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Title Masque of Reason

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A MASQUE OF REASON

By the same author

A FURTHER RANGE
COLLECTED POEMS
A WITNESS TREE
COME IN AND OTHER POEMS

A MASQUE OF REASON

by

ROBERT FROST

containing

A Masque of Reason A Masque of Mercy
(Two New England Biblicals)
together with
Steeple Bush and other Poems



But Mishna is strong wine
LONGFELLOW

It was the wanton gospeller
HAWTHORNE

JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

A ROMANTIC CHASM

HAVING a book in London is not quite the same thing today as it was in 1915 when I had my first book there or anywhere – half a lifetime and two wars ago. To be sure by 1915 I had already had it from Kipling that I was hopelessly hedged from the elder earth with alien speech. But hearing then I heard not. I was young and heedless. My vitality shed discouragement as the well-oiled feathers of a healthy duck shed wetness. And to be merely hedged off was no great matter. What was a hedge to the poacher in my blood of a shiny night in the season of the year? It took an American, a friend, Henry L. Mencken, to rouse me to a sense of national differences. My pedantry would be poor and my desert small with the educated if I could pretend to look unscared into the gulf his great book has made to yawn between the American and English languages.

I wish Edward Thomas (that poet) were here to ponder gulfs in general with me as in the days when he and I tired the sun with talking on the footpaths and stiles of Leddington and Ryton. I should like to ask him if it isn't true that the world is in parts and the separation of the parts as important as the connection of the parts. Isn't the great demand for good spacing? But now I do not know the number of his mansion to write him so much as a letter of inquiry. The mansions so many would probably be numberless. Then I must leave it to Jack Haines in Gloucester to tell me frankly if the gulf in word or idiom has been seriously widening since the night when to illustrate our talk about the internationality of ferns, he boosted me up a small cliff to see by matchlight a spleenwort he knew of there.

The Dea knows (as we still say in New England) I would go to any length short of idolatry to keep Great Britain within speaking, or at least shouting, distance of America in the trying times seen ahead. I might not care to go for a hero myself, but I could perhaps persuade some Mark Curtius of our race to leap into the gulf in the forum for me and close it as much as it was thought needful. Anyway I might be tempted to enlist with the forlorn hope who would sacrifice all the words in both languages except a very limited few we could agree on as meaning the same in both; only with the proviso that I should be drawn on the committee for vocabulary where I could hold out for certain favourites for my own use, such as *quackery* for remedies too unorthodox, *boustrophedon* for a more scientific eye-reading (if science is really in earnest about advancing the humanities), *ornery* for the old-fashioned colonial pronunciation of ordinary with only one accent. And there are other good words I should have to consult Ivor Brown about before giving them up. *Sua suaue*, for instance, for the way my wounds heal after cruel criticism.

It is beyond idealism of mine to think of closing the gulf so tight as to embarrass the beneficiaries of it on either verge. The Mother Country will hardly deny having profited in several ways by American independence in business and government. May she profit more. For me I should hate to miss the chance for exotic charm my distance overseas might lend me. Charm may be too strong a word. Suppose American had got as far away from English as present day English is from Chaucerian, or at least Elizabethan: obviously my verse by being in American would automatically, without mental expense on my part, be raised to the rank of having to be annotated. It might be advertised as with glossary. It might be studied.

I should surely hesitate to squeeze the Atlantic out from

between the two continents lest it should raise the tide too high for ports in the Pacific to adjust their wharves to the change.

But I mustn't talk myself entirely out of respect for the gulf. I don't doubt its awesome reality. Still I begin to wonder if it is anything more than a 'romantic chasm' of poetry and slang.

If that is a question, Phoebus replied (and touched my trembling ears), I can support you in your wild Coleridgian surmise. The estrangement in language is pretty much due to the very word-shift by metaphor you do your best to take part in daily so as to hold your closest friend off where you can 'entertain her always as a stranger' - with the freshness of a stranger. It often looks dangerously like aberration into a new dialect. But it is mostly back and forth in the same place like the jumping of a grasshopper whose day's work gets him nowhere. And even when it is a word-drift, which is a chain of word-shifts all in one direction, it is nothing but that an average ingenuity with figures of speech can be counted on to keep up with, or in half a jiffy overtake. You are both free peoples so used to your freedom that you are not interested in talking too much about what you are free from. Your pride is in what you dare to take liberties with, be it word, friend or institution. In the beginning was the word, to be sure, very sure, and a solid basic comfort it remains in situ, but the fun only begins with the spirited when you treat the word as a point of many departures. There is risk in the play. But if some of the company get lost in the excitement, charge it up to proving the truth of chapter and verse in the Gospel according to Saint Mark, although the oracle speaking is Delphic. Remember the future of the world may depend on your keeping in practice with each other's quips and figures.

A MASQUE OF REASON

If that is all there is to be of Heaven,
Escape from so great pains of life on earth
It gives a sense of let-up calculated
To last a fellow to Eternity.

GOD

Yes, by and by. But first a larger matter.
I've had you on my mind a thousand years
To thank you some day for the way you helped
me

Establish once for all the principle
There's no connection man can reason out
Between his just deserts and what he gets.
Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed.
'Twas a great demonstration we put on.
I should have spoken sooner had I found
The word I wanted. You would have supposed
One who in the beginning *was* the Word
Would be in a position to command it.
I have to wait for words like anyone.
Too long I've owed you this apology
For the apparently unmeaning sorrow
You were afflicted with in those old days.
But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn't understand it at the time.
It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning.
And it came out all right. I have no doubt
You realize by now the part you played
To stultify the Deuteronomist
And change the tenor of religious thought.
My thanks are to you for releasing me
From moral bondage to the human race.
The only free will there at first was man's,
Who could do good or evil as he chose.
I had no choice but I must follow him

JOB'S WIFE The witch of Endor was a friend of mine.

GOD You wouldn't say she fared so very badly.
I noticed when she called up Samuel
His spirit had to come. Apparently
A witch was stronger than a prophet there.

JOB'S WIFE But she was burned for witchcraft.

GOD That is not
Of record in my Note Book.

JOB'S WIFE Well, she was.
And I should like to know the reason why.

GOD There you go asking for the very thing
We've just agreed I didn't have to give.

*(The throne collapses. But He picks it up
and this time locks it up and leaves it)*

Where has she been the last half hour or so?
She wants to know why there is still injustice.
I answer flatly. That's the way it is,
And bid my will avouch it like Macbeth.
We may as well go back to the beginning
And look for justice in the case of Segub.

JOB Oh, Lord, let's not go *back* to anything . . .

GOD Because your wife's past won't bear looking
into?
In our great moment what did you do, Madam?
What did you try to make your husband say?

JOB'S WIFE No, let's not live things over. I don't care.
I stood by Job. I may have turned on You.
Job scratched his boils and tried to think what he
Had done or not done to or for the poor.

