Main Street, and Other Poems

Joyce Kilmer



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MAIN STREET AND OTHER POEMS

by Alfred Joyce Kilmer

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

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

To Mrs. Edmund Leamy

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MAIN STREET AND OTHER POEMS

Main Street

(For S. M. L.)

I like to look at the blossomy track of the moon upon the sea,
But it isn't half so fine a sight as Main Street used to be
When it all was covered over with a couple of feet of snow,
And over the crisp and radiant road the ringing sleighs would go.

Now, Main Street bordered with autumn leaves, it was a pleasant thing,
And its gutters were gay with dandelions early in the Spring;
I like to think of it white with frost or dusty in the heat,
Because I think it is humaner than any other street.

A city street that is busy and wide is ground by a thousand wheels,
And a burden of traffic on its breast is all it ever feels:
It is dully conscious of weight and speed and of work that never ends,
But it cannot be human like Main Street, and recognise its friends.

There were only about a hundred teams on Main Street in a day,
And twenty or thirty people, I guess, and some children out to play.
And there wasn't a wagon or buggy, or a man or a girl or a boy
That Main Street didn't remember, and somehow seem to enjoy.

The truck and the motor and trolley car and the elevated train
They make the weary city street reverberate with pain:
But there is yet an echo left deep down within my heart
Of the music the Main Street cobblestones made beneath a butcher's cart.

God be thanked for the Milky Way that runs across the sky,
That's the path that my feet would tread whenever I have to die.
Some folks call it a Silver Sword, and some a Pearly Crown,
But the only thing I think it is, is Main Street, Heaventown.

Roofs

(For Amelia Josephine Burr)

The road is wide and the stars are out
   and the breath of the night is sweet,
And this is the time when wanderlust should seize upon my feet.
But I'm glad to turn from the open road and the starlight on my face,
And to leave the splendour of out-of-doors for a human dwelling place.

I never have seen a vagabond who really liked to roam
All up and down the streets of the world and not to have a home:
The tramp who slept in your barn last night and left at break of day
Will wander only until he finds another place to stay.

A gypsy-man will sleep in his cart with canvas overhead;
Or else he'll go into his tent when it is time for bed.
He'll sit on the grass and take his ease so long as the sun is high,
But when it is dark he wants a roof to keep away the sky.

If you call a gypsy a vagabond, I think you do him wrong,
For he never goes a-travelling but he takes his home along.
And the only reason a road is good, as every wanderer knows,
Is just because of the homes, the homes, the homes to which it goes.

They say that life is a highway and its milestones are the years,
And now and then there's a toll-gate where you buy your way with tears.
It's a rough road and a steep road and it stretches broad and

far,
But at last it leads to a golden Town where golden Houses are.

The Snowman in the Yard

(For Thomas Augustine Daly)

The Judge's house has a splendid porch, with pillars and steps of stone,
And the Judge has a lovely flowering hedge that came from across the seas;
In the Hales' garage you could put my house and everything I own,
And the Hales have a lawn like an emerald and a row of poplar trees.

Now I have only a little house, and only a little lot,
And only a few square yards of lawn, with dandelions starred;
But when Winter comes, I have something there
that the Judge and the Hales have not,
And it's better worth having than all their wealth —
it's a snowman in the yard.

The Judge's money brings architects to make his mansion fair;
The Hales have seven gardeners to make their roses grow;
The Judge can get his trees from Spain and France and everywhere,
And raise his orchids under glass in the midst of all the snow.

But I have something no architect or gardener ever made,
A thing that is shaped by the busy touch of little mittened hands:
And the Judge would give up his lonely estate, where the level snow is laid
For the tiny house with the trampled yard,
the yard where the snowman stands.

They say that after Adam and Eve were driven away in tears
  To toil and suffer their life-time through,
    because of the sin they sinned,
The Lord made Winter to punish them for half their exiled years,
  To chill their blood with the snow, and pierce
    their flesh with the icy wind.

But we who inherit the primal curse, and labour for our bread,
   Have yet, thank God, the gift of Home, though Eden's gate is barred:
And through the Winter's crystal veil, Love's roses blossom red,
  For him who lives in a house that has a snowman in the yard.

A Blue Valentine

(For Aline)

Monsignore,
     Right Reverend Bishop Valentinus,
Sometime of Interamna, which is called Ferni,
Now of the delightful Court of Heaven,
I respectfully salute you,
I genuflect
And I kiss your episcopal ring.

