when scouting paid,
Saved a post from an Indian raid--
Trapper, miner, and mountain guide,
Less one arm in a lumber slide;
Walked the line like a panther's guard,
Like a maverick penned in a branding-yard.
"Right as rain," said the engineers,
"With the old man working his eyes and ears."

"Safe with Carew on the mountain wall,"
Was how they put it, in Montreal.
Right and safe was it East and West
Till a demon rose on the mountain crest,
And drove at its shoulders angry spears,
That it rose from its sleep of a thousand years,
That its heaving breast broke free the cords
Of imprisoned snow as with flaming swords;
And, like a star from its frozen height,
An avalanche leaped one spring-tide night;
Leaped with a power not God's or man's
To smite the Bridge of the Hundred Spans.

It smote a score of the spans; it slew
With its icy squadrons old Carew.
Asleep he lay in his snow-bound grave,
While the train drew on that he could not save;
It would drop, doom-deep, through the trap of death,
From the light above, to the dark beneath;
And town and village both far and near
Would mourn the tragedy ended here.

One more hap in a hapless world,
One more wreck where the tide is swirled,
One more heap in a waste of sand,
One more clasp of a palsied hand,
One more cry to a soundless Word,
One more flight of a wingless bird;
The ceaseless falling, the countless groan,
The waft of a leaf and the fall of a stone;
Ever the cry that a Hand will save,
Ever the end in a fast-closed grave;
Ever and ever the useless prayer,
Beating the walls of a mute despair.
Doom, all doom--nay then, not all doom!
Rises a hope from the fast-closed tomb.
Write not "Lost," with its grinding bans,
On life, or the Bridge of the Hundred Spans.

See, on the canon's western ridge,
There stands a girl! She beholds the bridge
Smitten and broken; she sees the need
For a warning swift, and a daring deed.

See then the act of a simple girl;
Learn from it, thinker, and priest, and churl.
See her, the lantern between her teeth,
Crossing the quivering trap of death.
Hand over hand on a swaying rail,
Sharp in her ears and her heart the wail
Of a hundred lives; and she has no fear
Save that her prayer be not granted her.
Cold is the snow on the rail, and chill
The wind that comes from the frozen hill.
Her hair blows free and her eyes are full
Of the look that makes Heaven merciful--
Merciful, ah! quick, shut your eyes,
Lest you wish to see how a brave girl dies!
Dies--not yet; for her firm hands clasped
The solid bridge, as the breach out-gasped,
And the rail that had held her downward swept,
Where old Carew in his snow-grave slept.

Now up and over the steep incline,
She speeds with the red light for a sign;
She hears the cry of the coming train,
it trembles like lanceheads through her brain;
And round the curve, with a foot as fleet
As a sinner's that flees from the Judgment-seat,
She flies; and the signal swings, and then
She knows no more; but the enginemen
Lifted her, bore her, where women brought
The flush to her cheek, and with kisses caught
The warm breath back to her pallid lips,
The life from lives that were near eclipse;
Blessed her, and praised her, and begged her name
That all of their kindred should know her fame;
Should tell how a girl from a cattle-ranche
That night defeated an avalanche.
Where is the wonder the engineer
Of the train she saved, in half a year
Had wooed her and won her? And here they are
For their homeward trip in a parlour car!
Which goes to show that Old Nature's plans
Were wrecked with the Bridge of the Hundred Spans.

NELL LATORE

Rebel? . . . I grant you,--my comrades then
Were called Old Pascal Dubois' Men
Half-breeds all of us . . . I, a scamp,
The best long-shot in the Touchwood Camp;
Muscle and nerve like strings of steel,
Sound in the game of bit and heel--
There's your guide-book. . . . But, Jeanne Amray,
Telegraph-clerk at Sturgeon Bay,
French and thoroughbred, proud and sweet,
Sunshine down to her glancing feet,

Sang one song 'neath the northern moon
That changed God's world to a tropic noon;
And Love burned up on its golden floor
Years of passion for Nell Latore--
Nell Latore with her tawny hair,
Glowing eyes and her reckless air;
Lithe as an alder, straight and tall--
Pride and sorrow of Rise-and-Fall!
Indian blood in her veins ran wild,
And a Saxon father called her child;
Women feared her, and men soon found
When they trod on forbidden ground.
Ride! there's never a cayuse knew
Saddle slip of her; pistols, too,
Seemed to learn in her hands a knack
How to travel a dead-sure track.
Something in both alike maybe,
Something kindred in ancestry,
Some warm touch of an ancient pride
Drew my feet to her willing side.
My comrade, she, in the Touchwood Camp,
To ride, hunt, trail by the fire-fly lamp;
To track the moose to his moose-yard; pass
The bustard's doom through the prairie grass;
To hark at night to the crying loon
Beat idle wings on the still lagoon;
To hide from death in the drifting snow,
To slay the last of the buffalo. . . .
Ah, well, I speak of the days that were;
And I swear to you, I was kind to her.
I lost her. How are the best friends lost?
The lightning lines of our souls got crossed--
Crossed, and could never again be free
Till Death should call from his midnight sea.