The test is always how we treat the poor.
 It's time the poor were treated by the state
 In some way not so penal as the poorhouse.
 That's one thing more to put on Your agenda.
 Job hadn't done a thing, poor innocent.
 I told him not to scratch: it made it worse.
 If I said once I said a thousand times,
 Don't scratch! And when, as rotten as his skin,
 His tents blew all to pieces, I picked up
 Enough to build him every night a pup tent
 Around him so it wouldn't touch and hurt him.
 I did my wifely duty. I should tremble!
 All You can seem to do is lose Your temper
 When reason-hungry mortals ask for reasons.
 Of course, in the abstract high singular
 There isn't any universal reason;
 And no one but a man would think there was.
 You don't catch women trying to be Plato.
 Still there must be lots of unsystematic
 Stray scraps of palliative reason
 It wouldn't hurt You to vouchsafe the faithful.
 You thought it was agreed You needn't give
 them.
 You thought to suit Yourself. I've not agreed
 To anything with anyone.

JOB There, there,
 You go to sleep. God must await events
 As well as words.

JOB'S WIFE I'm serious. God's had
 Aeons of time and still it's mostly women
 Get burned for prophecy, men almost never.

JOB God needs time just as much as you or I
 To get things done. Reformers fail to see that.

She'll go to sleep. Nothing keeps her awake
But physical activity, I find.
Try to read to her and she drops right off.

GOD She's beautiful.

JOB Yes, she was just remarking
She now felt younger by a thousand years
Than the day she was born.

GOD That's about right,
I should have said. You got your age reversed
When time was found to be a space dimension
That could, like any space, be turned around in?

JOB Yes, both of us: we saw to that at once.
But, God, I have a question too to raise.
(My wife gets in ahead of me with hers.)
I need some help about this reason problem
Before I am too late to be got right
As to what reasons I agree to waive.
I'm apt to string along with Thyatira.
God knows – or rather, You know (God forgive
me)

I waived the reason for my ordeal -- but --
I have a question even there to ask --
In confidence. There's no one here but her,
And she's a woman: she's not interested
In general ideas and principles.

GOD What are her interests, Job?

JOB Witch-women's rights.
Humour her there or she will be confirmed
In her suspicion You're no feminist.
You have it in for women, she believes.
Kipling invokes You as Lord God of Hosts.

She'd like to know how You would take a
prayer
That started off Lord God of Hostesses.

GOD I'm charmed with her.

JOB Yes, I could see You were.
But to my question. I am much impressed
With what You say we have established.
Between us, You and I.

GOD I make you see?
It would be too bad if Columbus-like
You failed to see the worth of your achieve-
ment.

JOB You call it mine.

GOD We groped it out together.
Any originality it showed
I give you credit for. My forte is truth,
Or metaphysics, long the world's reproach
For standing still in one place true forever;
While science goes self-superseding on.
Look at how far we've left the current science
Of Genesis behind. The wisdom there though,
Is just as good as when I uttered it.
Still, novelty has doubtless an attraction.

JOB So it's important who first thinks of things?

GOD I'm a great stickler for the author's name.
By proper names I find I do my thinking.

JOB'S WIFE God, who invented earth?

JOB What, still awake?

There's will as motor and there's will as brakes.
Reason is, I suppose, the steering gear.
The will as brakes can't stop the will as motor
For very long. We're plainly made to go.
We're going anyway and may as well
Have some say as to where we're headed for;
Just as we will be talking anyway
And may as well throw in a little sense.
Let's do so now. Because I let You off
From telling me Your reason, don't assume
I thought You had none. Somewhere back
I knew You had one. But this isn't it
You're giving me. You say we groped this out.
But if You will forgive me the irreverence,
It sounds to me as if You thought it out,
And took Your time to it. It seems to me
An afterthought, a long long afterthought.
I'd give more for one least beforehand reason
Than all the justifying ex-post-facto
Excuses trumped up by You for theologians.
The front of being answerable to no one
I'm with You in maintaining to the public.
But Lord, we showed them what. The audience
Has all gone home to bed. The play's played
out.

Come, after all these years – to satisfy me.
I'm curious. And I'm a grown-up man:
I'm not a child for You to put me off
And tantalize me with another 'Oh, because'.
You'd be the last to want me to believe
All Your effects were merely lucky blunders.
That would be unbelief and atheism.
The artist in me cries out for design.
Such devilish ingenuity of torture

So there is nothing we can do about it
But warn the children they perhaps should
have none.

You could end this by simply coming out
And saying plainly and unequivocally
Whether there's any part of man immortal.
Yet You don't speak. Let fools bemuse them-
selves

By being baffled for the sake of being.
I'm sick of the whole artificial puzzle.

JOB'S WIFE You won't get any answers out of God.

GOD My kingdom, what an outbreak!

JOB'S WIFE Job is right.
Your kingdom, yes, Your kingdom come on
earth.
Pray tell me what does that mean. Anything?
Perhaps that earth is going to crack some day
Like a big egg and hatch a heaven out
Of all the dead and buried from their graves.
One simple little statement from the throne
Would put an end to such fantastic nonsense;
And, too, take care of twenty of the four
And twenty freedoms on the party docket.
Or is it only four? My extra twenty
Are freedoms from the need of asking questions.
(I hope You know the game called twenty
questions.)
For instance, is there such a thing as Progress?
Job says there's no such thing as Earth's be-
coming
An easier place for man to save his soul in.
Except as a hard place to save his soul in,

A trial ground where he can try himself
And find out whether he is any good,
It would be meaningless. It might as well
Be Heaven at once and have it over with.

GOD Two pitching on like this tend to confuse me.
One at a time, please. I will answer Job first.
I'm going to tell Job why I tortured him
And trust it won't be adding to the torture.
I was just showing off to the Devil, Job,
As is set forth in chapters One and Two.

(Job takes a few steps pacing) Do you mind?
(God eyes him anxiously)

JOB No. No, I must'nt.
'Twas human of You. I expected more
Than I could understand and what I get
Is almost less than I can understand.
But I don't mind. Let's leave it as it stood.
The point was it was none of my concern.
I stick to that. But talk about confusion!
How is that for a mix-up, Thyatira?
Yet I suppose what seems to us confusion
Is not confusion, but the form of forms,
The serpent's tail stuck down the serpent's
throat,
Which is the symbol of eternity
And also of the way all things come round,
Or of how rays return upon themselves,
To quote the greatest Western poem yet.
Though I hold rays deteriorate to nothing,
First white, then red, then ultra-red, then out.

GOD Job, you must understand my provocation.
The tempter comes to me and I am tempted.