It is not, Monsignore,
The fragrant memory of your holy life,
Nor that of your shining and joyous martyrdom,
Which causes me now to address you.
But since this is your august festival, Monsignore,
It seems appropriate to me to state
According to a venerable and agreeable custom,
That I love a beautiful lady.
Her eyes, Monsignore,
Are so blue that they put lovely little blue reflections
On everything that she looks at,
Such as a wall
Or the moon
Or my heart.
It is like the light coming through blue stained glass,
Yet not quite like it,
For the blueness is not transparent,
Only translucent.
Her soul's light shines through,
But her soul cannot be seen.
It is something elusive, whimsical, tender, wanton, infantile, wise
And noble.

She wears, Monsignore, a blue garment,
Made in the manner of the Japanese.
It is very blue —
I think that her eyes have made it more blue,
Sweetly staining it
As the pressure of her body has graciously given it form.
Loving her, Monsignore,
I love all her attributes;
But I believe
That even if I did not love her
I would love the blueness of her eyes,
And her blue garment, made in the manner of the Japanese.

Monsignore,
I have never before troubled you with a request.
The saints whose ears I chiefly worry with my pleas
   are the most exquisite and maternal Brigid,
Gallant Saint Stephen, who puts fire in my blood,
And your brother bishop, my patron,
The generous and jovial Saint Nicholas of Bari.
But, of your courtesy, Monsignore,
Do me this favour:
When you this morning make your way
To the Ivory Throne that bursts into bloom with roses
   because of her who sits upon it,
When you come to pay your devoir to Our Lady,
I beg you, say to her:
"Madame, a poor poet, one of your singing servants yet on earth,
Has asked me to say that at this moment he is especially grateful to you
For wearing a blue gown."

Houses

(For Aline)

When you shall die and to the sky
  Serenely, delicately go,
Saint Peter, when he sees you there,
  Will clash his keys and say:
"Now talk to her, Sir Christopher!
  And hurry, Michelangelo!
She wants to play at building,
  And you've got to help her play!"

Every architect will help erect
  A palace on a lawn of cloud,
With rainbow beams and a sunset roof,
  And a level star-tiled floor;
And at your will you may use the skill
  Of this gay angelic crowd,
When a house is made you will throw it down,
  And they'll build you twenty more.

For Christopher Wren and these other men
  Who used to build on earth
Will love to go to work again
  If they may work for you.
"This porch," you'll say, "should go this way!"
  And they'll work for all they're worth,
And they'll come to your palace every morning,
  And ask you what to do.

And when night comes down on Heaven-town
  (If there should be night up there)
You will choose the house you like the best
  Of all that you can see:

And its walls will glow as you drowsily go
  To the bed up the golden stair,
And I hope you'll be gentle enough to keep
  A room in your house for me.

In Memory

I

Serene and beautiful and very wise,
  Most erudite in curious Grecian lore,
  You lay and read your learned books, and bore
A weight of unshed tears and silent sighs.
The song within your heart could never rise
  Until love bade it spread its wings and soar.
  Nor could you look on Beauty's face before
A poet's burning mouth had touched your eyes.

Love is made out of ecstasy and wonder;
  Love is a poignant and accustomed pain.
It is a burst of Heaven-shaking thunder;
  It is a linnet's fluting after rain.
Love's voice is through your song; above and under
  And in each note to echo and remain.

II

Because Mankind is glad and brave and young,
  Full of gay flames that white and scarlet glow,
  All joys and passions that Mankind may know
By you were nobly felt and nobly sung.
Because Mankind's heart every day is wrung
  By Fate's wild hands that twist and tear it so,
  Therefore you echoed Man's undying woe,
A harp Aeolian on Life's branches hung.

So did the ghosts of toiling children hover
  About the piteous portals of your mind;
Your eyes, that looked on glory, could discover
  The angry scar to which the world was blind:

And it was grief that made Mankind your lover,
  And it was grief that made you love Mankind.
   III

Before Christ left the Citadel of Light,
  To tread the dreadful way of human birth,
  His shadow sometimes fell upon the earth
And those who saw it wept with joy and fright.
"Thou art Apollo, than the sun more bright!"
  They cried. "Our music is of little worth,
  But thrill our blood with thy creative mirth
Thou god of song, thou lord of lyric might!"

O singing pilgrim! who could love and follow
  Your lover Christ, through even love's despair,
You knew within the cypress-darkened hollow
  The feet that on the mountain are so fair.
For it was Christ that was your own Apollo,
  And thorns were in the laurel on your hair.