One spring brought me my wedding day,
Brought me my bright-eyed Jeanne Amray;
Brought that night to our cabin door
My old, lost comrade, Nell Latore.
Her eyes swam fire, and her cheek was red,
Her full breast heaved as she darkly said:
"The coyote hides from the wind and rain,
The wild horse flies from the hurricane,
But who can flee from the half-breed's hate,
That rises soon and that watches late?"
Then went; and I laughed Jeanne's fears afar,
But I thought that wench was our evil star.
Be sure, when a woman's heart gets hard,
It works up war like a navy yard.

Half-breed and Indian troubles came--
The same old story--land and game;
And Dubois' Men were the first to feel
The bullet-sting and the clip of steel;
And last in battle 'gainst thousands sent,
With Gatling guns for our punishment.
Every cause has its traitor; then
How should it fare with Dubois' Men!
Beaten their cause was, and hunted down,

Like to a moose in the chase full blown,
Panting they stood; and a Judas sold
Their hiding-place for a piece of gold.
And while scouts searched for us night and day
Jeanne telegraphed on at Sturgeon Bay.
Picture her there as she stands alone,
Cold, in the glow of the afternoon;
Picture, I ask you, that patient wife,
Numb with fear for her husband's life,
When a sharp click-click awakes her brain
To life, with the needle-points of pain.
A message it was to Camp Pousette--
One that the half-breeds think on yet:
"Dubois' gang are in Rocky Glen,
Take a hundred and fifty men;
Go by the next express," it said,
"Bring them up here, alive or dead!" . . .

"Go by the next express!" and she,
Standing there by the silent key,
Said it over and over again,
Thinking of one of Dubois' Men
Thinking in anguish, heart and head,
Of him, brought up there alive or dead.
Save him, and perish to save him, yes!
But three hours more, and that next express
Would thunder by her, and she, alas!
Must stand there still and let it pass.
Duty was duty, and hers was clear;
God seemed far off, and no friend near.
But the truest friend and the swiftest horse
Must ride that ride on a breakneck course;
And with truest horse and swiftest friend,
To the fast express was the winning end!
And as if one pang was needed more,
There stood in the doorway, Nell Latore--
Nell Latore, with her mocking face,
Restless eyes, and her evil grace;
Quick to read in the wife's sad eyes,
The deep, strange woe, and the hurt surprise.
Slow she said, with piercing breath,
"Rebel fighter dies rebel death!"
Said, and paused; for she seemed to see
Far through the other's misery,
Something that stilled her; triumph fled
Shamed and fast, as the young wife said--
"He keeps his faith with an oath he swore,
For the half-breed's freedom, Nell Latore;
And, did he lie here, eyes death-dim,
You, if you spoke but truth of him,
Truth, truth only, should stand and say,
'He never wronged me, Jeanne Amray.'"
Then, for a moment, standing there,
Hushed and cold as a dead man's prayer,
Nell Latore, with the woman now,
Scorching the past from her eyes and brow
"Trust me," she said, like an angel-call,
"Tell me his danger, tell me all."

Quick resolve to a quick-told tale--
Nell Latore, to the glistening rail
Fled, and on it a hand-car drew,
Seized the handles, and backward threw
One swift, farewell look, and said,
"You shall have him alive, not dead!"
Ah, well for her that her arms were strong,
And cord and nerve like a knotted thong,
And well for Jeanne in her sharp distress,
That Nell was racing the fast express
Her whole life bent to this one deed,
And, like a soul from its prison freed,
Rising, dilating, reached across
Hills of conquest from plains of loss.
Gorges echoed as she passed by,
Wild fowl rose with a plaintive cry;
On she sped; and the white steel rang--
"Save him--save him for her!" it sang.
Once, a lad at a worn-out mine
Strove to warn her with awe-struck sign--
Turned she neither to left nor right,

Strained till the Rock Hills came in sight;
"But two miles more," to herself she said,
"Then she shall have him alive, not dead!"
The merciful gods that moment heard
Her promise, and helped her to keep her word;
For, when the wheels of the fast express
Slowed through the gates of that wilderness,
Round a headland and far away
Sailed the husband of Jeanne Amray.
While all that hundred-and-fifty then,
Hot on the trail of the Dubois Men,
Knew, as they stood by the pine-girt store,
The girl that had foiled them--Nell Latore.
Slow she moved from among them, turned
Where the sky to the westward burned;
Gazed for a moment, set her hands
Over her brow, so! drew the strands
Loose and rich of her tawny hair,
Once through her fingers, standing there;
Then again to the rail she passed.
One more look to the West she cast,
And into the East she drew away:
Backwards and forwards her brown arms play,
Forwards and backwards, till far and dim,
She grew one with the night's dun rim;
Backwards and forwards, and then, was gone
Into I know not what . . . alone.
She came not back, she may never come;
But a young wife lives in a cabin home,
Who prays each night that, alive or dead,
Come God's own rest for her lonely head:
And I--shall I see her then no more,
My comrade, my old love, Nell Latore?

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