I'd had about enough of his derision
Of what I valued most in human nature.
He thinks he's smart. He thinks he can convince
me

It is no different with my followers
From what it is with his. Both serve for pay.
Disinterestedness never did exist
And if it did, it wouldn't be a virtue.
Neither would fairness. You have heard the
doctrine.

It's on the increase. He could count on no one
That was his look-out. I could count on you.
I wanted him forced to acknowledge so much.
I gave you over to him, but with safeguards.
I took care of you. And before you died
I trust I made it clear I took your side
Against your comforters in their contention
You must be wicked to deserve such pain.
That's Browning and sheer Chapel Non-con-
formism.

JOB God, please, enough for now. I'm in no mood
for more excuses.

GOD What I mean to say:
Your comforters were wrong.

JOB Oh, that committee!

GOD I saw you had no fondness for committees.
Next time you find yourself pressed on to one
For the revision of the Book of Prayer
Put that in if it isn't in already:
Deliver us from committees. 'Twill remind me.
I would do anything for you in reason.

From the surrounding desert; just today
I stumbled over it and got tripped up.

JOB'S WIFE Oh, yes, that tendency! Oh, do come off it.
Don't let it carry you away. I hate
A tendency. The minute you get on one
It seems to start right off accelerating.
Here, take my hand.

*(He takes it and alights
In three quick steps as off an escalator.
The tendency, a long, long narrow strip
Of middle-aisle church carpet, sisal hemp,
Is worked by hands invisible off stage)*

I want you in my group beside the throne -
Must have you. There, that's just the right
arrangement.
Now someone can light up the Burning Bush
And turn the gold enamelled artificial birds on.
I recognize them. Greek artificers
Devised them for Alexius Comnenus.
They won't show in the picture. That's too bad.
Neither will I show. That's too bad moreover.
Now if you three have settled anything
You'd as well smile as frown on the occasion.

(Here endeth chapter forty-three of Job)

A MASQUE OF MERCY

A MASQUE OF MERCY

*A bookstore late at night. The Keeper's wife
Pulls down the window curtain on the door
And locks the door. One customer, locked in,
Stays talking with the Keeper at a show-case.
The Keeper's wife has hardly turned away
Before the door's so violently tried
It makes her move as if to reinforce it.*

JESSE BEL. You can't come in! (*Knock, knock*) The store is
closed!

PAUL Late, late, too late, you cannot enter now.

JESSE BEL We can't be always selling people things.
He doesn't go.

KEEPER You needn't be so stern.
Open enough to find out who it is.

JESSE BEL Keeper, you come and see. Or you come, Paul.
Our second second-childhood case tonight.
Where do these senile runaways escape from?
Wretchedness in a stranger frightens me
More than it touches me.

PAUL. You may come in.

FUGITIVE (*Entering hatless in a whirl of snow*)
God's after me!

JESSE BEL You mean the Devil is.

FUGITIVE No, God.

JESSE BEL I never heard of such a thing.

FUGITIVE Haven't you heard of Thompson's Hound of
Heaven?

PAUL 'I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years.'

KEEPER This is a bookstore -- not a sanctuary.

JESSE BEL I thought you just now said it was a gift shop.

KEEPER Don't you be bitter about it. I'm not bitter.

FUGITIVE Well, I could use a book.

KEEPER What book?

FUGITIVE A Bible.

KEEPER To find out how to get away from God?
Which is what people use it for too often --
And why we wouldn't have one in the store.
We don't believe the common man should read it.
Let him seek his religion in the Church.

JESSE BEL Keeper, be still. Pay no attention to him.
He's being a religious snob for fun.
The name his mother gave him is to blame
For Keeper's levity; My Brother's Keeper.
She didn't do it to him to be quaint,
But out of politics. She told me so.
She was left over from the Brook Farm venture.

KEEPER Why is God after you? -- to save your soul?

FUGITIVE No, make me prophesy.

JESSE BEL And - you - just - won't?

FUGITIVE Haven't you noticed anything (hear that!)
Since I came in?

JONAH

I know I am.

That was where my engagement was to speak
This very night. I had the hall all hired,
The audience assembled. There I was
Behind the scenes ordained and advertised
To prophesy, and full of prophecy,
Yet could not bring myself to say a word.
I left light shining on an empty stage
And fled to you. But you receive me not.

KEEPER

Yes we do too, with sympathy my friend.
Your righteous indignation fizzled out,
Or else you were afraid of being mobbed
If what you had to say was disagreeable.

JESSE BEL.

Your courage failed. The saddest thing in life
Is that the best thing in it should be courage.
Them is my sentiments, and Mr. Flood,
Since you propose it, I believe I will.

JONAH

Please, someone understand.

PAUL

I understand.

JONAH

These others don't.

PAUL

You don't yourself entirely.

JONAH

What don't I understand? It's easy enough.
I'm in the Bible, all done out in story.
I've lost my faith in God to carry out
The threats He makes against the city evil.
I can't trust God to be unmerciful.

KEEPER

You've lost your faith in God? How wicked of
you.

JESSE BEL. You naughty kitten, you shall have no pie.

PAUL. Keeper's the kind of Unitarian
Who having by elimination got
From many gods to Three and Three to One,
Thinks why not taper off to none at all,
Except as father putative to sort of
Legitimize the brotherhood of man,
So we can hang together in a strike.

KEEPER Now we are hearing from the Exegete.
You don't know Paul: he's in the Bible too.
He is the fellow who theologized
Christ almost out of Christianity.
Look out for him.

PAUL. 'Look out for me' is right.
I'm going to tell you something, Jonas Dove.
I'm going to take the nonsense out of you
And give you rest, poor Wandering Jew.

JONAH I'm not
The Wandering Jew – I'm who I say I am,
A prophet with the Bible for credentials.

PAUL. I never said you weren't. I recognized you.
You are the universal fugitive,
Escapist as we say, though you are not
Running away from Him you think you are
But from His mercy-justice contradiction.
Mercy and justice are a contradiction.
But here's where your evasion has an end.
I have to tell you something that will spoil
Indulgence in your form of melancholy
Once and for all. I'm going to make you see
How relatively little justice matters.

JONAH I see what you are up to: robbing me
Of my incentive – cancelling my mission.

JESSE BEL I'm sick. Joe's sick. The world's sick.
I'll take to drink – at least I'll take *a* drink.

JONAH My name's not Joe. I don't like what she says.
It's Greenwich Village cocktail party talk -
Big-city talk. I'm getting out of here.
I'm – bound – away. *(He quotes it to the tune)*

PAUL Oh no, you're not. You're staying here tonight.
You locked the door, Bel. Let me have the key.

(He goes and takes it from the door himself)

JONAH Then I'm a prisoner?

PAUL You are tonight.
We take it you were sent in here for help.
And help you're going to get.