Apology

(For Eleanor Rogers Cox)

For blows on the fort of evil
  That never shows a breach,
For terrible life-long races
  To a goal no foot can reach,
For reckless leaps into darkness
  With hands outstretched to a star,
There is jubilation in Heaven
  Where the great dead poets are.

There is joy over disappointment
  And delight in hopes that were vain.
Each poet is glad there was no cure
  To stop his lonely pain.
For nothing keeps a poet
  In his high singing mood
Like unappeasable hunger
  For unattainable food.

So fools are glad of the folly
  That made them weep and sing,
And Keats is thankful for Fanny Brawne
  And Drummond for his king.
They know that on flinty sorrow
  And failure and desire
The steel of their souls was hammered
  To bring forth the lyric fire.

Lord Byron and Shelley and Plunkett,
  McDonough and Hunt and Pearse
See now why their hatred of tyrants
  Was so insistently fierce.

Is Freedom only a Will-o'-the-wisp
  To cheat a poet's eye?
Be it phantom or fact, it's a noble cause
  In which to sing and to die!

So not for the Rainbow taken
  And the magical White Bird snared
The poets sing grateful carols
  In the place to which they have fared;
But for their lifetime's passion,
  The quest that was fruitless and long,
They chorus their loud thanksgiving
  To the thorn-crowned Master of Song.

The Proud Poet

(For Shaemas O Sheel)

One winter night a Devil came and sat upon my bed,
   His eyes were full of laughter for his heart was full of crime.
"Why don't you take up fancy work, or embroidery?" he said,
  "For a needle is as manly a tool as a pen that makes a rhyme!"
"You little ugly Devil," said I, "go back to Hell
  For the idea you express I will not listen to:
I have trouble enough with poetry and poverty as well,
  Without having to pay attention to orators like you.

"When you say of the making of ballads and songs that it is woman's work
   You forget all the fighting poets that have been in every land.
There was Byron who left all his lady-loves to fight against the Turk,
  And David, the Singing King of the Jews,
    who was born with a sword in his hand.
It was yesterday that Rupert Brooke went out to the Wars and died,
   And Sir Philip Sidney's lyric voice was as sweet as his arm was strong;
And Sir Walter Raleigh met the axe as a lover meets his bride,
  Because he carried in his soul the courage of his song.

"And there is no consolation so quickening to the heart
  As the warmth and whiteness that come from the lines of noble poetry.
It is strong joy to read it when the wounds of the spirit smart,
  It puts the flame in a lonely breast where only ashes be.
It is strong joy to read it, and to make it is a thing

That exalts a man with a sacreder pride than any pride on earth.
For it makes him kneel to a broken slave and set his foot on a king,
And it shakes the walls of his little soul with the echo of God's mirth.

"There was the poet Homer had the sorrow to be blind,
Yet a hundred people with good eyes would listen to him all night;
For they took great enjoyment in the heaven of his mind,
And were glad when the old blind poet let them share his powers of sight.
And there was Heine lying on his mattress all day long,
He had no wealth, he had no friends, he had no joy at all,
Except to pour his sorrow into little cups of song,
And the world finds in them the magic wine that his broken heart let fall.

"And these are only a couple of names from a list of a thousand score
Who have put their glory on the world in poverty and pain.
And the title of poet's a noble thing, worth living and dying for,
Though all the devils on earth and in Hell spit at me their disdain.
It is stern work, it is perilous work, to thrust your hand in the sun
And pull out a spark of immortal flame to warm the hearts of men:
But Prometheus, torn by the claws and beaks whose task is never done,
Would be tortured another eternity to go stealing fire again."

Lionel Johnson

(For the Rev. John J. Burke, C. S. P.)

There was a murkier tinge in London's air
  As if the honest fog blushed black for shame.
  Fools sang of sin, for other fools' acclaim,
And Milton's wreath was tossed to Baudelaire.
The flowers of evil blossomed everywhere,
  But in their midst a radiant lily came
  Candescent, pure, a cup of living flame,
Bloomed for a day, and left the earth more fair.

And was it Charles, thy "fair and fatal King",
  Who bade thee welcome to the lovely land?
Or did Lord David cease to harp and sing
  To take in his thine emulative hand?
Or did Our Lady's smile shine forth, to bring
  Her lyric Knight within her choir to stand?

Father Gerard Hopkins, S. J.

Why didst thou carve thy speech laboriously,
  And match and blend thy words with curious art?
  For Song, one saith, is but a human heart
Speaking aloud, undisciplined and free.
Nay, God be praised, Who fixed thy task for thee!
  Austere, ecstatic craftsman, set apart
  From all who traffic in Apollo's mart,
On thy phrased paten shall the Splendour be!

Now, carelessly we throw a rhyme to God,
  Singing His praise when other songs are done.
But thou, who knewest paths Teresa trod,
  Losing thyself, what is it thou hast won?
O bleeding feet, with peace and glory shod!
  O happy moth, that flew into the Sun!

Gates and Doors

(For Richardson Little Wright)

There was a gentle hostler
  (And blessed be his name!)
He opened up the stable
  The night Our Lady came.
Our Lady and Saint Joseph,
  He gave them food and bed,
And Jesus Christ has given him
  A glory round his head.

      So let the gate swing open
       However poor the yard,
      Lest weary people visit you
       And find their passage barred;
      Unlatch the door at midnight
       And let your lantern's glow
      Shine out to guide the traveler's feet
       To you across the snow.

There was a courteous hostler
  (He is in Heaven to-night)
He held Our Lady's bridle
  And helped her to alight;
He spread clean straw before her
  Whereon she might lie down,
And Jesus Christ has given him
  An everlasting crown.

      Unlock the door this evening
       And let your gate swing wide,
      Let all who ask for shelter
       Come speedily inside.

What if your yard be narrow?
What if your house be small?
There is a Guest is coming
Will glorify it all.

There was a joyous hostler
Who knelt on Christmas morn
Beside the radiant manger
Wherein his Lord was born.
His heart was full of laughter,
His soul was full of bliss
When Jesus, on His Mother's lap,
Gave him His hand to kiss.

Unbar your heart this evening
And keep no stranger out,
Take from your soul's great portal
The barrier of doubt.
To humble folk and weary
Give hearty welcoming,
Your breast shall be to-morrow
The cradle of a King.

The Robe of Christ

(For Cecil Chesterton)

At the foot of the Cross on Calvary
  Three soldiers sat and diced,
And one of them was the Devil
  And he won the Robe of Christ.

When the Devil comes in his proper form
  To the chamber where I dwell,
I know him and make the Sign of the Cross
  Which drives him back to Hell.

And when he comes like a friendly man
  And puts his hand in mine,
The fervour in his voice is not
  From love or joy or wine.

And when he comes like a woman,
  With lovely, smiling eyes,
Black dreams float over his golden head
  Like a swarm of carrion flies.

Now many a million tortured souls
  In his red halls there be:
Why does he spend his subtle craft
  In hunting after me?

Kings, queens and crested warriors
  Whose memory rings through time,
These are his prey, and what to him
  Is this poor man of rhyme,

That he, with such laborious skill,

  Should change from role to role,
Should daily act so many a part
  To get my little soul?

Oh, he can be the forest,
  And he can be the sun,
Or a buttercup, or an hour of rest
  When the weary day is done.

I saw him through a thousand veils,
  And has not this sufficed?
Now, must I look on the Devil robed
  In the radiant Robe of Christ?

He comes, and his face is sad and mild,
  With thorns his head is crowned;
There are great bleeding wounds in his feet,
  And in each hand a wound.

How can I tell, who am a fool,
  If this be Christ or no?
Those bleeding hands outstretched to me!
  Those eyes that love me so!

I see the Robe — I look — I hope —
  I fear — but there is one
Who will direct my troubled mind;
  Christ's Mother knows her Son.

O Mother of Good Counsel, lend
  Intelligence to me!
Encompass me with wisdom,
  Thou Tower of Ivory!

"This is the Man of Lies," she says,
  "Disguised with fearful art:
He has the wounded hands and feet,
  But not the wounded heart."

Beside the Cross on Calvary
  She watched them as they diced.
She saw the Devil join the game
  And win the Robe of Christ.

The Singing Girl

(For the Rev. Edward F. Garesche, S. J.)

There was a little maiden
  In blue and silver drest,
She sang to God in Heaven
  And God within her breast.

It flooded me with pleasure,
  It pierced me like a sword,
When this young maiden sang: "My soul
  Doth magnify the Lord."

The stars sing all together
  And hear the angels sing,
But they said they had never heard
  So beautiful a thing.

Saint Mary and Saint Joseph,
  And Saint Elizabeth,
Pray for us poets now
  And at the hour of death.