JONAH I'll break your door down.
Always the same when I set out in flight.
I take the first boat. God puts up a storm
That someone in the crew connects with me.
The sailors throw me overboard for luck,
Or as you might say throw me to the whale –
For me to disagree with him and get spit out
Right back in the same trouble I was in.
You're modern; so the whale you throw me to
Will be some soulless lunatic asylum --
For me to disagree with any science
There may be there and get spit out again.

JESSE BEL You poor, poor swallowable little man.

PAUL If you would take the hands out of your hair
And calm yourself. Be sane! I hereby hold
Your forearms in the figure of a cross
The way it rested two points on the ground
At every station but the final one.

Let's have some prophecy. What form of ruin
(For ruin I assume was what it was)
Had you in mind to visit on the city,
Rebellion, pestilence, invasion?

JONAH Earthquake
Was what I thought of.

KEFFER Have you any grounds,
Or undergrounds, for confidence in earthquake?

JONAH It's good geology - the Funday Fault,
A fracture in the rocks beneath New York
That only needs a finger touch from God
To spring it like a deadfall and the fault
In nature would wipe out all human fault.
(He stops to listen.) That's a mighty storm,
And we are shaken. But it isn't earthquake.
Another possibility I thought of -

*(He stops to listen and his unspoken thought,
Projected from the lantern of his eyes,
Is thrown in script as at Belshazzar's feast
On the blank curtain on the outer door)*

- Was Babel: everyone developing
A language of his own to write his book in,
And one to cap the climax by combining
All language in a one-man tongue-confusion.

*(He starts to speak, but stops again to listen.
The writing on the screen must change too fast
For any but the rapidest eye readers)*

Suspicion of the income-tax returns,
A question who was getting the most out
Of business, might increase into a madness.

The mob might hold a man up in the streets
And tear his clothes off to examine him
To find if there were pockets in his skin
As in a smuggler's at the diamond fields,
Where he was hoarding more than they enjoyed.

PAUL. We can all see what's passing in your mind.
(I won't have Keeper calling it religion.)
It's a hard case. It's got so prophecy
Is a disease of your imagination.
You're so lost in the virtuosity
Of getting up good ruins, you've forgotten
What the sins are men ought to perish for.

JONAH You wrong me.

KEEPER Well then, name a single sin.

JONAH Another possibility I thought of --

JESSE BEL. There he goes off into another trance.

KEEPER You stick to earthquake, you have something
there --
Something we'll know we're getting when we
get it.

PAUL. (*Taking a walk off down the store distressed*)
Keeper, I'll turn on you if you keep on.

KEEPER If I were in your place though, Mr. Prophet,
I'd *want* to be more certain I was called
Before I undertook so delicate
A mission as to have to tell New York
'Twas in for an old-fashioned shaking down
Like the one Joshua gave Jericho.
You wouldn't want the night clubs laughing
at you.

It's a coincidence but we were on
The subject of the workers' revolution
When you came in. We're revolutionists.
Or Keeper is a revolutionist.
Paul almost had poor Keeper in a corner
Where he would have to quit his politics
Or be a Christian. Paul, I wish you'd say
That over. I shall have to retail it
To some of Keeper's friends that come in here,
A bunch of smalltime revolutionaries.
Paul makes it come out so they look like
Christians.
How they'll like that. Paul said conservatives –
You say it, Paul.

PAUL.

You mean about success,
And how by its own logic it concentrates
All wealth and power in too few hands?
The rich in seeing nothing but injustice
In their impoverishment by revolution
Are right. But 'twas intentional injustice.
It was their justice being mercy-crossed.
The revolution Keeper's bringing on
Is nothing but an outbreak of mass mercy,
Too long pent up in rigorous convention –
A holy impulse towards redistribution.
To set out to homogenize mankind
So that the cream could never rise again.
Required someone who laughingly could play
With the idea of justice in the courts,
Could mock at riches in the right it claims
To count on justice to be merely just.
But we are talking over Jonah's head
Or clear off what we know his interests are.

KEEPER Or not at least the ordinary kind.
 No revolution I brought on would aim
 At anything but change of personnel.
 The Andrew Jackson slogan of *Vae Victis*
 Or "Turn the rascals out" would do for me.

PAUL Don't you be made feel small by all this posing.
 Both of them caught it from Bel's favourite poet
 Who in his favourite pose as poet thinker
 (His was the doctrine of the Seven Poses)
 Once charged the Nazarene with having brought
 A darkness out of Asia that had crossed
 Old Attic grace and Spartan discipline
 With violence. The Greeks were hardly
strangers
 To the idea of violence. It flourished
 Persisting from old Chaos in their myth
 To embroil the very gods about their spheres
 Of influence. It's been a commonplace
 Ever since Alexander Greeced the world.
 'Twere nothing new if that were all Christ
brought.
 Christ came to introduce a break with logic
 That made all other outrage seem as child's play:
 The Mercy on the Sin against the Sermon.
 Strange no one ever thought of it before Him.
 'Twas lovely and its origin was love.

KEEPER We know what's coming now.

PAUL You say it, keeper,
 If you have learned your lesson. Don't be
bashful.

KEEPER Paul's constant theme. The Sermon on the
Mount

Is just a frame-up to insure the failure
Of all of us, so all of us will be
Thrown prostrate at the Mercy Seat for Mercy

JESSE BEL Yes, Paul, you do say things like that sometimes.

PAUL You all have read the Sermon on the Mount.
I ask you all to read it once again.

*(They put their hands together like a book
And hold it up nearsightedly to read)*

KEEPER AND

JESSE BEL We're reading it.

PAUL Well now you've got it read,
What do you make of it?

JESSE BEL The same old nothing.

KEEPER A beautiful impossibility.

PAUL Keeper, I'm glad you think it beautiful.

KEEPER An irresistible impossibility.
A lofty beauty no one can live up to
Yet no one turn from trying to live up to.

PAUL Yes, spoken so we can't live up to it
Yet so we'll have to weep because we can't.
Mercy is only to the undeserving.
But such we all are made in the sight of God.
 'Oh what is a king here,
 And what is a boor?
 Here all starve together.
 All dwarfed and poor.'
Here we all fail together, dwarfed and poor.
Failure is failure, but success is failure.
There is no better way of having it.

An end you can't by any means achieve
And yet can't turn your back on or ignore.
That is the mystery you must accept.
Do you accept it, Master Jonas Dove?

JONAH What do you say to it, My Brother's Keeper?

KEEPER I say I'd rather be lost in the woods
Than found in church.

JONAH That doesn't help me much.

KEEPER Our disagreement when we disagree, Paul,
Lies in our different approach to Christ,
Yours more through Rome, mine more through
Palestine.

But let's be serious about Paul's offer.
His irresistible impossibility
His lofty beauty no one can live up to
Yet no one turn away from or ignore -
I simply turn away from it.

PAUL You Pagan!