The Annunciation

(For Helen Parry Eden)

"Hail Mary, full of grace," the Angel saith.
  Our Lady bows her head, and is ashamed;
  She has a Bridegroom Who may not be named,
Her mortal flesh bears Him Who conquers death.
Now in the dust her spirit grovelleth;
  Too bright a Sun before her eyes has flamed,
  Too fair a herald joy too high proclaimed,
And human lips have trembled in God's breath.

O Mother-Maid, thou art ashamed to cover
  With thy white self, whereon no stain can be,
Thy God, Who came from Heaven to be thy Lover,
  Thy God, Who came from Heaven to dwell in thee.
About thy head celestial legions hover,
  Chanting the praise of thy humility.

Roses

(For Katherine Bregy)

I went to gather roses and twine them in a ring,
For I would make a posy, a posy for the King.
I got an hundred roses, the loveliest there be,
From the white rose vine and the pink rose bush and from the red rose tree.

But when I took my posy and laid it at His feet
I found He had His roses a million times more sweet.
There was a scarlet blossom upon each foot and hand,
And a great pink rose bloomed from His side for the healing of the land.

Now of this fair and awful King there is this marvel told,
That He wears a crown of linked thorns instead of one of gold.
Where there are thorns are roses, and I saw a line of red,
A little wreath of roses around His radiant head.

A red rose is His Sacred Heart, a white rose is His face,
And His breath has turned the barren world to a rich and flowery place.
He is the Rose of Sharon, His gardener am I,
And I shall drink His fragrance in Heaven when I die.

The Visitation

(For Louise Imogen Guiney)

There is a wall of flesh before the eyes
  Of John, who yet perceives and hails his King.
  It is Our Lady's painful bliss to bring
Before mankind the Glory of the skies.
Her cousin feels her womb's sweet burden rise
  And leap with joy, and she comes forth to sing,
  With trembling mouth, her words of welcoming.
She knows her hidden God, and prophesies.

Saint John, pray for us, weary souls that tarry
  Where life is withered by sin's deadly breath.
Pray for us, whom the dogs of Satan harry,
  Saint John, Saint Anne, and Saint Elizabeth.
And, Mother Mary, give us Christ to carry
  Within our hearts, that we may conquer death.

Multiplication

(For S. M. E.)

I take my leave, with sorrow, of Him I love so well;
I look my last upon His small and radiant prison-cell;
O happy lamp! to serve Him with never ceasing light!
O happy flame! to tremble forever in His sight!

I leave the holy quiet for the loudly human train,
And my heart that He has breathed upon is filled with lonely pain.
O King, O Friend, O Lover! What sorer grief can be
In all the reddest depths of Hell than banishment from Thee?

But from my window as I speed across the sleeping land
I see the towns and villages wherein His houses stand.
Above the roofs I see a cross outlined against the night,
And I know that there my Lover dwells in His sacramental might.

Dominions kneel before Him, and Powers kiss His feet,
Yet for me He keeps His weary watch in the turmoil of the street:
The King of Kings awaits me, wherever I may go,
O who am I that He should deign to love and serve me so?

Thanksgiving

(For John Bunker)

The roar of the world is in my ears.
  Thank God for the roar of the world!
Thank God for the mighty tide of fears
  Against me always hurled!

Thank God for the bitter and ceaseless strife,
  And the sting of His chastening rod!
Thank God for the stress and the pain of life,
  And Oh, thank God for God!

The Thorn

(For the Rev. Charles L. O'Donnell, C. S. C.)

The garden of God is a radiant place,
And every flower has a holy face:
Our Lady like a lily bends above the cloudy sod,
But Saint Michael is the thorn on the rosebush of God.

David is the song upon God's lips,
And Our Lady is the goblet that He sips:
And Gabriel's the breath of His command,
But Saint Michael is the sword in God's right hand.

The Ivory Tower is fair to see,
And may her walls encompass me!
But when the Devil comes with the thunder of his might,
Saint Michael, show me how to fight!

The Big Top

The boom and blare of the big brass band is cheering to my heart
  And I like the smell of the trampled grass and elephants and hay.
I take off my hat to the acrobat with his delicate, strong art,
  And the motley mirth of the chalk-faced clown drives all my care away.

I wish I could feel as they must feel, these players brave and fair,
  Who nonchalantly juggle death before a staring throng.
It must be fine to walk a line of silver in the air
  And to cleave a hundred feet of space with a gesture like a song.