KEEPER Yes, call me Pagan, Paul, as if you meant it.
I won't deceive myself about success
By making failure out of equal value.
Any equality they may exhibit's
In making fools of people equally.

PAUL But you - what is your answer, Jonas Dove?

JONAH You ask if I see yonder shining gate,
And I reply I almost think I do,
Beyond this great door you have locked against
me,
Beyond the storm, beyond the universe.

KEEPER It is the cellar to my store. What ho, down there!
My dungeoneers, come fetch us. No one answers.
There's not much we can do till Martin gets here. —

Don't let me scare you. I was only teasing.
It is the cellar to my store, but not my cellar.
Jesse has given Paul the rent of it
To base his campaign on to save the world.

JESSE BEL. Something's the matter everyone admits.
On the off-chance it may be lack of faith
I have contributed the empty cellar
To Paul to see what he can do with it
To bring faith back. I'm only languidly
Inclined to hope for much. Still what we need
Is something to believe in, don't we, Paul?

KEEPER By something to believe in Jesse means
Something to be fanatical about
So as to justify the orthodox
In saving heretics by slaying them,
Not on the battlefield, but down in cellars.
That way's been tried too many times for me.
I'd like to see the world tried once without it.

JESSE BEL The world seems crying out for a Messiah.

KEEPER Haven't you heard the news? We already have one,
And of the Messianic race, Karl Marx.

JESSE BEL Light, bring a light!

KEEPER Awh, there's no lack of light, you -
A light that falls diffused over my shoulder

And is reflected from the printed page,
And bed of world-flowers so as not to blind me.
If even the face of man's too bright a light
To look at long directly (like the sun),
Then how much more the face of truth must be.
We were not given eyes or intellect
For all the light at once the source of light –
For wisdom that can have no counterwisdom
In our subscription to the sentiment
Of one God we provide He shall be one
Who can be many Gods to many men,
His church on earth a Roman Pantheon;
Which is our greatest hope of rest from war.
Live and let live, believe and let believe.
'Twas said the lesser gods were only traits
Of the one awful God. Just so the saints
Are God's white light refracted into colours.

JESSE BEL. Let's change the subject, boys. I'm getting
nervous.

KEEPER Nervous is all the great things ever made you.
But to repeat and get it through your head:
We have all the belief that's good for us.
Too much all-fired belief and we'd be back
Down burning sceptics in the cellar furnace
Like Shadrac, Meshach, and Abednego.

JONAH What's all this talk of slaying down in cellars –
So sinister? You spoke to someone down there.

KEEPER My friends and stokers, Jeffers and O'Neil.
'They fail me. Now I'm teasing you again.
'There's no one down there getting tortured save
A penitent perhaps self-thrown on Mercy.

JESSE BEL What did he say? I can't hear what he says.

PAUL Mercy on him for having asked for justice.

KEEPER Die saying that, old-fashioned sapient,
 You poor old sape, if I may coin the slang.
 We like you, don't we, Paul? (PAUL *takes his wrist*)

JESSE BEL (*Still standing off*) We've all grown fond of you.

PAUL We've all grown fond of you. (PAUL *says it louder,*
But JONAH gives no sign of having heard)

KEEPER Who said too late you cannot enter now?

JESSE BEL He was rejected for his reservations!

KEEPER (*Still on his knees he sits back on his heels*)
 But one thing more before the curtain falls.
 (*The curtain starts to fall*) Please hold the
 curtain -
 All Paul means and I wish the dead could hear
 me,
 All you mean Paul, I think

JESSE BEL Will you stand there
 And let that tell you what you think like that?

PAUL Suffer a friend to try to word you better.

JESSE BEL Oh, there's to be a funeral oration.
 And we're an orator. Get up. Stand up
 For what you think your doctor thinks, why
 don't you?
 Don't wear your pants out preaching on your
 knees.
 Save them to say your prayers on. - What's the
 matter?

KEEPER *(He doesn't rise, but looks at her a moment)*
Lady, at such a time, and in the Presence!
I won't presume to tell Bel where to go.
But if this prophet's mantle fell on me
I should dare say she would be taken care of.
We send our wicked enemies to Hell,
Our wicked friends we send to Purgatory.
But Bel gets some things right - and she was
right --

JESSE BEL. *(She startles at the sudden note of kindness)*
I am right then?

KEEPER In glorifying courage.
Courage is of the heart by derivation,
And great it is. But fear is of the soul.
And I'm afraid. *(The bulb lights sicken down.
The cellar door swings wide and slams again)*

PAUL. The fear that you're afraid with is the fear
Of God's decision lastly on your deeds.
That is the Fear of God whereof 'tis written.

KEEPER But not the fear of punishment for sin
(I have to sin to prove it isn't that),
I'm no more governed by the fear of Hell
Than by the fear of the asylum, jail, or poor-
house,
The basic three the state is founded on.
But I'm too much afraid of God to claim
I have been fighting on the angels' side.
That is for Him and not for me to say.
For me to say it would be irreligious.
(Sometimes I think you are too sure you have
been.)

And I can see that the uncertainty

In which we act is a severity,
A cruelty, amounting to injustice
That nothing but God's mercy can arrange.
I can see that, if that is what you mean.
Give me a hand up, if we are agreed.

PAUL. Yes, there you have it at the root of things.
We have to stay afraid deep in our souls.
Our sacrifice, the best we have to offer,
And not our worst nor second best, our best,
Our very best, our lives laid down like Jonah's,
Our lives laid down in war and peace, may not
Be found acceptable in Heaven's sight.
And that they may be is the only prayer
Worth praying. May my sacrifice
Be found acceptable in Heaven's sight.

KEEPER Let the lost millions pray it in the dark!
My failure is no different from Jonah's.
We both have lacked the courage in the heart
To overcome the fear within the soul
And go ahead to any accomplishment.
Courage is what it takes and takes the more of
Because the deeper fear is so eternal.
And if I say we lift him from the floor
And lay him where you ordered him to lie
Before the cross, it is from fellow feeling,
As if I asked for one more chance myself
To learn to say (*He moves to JONAH'S feet*)
Nothing can make injustice just but mercy.

Curtain

STEEPLE BUSH

A YOUNG BIRCH

The birch begins to crack its outer sheath
Of baby green and show the white beneath,
As whosoever likes the young and slight
May well have noticed. Soon entirely white
To double day and cut in half the dark
It will stand forth, entirely white in bark,
And nothing but the top a leafy green –
The only native tree that dares to lean,
Relying on its beauty, to the air.
(Less brave perhaps than trusting are the fair.)
And someone reminiscent will recall
How once in cutting brush along the wall
He spared it from the number of the slain,
At first to be no bigger than a cane,
And then no bigger than a fishing pole,
But now at last so obvious a bole
The most efficient help you ever hired
Would know that it was there to be admired,
And zeal would not be thanked that cut it down
When you were sick in bed or out of town.
It was a thing of beauty and was sent
To live its life out as an ornament.

SOMETHING FOR HOPE

At the present rate it must come to pass
And that right soon that the meadow sweet
And steeple bush not good to eat
Will have crowded out the edible grass.

Then all there is to do is wait
For maple birch and spruce to push
Through meadow sweet and steeple bush
And crowd them out at a similar rate.

No plough among these rocks would pay.
So busy yourself with other things
While the trees put on their wooden rings
And with long-sleeved branches hold their sway.

Then cut down the trees when lumber grown,
And there's your pristine earth all freed
From lovely blooming but wasteful weed
And ready again for the grass to own.

A cycle we'll say of a hundred years.
Thus foresight does it and *laissez faire*,
A virtue in which we all may share
Unless a government interferes.

Patience and looking away ahead,
And leaving somethings to take their course.
Hope may not nourish a cow or horse,
But *spes alit agricolam* 'tis said.

ONE STEP BACKWARD TAKEN

Not only sands and gravels
Were once more on their travels,
But gulping muddy gallons
Great boulders off their balance
Bumped heads together dully
And started down the gully.
Whole capes caked off in slices.
I felt my standpoint shaken
In the universal crisis.
But with one step backward taken
I saved myself from going.
A world torn loose went by me.
Then the rain stopped and the blowing
And the sun came out to dry me.

DIRECTIVE

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry –
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretence of keeping covered.
And there's a story in a book about it:
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
As for the woods' excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.

The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
And if you're lost enough to find yourself
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
First there's the children's house of make believe,
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belhaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they must'nt.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

TOO ANXIOUS FOR RIVERS

Look down the long valley and there stands a mountain
That someone has said is the end of the world.
Then what of this river that having arisen
Must find where to pour itself into and empty?
I never saw so much swift water run cloudless.
Oh I have been often too anxious for rivers
To leave it to them to get out of their valleys.
The truth is the river flows into the canyon
Of Ceasing to Question What Doesn't Concern Us,
As sooner or later we have to cease somewhere.
No place to get lost like too far in the distance.
It may be a mercy the dark closes round us
So broodingly soon in every direction.
The world as we know is an elephant's howdah;
The elephant stands on the back of a turtle;
The turtle in turn on a rock in the ocean.
And how much longer a story has science
Before she must put out the light on the children
And tell them the rest of the story is dreaming?
'You children may dream it and tell it tomorrow.'
Time was we were molten, time was we were vapour
What set us on fire and what set us revolving
Lucretius the Epicurean might tell us
'Twas something we knew all about to begin with
And needn't have fared into space like his master
To find 'twas the effort, the essay of love.

AN UNSTAMPED LETTER IN OUR
RURAL LETTER BOX

Last night your watch dog barked all night
So once you rose and lit the light.
It wasn't someone at your locks.
No, in your rural letter box
I leave this note without a stamp
To tell you it was just a tramp
Who used your pasture for a camp.
There pointed like the pip of spades
The young spruce made a suite of glades
So regular that in the dark
The place was like a city park.
There I elected to demur
Beneath a low-slung juniper
That like a blanket to my chin
Kept some dew out and some heat in,
Yet left me freely face to face
All night with universal space.
It may have been at two o'clock
That under me a point of rock
Developed in the grass and fern,
And as I woke afraid to turn
Or so much as uncross my feet,
Lest having wasted precious heat
I never should again be warmed,
The largest firedrop ever formed
From two stars' having coalesced
Went streaking molten down the west.
And then your tramp astrologer
From seeing this undoubted stir
In Heaven's firm-set firmament,
Himself had the equivalent,

Only within. Inside the brain
Two memories that long had lain,
Now quivered toward each other, lipped
Together, and together slipped;
And for a moment all was plain
That men have thought about in vain.
Please, my involuntary host,
Forgive me if I seem to boast.
'Tis possible you may have seen,
Albeit through a rusty screen,
The same sign Heaven showed your guest
Each knows his own discernment best.
You have had your advantages.
Things must have happened to you, yes,
And have occurred to you no doubt,
If not indeed from sleeping out,
Then from the work you went about
In farming well – or pretty well.
And it is partly to compel
Myself, *in forma pauperis*,
To say as much I write you this.

TO AN ANCIENT

Your claims to immortality were two.
The one you made, the other one you grew.
Sorry to have no name for you but You.

We never knew exactly where to look,
But found one in the delta of a brook,
One in a cavern where you used to cook.

Coming on such an ancient human trace
Seems as expressive of the human race
As meeting someone living face to face.

We date you by your depth in silt and dust
Your probable brute nature is discussed.
At which point we are totally nonplussed.

You made the eolith, you grew the bone,
The second more peculiarly your own,
And likely to have been enough alone.

You make me ask if I would go to time
Would I gain anything by using rhyme?
Or aren't the bones enough I live to lime?

FIVE NOCTURNES

1. THE NIGHT LIGHT

She always had to burn a light
Beside her attic bed at night.
It gave bad dreams and broken sleep,
But helped the Lord her soul to keep.
Good gloom on her was thrown away.
It is on me by night or day,
Who have, as I suppose, ahead
The darkest of it still to dread.

11. WERE I IN TROUBLE

Where I could think of no thoroughfare,
Away on the mountain up far too high,
A blinding headlight shifted glare
And began to bounce down a granite stair
Like a star fresh fallen out of the sky.
And I away in my opposite wood
Am touched by that unntimate light
And made feel less alone than I rightly should,
For traveller there could do me no good
Were I in trouble with night tonight.

111. BRAVADO

Have I not walked without an upward look
Of caution under stars that very well
Might not have missed me when they shot and fell?
It was a risk I had to take - and took.

IV. ON MAKING CERTAIN
ANYTHING HAS HAPPENED

I could be worse employed
Than as watcher of the void
Whose part should be to tell
What star if any fell.

Suppose some seed-pearl sun
Should be the only one;
Yet still I must report
Some cluster one star short.

I should justly hesitate
To frighten church or state
By announcing a star down
From say the Cross or Crown.

To make sure what star I missed
I should have to check on my list
Every star in sight.
It might take me all night.

v. IN THE LONG NIGHT

I would build my house of crystal
With a solitary friend
Where the cold cracks like a pistol
And the needle stands on end.

We would pour oil on the ingle
And for want of books recite.
We would crawl out filing single
To observe the Northern Light.

If Etookashoo and Couldlooktoo
The Esquimaux should call,
There would be fish raw and cooked too
And enough drink oil for all.

As one rankly warm insider
To another I would say,
We can rest assured on eider
There will come another day.