Sir Henry Irving never knew a keener, sweeter thrill
  Than that which stirs the breast of him who turns his painted face
To the circling crowd who laugh aloud and clap hands with a will
  As a tribute to the clown who won the great wheel-barrow race.

Now, one shall work in the living rock with a mallet and a knife,
  And another shall dance on a big white horse that canters round a ring,
By another's hand shall colours stand in similitude of life;
  And the hearts of the three shall be moved by one mysterious high thing.

For the sculptor and the acrobat and the painter are the same.
  They know one hope, one fear, one pride, one sorrow and one mirth,
And they take delight in the endless fight for the fickle world's acclaim;

For they worship art above the clouds and serve her on the earth.

But you, who can build of the stubborn rock no form of loveliness,
Who can never mingle the radiant hues to make a wonder live,
Who can only show your little woe to the world in a rhythmic dress —
What kind of a counterpart of you does the three-ring circus give?

Well — here in the little side-show tent to-day some people stand,
One is a giant, one a dwarf, and one has a figured skin,
And each is scarred and seared and marred by Fate's relentless hand,
And each one shows his grief for pay, with a sort of pride therein.

You put your sorrow into rhyme and want the world to look;
You sing the news of your ruined hope and want the world to hear;
Their woe is pent in a canvas tent and yours in a printed book.
O, poet of the broken heart, salute your brothers here!

Queen Elizabeth Speaks

My hands were stained with blood, my heart was proud and cold,
My soul is black with shame . . . but I gave Shakespeare gold.
So after aeons of flame, I may, by grace of God,
Rise up to kiss the dust that Shakespeare's feet have trod.

Mid-ocean in War-time

(For My Mother)

The fragile splendour of the level sea,
  The moon's serene and silver-veiled face,
  Make of this vessel an enchanted place
Full of white mirth and golden sorcery.
Now, for a time, shall careless laughter be
  Blended with song, to lend song sweeter grace,
  And the old stars, in their unending race,
Shall heed and envy young humanity.

And yet to-night, a hundred leagues away,
  These waters blush a strange and awful red.
Before the moon, a cloud obscenely grey
  Rises from decks that crash with flying lead.
And these stars smile their immemorial way
  On waves that shroud a thousand newly dead!

In Memory of Rupert Brooke

In alien earth, across a troubled sea,
  His body lies that was so fair and young.
  His mouth is stopped, with half his songs unsung;
His arm is still, that struck to make men free.
But let no cloud of lamentation be
  Where, on a warrior's grave, a lyre is hung.
  We keep the echoes of his golden tongue,
We keep the vision of his chivalry.

So Israel's joy, the loveliest of kings,
  Smote now his harp, and now the hostile horde.
To-day the starry roof of Heaven rings
  With psalms a soldier made to praise his Lord;
And David rests beneath Eternal wings,
  Song on his lips, and in his hand a sword.

The New School

(For My Mother)

The halls that were loud with the merry tread of young and careless feet
  Are still with a stillness that is too drear to seem like holiday,
And never a gust of laughter breaks the calm of the dreaming street
  Or rises to shake the ivied walls and frighten the doves away.

The dust is on book and on empty desk, and the tennis-racquet and balls
  Lie still in their lonely locker and wait for a game that is never played,
And over the study and lecture-room and the river and meadow falls
  A stern peace, a strange peace, a peace that War has made.

For many a youthful shoulder now is gay with an epaulet,
  And the hand that was deft with a cricket-bat is defter with a sword,
And some of the lads will laugh to-day where the trench is red and wet,
  And some will win on the bloody field the accolade of the Lord.

They have taken their youth and mirth away
  from the study and playing-ground
  To a new school in an alien land beneath an alien sky;
Out in the smoke and roar of the fight their lessons and games are found,
  And they who were learning how to live are learning how to die.

And after the golden day has come and the war is at an end,
   A slab of bronze on the chapel wall will tell of the noble dead.
And every name on that radiant list will be the name of a friend,
  A name that shall through the centuries in grateful prayers be said.

And there will be ghosts in the old school,
   brave ghosts with laughing eyes,
  On the field with a ghostly cricket-bat, by the stream with a ghostly rod;
They will touch the hearts of the living with a flame that sanctifies,
  A flame that they took with strong young hands
    from the altar-fires of God.

Easter Week

(In memory of Joseph Mary Plunkett)

("Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.")
William Butler Yeats.

"Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave."
Then, Yeats, what gave that Easter dawn
A hue so radiantly brave?

There was a rain of blood that day,
Red rain in gay blue April weather.
It blessed the earth till it gave birth
To valour thick as blooms of heather.

Romantic Ireland never dies!
O'Leary lies in fertile ground,
And songs and spears throughout the years
Rise up where patriot graves are found.

Immortal patriots newly dead
And ye that bled in bygone years,
What banners rise before your eyes?
What is the tune that greets your ears?

The young Republic's banners smile
For many a mile where troops convene.
O'Connell Street is loudly sweet
With strains of Wearing of the Green.

The soil of Ireland throbs and glows
With life that knows the hour is here

To strike again like Irishmen
  For that which Irishmen hold dear.

Lord Edward leaves his resting place
  And Sarsfield's face is glad and fierce.
See Emmet leap from troubled sleep
  To grasp the hand of Padraic Pearse!

There is no rope can strangle song
  And not for long death takes his toll.
No prison bars can dim the stars
  Nor quicklime eat the living soul.

Romantic Ireland is not old.
  For years untold her youth will shine.
Her heart is fed on Heavenly bread,
  The blood of martyrs is her wine.

The Cathedral of Rheims

(From the French of Emile Verhaeren)

He who walks through the meadows of Champagne
    At noon in Fall, when leaves like gold appear,
    Sees it draw near
Like some great mountain set upon the plain,
From radiant dawn until the close of day,
    Nearer it grows
    To him who goes
Across the country. When tall towers lay
    Their shadowy pall
    Upon his way,
    He enters, where
The solid stone is hollowed deep by all
Its centuries of beauty and of prayer.

Ancient French temple! thou whose hundred kings
Watch over thee, emblazoned on thy walls,
Tell me, within thy memory-hallowed halls
What chant of triumph, or what war-song rings?
Thou hast known Clovis and his Frankish train,
Whose mighty hand Saint Remy's hand did keep
And in thy spacious vault perhaps may sleep
An echo of the voice of Charlemagne.
For God thou has known fear, when from His side
Men wandered, seeking alien shrines and new,
But still the sky was bountiful and blue
And thou wast crowned with France's love and pride.
Sacred thou art, from pinnacle to base;
And in thy panes of gold and scarlet glass
The setting sun sees thousandfold his face;
Sorrow and joy, in stately silence pass

Across thy walls, the shadow and the light;
Around thy lofty pillars, tapers white
Illuminate, with delicate sharp flames,
The brows of saints with venerable names,
And in the night erect a fiery wall.
A great but silent fervour burns in all
Those simple folk who kneel, pathetic, dumb,
And know that down below, beside the Rhine —
Cannon, horses, soldiers, flags in line —
With blare of trumpets, mighty armies come.

Suddenly, each knows fear;
Swift rumours pass, that every one must hear,
The hostile banners blaze against the sky
And by the embassies mobs rage and cry.
Now war has come, and peace is at an end.
On Paris town the German troops descend.
They are turned back, and driven to Champagne.
And now, as to so many weary men,
The glorious temple gives them welcome, when
It meets them at the bottom of the plain.

At once, they set their cannon in its way.
    There is no gable now, nor wall
That does not suffer, night and day,
    As shot and shell in crushing torrents fall.
The stricken tocsin quivers through the tower;
    The triple nave, the apse, the lonely choir
Are circled, hour by hour,
    With thundering bands of fire
And Death is scattered broadcast among men.

And then
That which was splendid with baptismal grace;
The stately arches soaring into space,
The transepts, columns, windows gray and gold,
The organ, in whose tones the ocean rolled,
The crypts, of mighty shades the dwelling places,

The Virgin's gentle hands, the Saints' pure faces,
All, even the pardoning hands of Christ the Lord
Were struck and broken by the wanton sword
Of sacrilegious lust.

O beauty slain, O glory in the dust!
Strong walls of faith, most basely overthrown!
The crawling flames, like adders glistening
Ate the white fabric of this lovely thing.
Now from its soul arose a piteous moan,
The soul that always loved the just and fair.
Granite and marble loud their woe confessed,
The silver monstrances that Popes had blessed,
The chalices and lamps and crosiers rare
Were seared and twisted by a flaming breath;
The horror everywhere did range and swell,
The guardian Saints into this furnace fell,
Their bitter tears and screams were stilled in death.