A SPIRE AND BELFRY

A MOOD APART

Once down on my knees to growing plants
I prodded the earth with a lazy tool
In time with a medley of sotto chants;
But becoming aware of some boys from school
Who had stopped outside the fence to spy,
I stopped my song and almost heart,
For any eye is an evil eye
That looks in on to a mood apart.

THE FEAR OF GOD

If you should rise from Nowhere up to Somewhere,
From being No one up to being Someone,
Be sure to keep repeating to yourself
You owe it to an arbitrary god
Whose mercy to you rather than to others
Won't bear too critical examination.
Stay unassuming. If for lack of licence
To wear the uniform of who you are,
You should be tempted to make up for it
In a subordinating look or tone
Beware of coming too much to the surface,
And using for apparel what was meant
To be the curtain of the inmost soul.

THE FEAR OF MAN

As a girl no one gallantly attends
Sets forth for home at midnight from a friend's –
She tries to make it in one catch of breath,
And this is not because she thinks of death.
The city seems intoppling from a height,
But she can trust it not to fall tonight.
(It will be taken down before it falls.)
There scarcely is a light in all its walls
Except beside a safe inside a bank
(For which assurance Mammon is to thank).
But there are little street lights she should trust
So jewel steady in the wind and dust.
Her fear is being spoken by the rude
And having her exposure misconstrued.
May I in my brief bolt across the scene
Not be misunderstood in what I mean.

A STEEPLE ON THE HOUSE

What if it should turn out eternity
Was but the steeple on our house of life
That made our house of life a house of worship?
We do not go up there to sleep at night.
We do not go up there to live by day.
Nor need we ever go up there to live.
A spire and belfry coming on the roof
Means that a soul is coming on the flesh.

INNATE HELIUM

Religious faith is a most filling vapour.
It swirls occluded in us under tight
Compression to uplift us out of weight –
As in those buoyant bird bones thin as paper,
To give them still more buoyancy in flight.
Some gas like helium must be innate.

THE COURAGE TO BE NEW

I hear the world reciting
The mistakes of ancient men,
The brutality and fighting
They will never have again.

Heartbroken and disabled
In body and in mind
They renew talk of the fabled
Federation of Mankind.

But they're blessed with the acumen
To suspect the human trait
Was not the *basest* human
That made them militate.

They will tell you more as soon as
You tell them what to do
With their ever breaking newness
And their courage to be new.

I O T A S U B S C R I P T

Seek not in me the big I capital,
Nor yet the little dotted in me seek.
If I have in me any I at all,
'Tis the iota subscript of the Greek.

So small am I as an attention beggar.
The letter you will find me subscript to
Is neither alpha eta nor omega,
But upsilon which is the Greek for you.

OUT AND AWAY

THE MIDDLENESS OF THE ROAD

The road at the top of the rise
Seems to come to an end
And take off into the skies.
So at the distant bend

It seems to go into a wood,
The place of standing still
As long the trees have stood.
But say what Fancy will,

The mineral drops that explode
To drive my ton of car
Are limited to the road.
They deal with near and far,

But have almost nothing to do
With the absolute flight and rest
The universal blue
And local green suggest.

A S T R O M E T A P H Y S I C A L

Lord, I have loved your sky,
Be it said against or for me,
Have loved it clear and high,
Or low and stormy;

Till I have reeled and stumbled
From looking up too much,
And fallen and been humbled
To wear a crutch.

My love for every Heaven
O'er which you, Lord, have lorded,
From number One to Seven
Should be rewarded.

It may not give me hope
That when I am translated
My scalp will in the cope
Be constellated.

But if that seems to tend
To my undue renown,
At least it ought to send
Me up, not down.

S C E P T I C

Far star that tickles for me my sensitive plate
And fries a couple of ebon atoms white,
I don't believe I believe a thing you state.
I put no faith in the seeming facts of light.

I don't believe I believe you're the last in space,
I don't believe you're anywhere near the last,
I don't believe what makes you red in the face
Is after explosion going away so fast.

The universe may or may not be very immense.
As a matter of fact there are times when I am apt
To feel it close in tight against my sense
Like a caul in which I was born and still am wrapped.

TWO LEADING LIGHTS

I never happened to contrast
The two in the celestial cast
Whose prominence has been so vast.
The Sun is satisfied with days.
He never has in any phase
That I have heard of shone at night.
And yet he is a power of light
And could in one burst overwhelm
And dayify the darkest realm
By right of eminent domain.
He has the greatness to refrain.
The Moon for all her light and grace
Has never learned to know her place.
The notedest astronomers
Have set the dark aside for hers.
But there are many nights though clear
She doesn't bother to appear.
Some lunatic or lunar whim
Will bring her out diminished dim
To set herself beside the Sun
As Sheba came to Solomon.
It may be charitably guessed
Comparison is not her quest.
Some rumour of his wishing ring
That changes winter into spring
Has brought her merely visiting,
An irresponsible divinity
Presuming on her femininity.

A ROGERS GROUP

How young and unassuming
They waited in the street,
With babies in their arms
And baggage at their feet.

A trolley car they hailed
Went by with clanging gong
Before they guessed the corner
They waited on was wrong.

And no one told them so
By way of traveller's aid,
No one was so far touched
By the Rogers Group they made.

ON BEING IDOLIZED

The wave sucks back and with the last of water
It wraps a wisp of seaweed round my legs,
And with the swift rush of its sandy dregs
So undermines my barefoot stand I totter
And did I not take steps would be tipped over
Like the ideal of some mistaken lover.

A WISH TO COMPLY

Did I see it go by,
That Millikan mote?
Well, I said that I did.
I made a good try.
But I'm no one to quote.
If I have a defect
It's a wish to comply
And see as I'm bid.
I rather suspect
All I saw was the lid
Going over my eye.
I honestly think
All I saw was a wink.

A CLIFF DWELLING

There sandy seems the golden sky
And golden seems the sandy plain.
No habitation meets the eye
Unless in the horizon rim,
Some half-way up the limestone wall,
That spot of black is not a stain
Or shadow, but a cavern hole,
Where someone used to climb and crawl
To rest from his besetting fears.
I see the callus on his sole
The disappearing last of him
And of his race starvation slim,
Oh years ago -- ten thousand years.

IT BIDS PRETTY FAIR

The play seems out for an almost infinite run.
Don't mind a little thing like the actors fighting.
The only thing I worry about is the sun.
We'll be all right if nothing goes wrong with the lighting.

BEYOND WORDS

That row of icicles along the gutter
Feels like my armoury of hate;
And you, you . . . you, you utter . . .
You wait!

A CASE FOR JEFFERSON

Harrison loves my country too,
But wants it all made over new.
He's Freudian Viennese by night.
By day he's Marxian Muscovite.
It isn't because he's Russian Jew.
He's Puritan Yankee through and through.
He dotes on Saturday pork and beans.
But his mind is hardly out of his teens:
With him the love of country means
Blowing it all to smithereens
And having it all made over new.