Around the flames armed hosts are skirmishing,
The burning sun reflects the lurid scene;
The German army, fighting for its life,
Rallies its torn and terrified left wing;
    And, as they near this place
    The imperial eagles see
    Before them in their flight,
Here, in the solemn night,
The old cathedral, to the years to be
    Showing, with wounded arms, their own disgrace.

Kings

(For the Rev. James B. Dollard)

The Kings of the earth are men of might,
And cities are burned for their delight,
And the skies rain death in the silent night,
  And the hills belch death all day!

But the King of Heaven, Who made them all,
Is fair and gentle, and very small;
He lies in the straw, by the oxen's stall —
  Let them think of Him to-day!

The White Ships and the Red

(For Alden March)

With drooping sail and pennant
  That never a wind may reach,
They float in sunless waters
  Beside a sunless beach.
Their mighty masts and funnels
  Are white as driven snow,
And with a pallid radiance
  Their ghostly bulwarks glow.

Here is a Spanish galleon
  That once with gold was gay,
Here is a Roman trireme
  Whose hues outshone the day.
But Tyrian dyes have faded,
  And prows that once were bright
With rainbow stains wear only
  Death's livid, dreadful white.

White as the ice that clove her
  That unforgotten day,
Among her pallid sisters
  The grim Titanic lay.
And through the leagues above her
  She looked aghast, and said:
"What is this living ship that comes
  Where every ship is dead?"

The ghostly vessels trembled
  From ruined stern to prow;

What was this thing of terror
  That broke their vigil now?
Down through the startled ocean
  A mighty vessel came,
Not white, as all dead ships must be,
  But red, like living flame!

The pale green waves about her
  Were swiftly, strangely dyed,
By the great scarlet stream that flowed
  From out her wounded side.
And all her decks were scarlet
  And all her shattered crew.
She sank among the white ghost ships
  And stained them through and through.

The grim Titanic greeted her
  "And who art thou?" she said;
"Why dost thou join our ghostly fleet
  Arrayed in living red?
We are the ships of sorrow
  Who spend the weary night,
Until the dawn of Judgment Day,
  Obscure and still and white."

"Nay," said the scarlet visitor,
  "Though I sink through the sea,
A ruined thing that was a ship,
  I sink not as did ye.
For ye met with your destiny
  By storm or rock or fight,
So through the lagging centuries
  Ye wear your robes of white.

"But never crashing iceberg
  Nor honest shot of foe,
Nor hidden reef has sent me
  The way that I must go.

My wound that stains the waters,
  My blood that is like flame,
Bear witness to a loathly deed,
  A deed without a name.

"I went not forth to battle,
  I carried friendly men,
The children played about my decks,
  The women sang — and then —
And then — the sun blushed scarlet
  And Heaven hid its face,
The world that God created
  Became a shameful place!

"My wrong cries out for vengeance,
  The blow that sent me here
Was aimed in Hell. My dying scream
  Has reached Jehovah's ear.
Not all the seven oceans
  Shall wash away that stain;
Upon a brow that wears a crown
  I am the brand of Cain."

When God's great voice assembles
  The fleet on Judgment Day,
The ghosts of ruined ships will rise
  In sea and strait and bay.
Though they have lain for ages
  Beneath the changeless flood,
They shall be white as silver,
  But one — shall be like blood.

The following biographical information is from the Occasional Notes to 'A Treasury of War Poetry', 1919, edited by George Herbert Clarke.

Kilmer, Joyce. He was born in New Brunswick, N.J., December 6, 1886. He had first joined the Officers' Reserve Corps, but soon resigned. Within seventeen days after the entrance of the United States into the

war he left his journalistic career to enlist as a Private in the Seventh Regiment, National Guard, New York. Shortly before the Seventh left New York for Spartanburg, S.C., he was transferred at his own request to the 165th U.S. Infantry, formerly the 69th National Guard Regiment of New York. He accompanied the regiment as a Private to Camp Mills, Long Island. He was transferred from Company H to Headquarters Company, and became Senior Regimental Statistician. The regiment sailed for France in October, 1917, and there he was placed in the Adjutant's Office and made Sergeant. Thereafter he was attached to the Regimental Intelligence Staff as an observer, and showed great fidelity and courage in the tasks to which he was assigned. He was killed in action on July 30, 1918, while trying to locate hostile machine-guns in the Wood of the Burned Bridge, on the Ourcq. His war writings may be found in 'Main Street, and other Poems', and 'Joyce Kilmer, Poems, Essays and Letters'.

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