LUCRETIUS VERSUS THE
LAKE POETS

‘Nature I loved; and next to Nature, Art.’

Dean, adult education may seem silly.
What of it though? I got some willy-nilly
The other evening at your college deanery.
And grateful for it (Let's not be facetious!)
For I thought Epicurus and Lucretius
By Nature meant the Whole Goddam Machinery.
But you say that in college nomenclature
The only meaning possible for Nature
In Landor's quatrain would be Pretty Scenery.
Which makes opposing it to Art absurd
I grant you – if you're sure about the word.
God bless the Dean and make his deanship plenary.

EDITORIALS

H A E C F A B U L A D O C E T

A Blindman by the name of La Fontaine,
Relying on himself and on his cane,
Came tap-tap-tapping down the village street,
The apogee of human blind conceit.
Now just ahead of him was seen to yawn
A trench where water pipes were laying on.
The Blindman might have found it with his ferrule,
But someone over anxious at his peril
Not only warned him with a loud command,
But ran against him with a staying hand.
Enraged at what he could but think officious,
The Blindman missed him with a blow so vicious
He gave his own poor iliac a wrench
And plunged himself head foremost in the trench:
Where with a glee no less for being grim
The workmen all turned to and buried him.

Moral

The moral is it hardly need be shown,
All those who try to go it sole alone,
Too proud to be beholden for relief,
Are absolutely sure to come to grief.

ETHEREALIZING

A theory if you hold it hard enough
And long enough gets rated as a creed:
Such as that flesh is something we can slough
So that the mind can be entirely freed.
Then when the arms and legs have atrophied,
And brain is all that's left of mortal stuff,
We can lie on the beach with the seaweed
And take our daily tide baths smooth and rough.
There once we lay as blobs of jellyfish
At evolution's opposite extreme.
But now as blobs of brain we'll lie and dream,
With only one vestigial creature wish:
Oh may the tide be soon enough at high
To keep our abstract verse from being dry.

WHY WAIT FOR SCIENCE

Sarcastic Science she would like to know,
In her complacent ministry of fear,
How we propose to get away from here
When she has made things so we have to go
Or be wiped out. Will she be asked to show
Us how by rocket we may hope to steer
To some star off there say a half light-year
Through temperature of absolute zero?
Why wait for Science to supply the how
When any amateur can tell it now?
'The way to go away should be the same
As fifty million years ago we came –
If anyone remembers how that was.
I have a theory, but it hardly does.

ANY SIZE WE PLEASE

No one was looking at his lonely case,
So like a half-mad outpost sentinel,
Indulging an absurd dramatic spell,
Albeit not without some shame of face,
He stretched his arms out to the dark of space
And held them absolutely parallel
In infinite appeal. Then saying, 'Hell'
He drew them in for warmth of self-embrace.
He thought if he could have his space all curved
Wrapped in around itself and self-befriended,
His science needn't get him so unnerved.
He had been too all out, too much extended.
He slapped his breast to verify his purse
And hugged himself for all his universe.

A N I M P O R T E R

Mrs. Someone's been to Asia,
What she brought back would amaze ye.
Bamboos, ivories, jades, and lacquers,
Devil-scaring firecrackers,
Recipes for tea with butter,
Sacred rigmaroles to mutter,
Subterfuge for saving faces,
A developed taste in vases,
Arguments too stale to mention
'Gainst American invention;
Most of all the mass production
Destined to prove our destruction.
What are telephones, skyscrapers,
Safety razors, Sunday papers,
But the silliest evasion
Of the truths we owe an Asian?
But the best of her exhibit
Was a prayer machine from Tibet
That by brook power in the garden
Kept repeating Pardon, pardon;
And as picturesque machinery
Beat a sundial in the scenery –
The most primitive of engines
Mass producing with a vengeance.
Teach those Asians mass production?
Teach your grandmother egg suction.

THE PLANNERS

If anything should put an end to This,
I'm thinking the unborn would never miss
What they had never had of vital bliss.
No burst of nuclear phenomenon
That put an end to what was going on
Could make much difference to the dead and gone.
Only a few of those even in whose day
It happened would have very much to say.
And anyone might ask them who were *they*.
Who *would* they be? The guild of social planners
With the intention blazoned on their banners
Of getting one more chance to change our manners?
These anyway might think it was important
That human history should not be shortened.

NO HOLY WARS FOR THEM

States strong enough to do good are but few.
Their number would seem limited to three.
Good is a thing that they the great can do,
But puny little states can only be.
And being good for these means standing by
To watch a war in nominal alliance,
And when it's over watch the world's supply
Get parcelled out among the winning giants.
God, have you taken cognizance of this?
And what on this is your divine position?
That nations like the Cuban and the Swiss
Can never hope to wage a Global Mission.
No Holy Wars for them. The most the small
Can ever give us is a nuisance brawl.

BURSTING RAPTURE

I went to the physician to complain,
The time had been when anyone could turn
To farming for a simple way to earn;
But now 'twas there as elsewhere, any gain
Was made by getting science on the brain;
There was so much more every day to learn,
The discipline of farming was so stern,
It seemed as if I couldn't stand the strain.
But the physician's answer was 'There, there,
What you complain of all the nations share.
Their effort is a mounting ecstasy
That when it gets too exquisite to bear
Will find relief in one burst. You shall see.
That's what a certain bomb was sent to be.'

U . S . 1 9 4 6 K I N G ' S X

Having invented a new Holocaust,
And been the first with it to win a war,
How they make haste to cry with fingers crossed,
King's X – no fairs to use it any more!

THE INGENUITIES OF DEBT

These I assume were words so deeply meant
They cut themselves in stone for permanent
Like trouble in the brow above the eyes:
'Take Care to Sell Your Horse before He Dies
The Art of Life Is Passing Losses on.'
The city saying it was Ctesiphon,
Which may a little while by war and trade
Have kept from being caught with the decayed,
Infirm, worn-out, and broken on its hands,
But judging by what little of it stands,
Not even the ingenuities of debt
Could save it from its losses being met.
Sand has been thrusting in the square of door
Across the tessellation of the floor,
And only rests, a serpent on its chin,
Content with contemplating, taking in,
Till it can muster breath inside a hall
To rear against the inscription on the wall.

THE BROKEN DROUGHT

The prophet of disaster ceased to shout.
Something was going right outside the hall.
A rain though stingy had begun to fall
That rather hurt his theory of the drought
And all the great convention was about.
A cheer went up that shook the mottoed wall.
He did as Shakespeare says, you may recall,
Good orators *will* do when they are out.
Yet in his heart he was unshaken sure
The drought was one no spit of rain could cure.
It was the drought of deserts. Earth would soon
Be uninhabitable as the moon.
What for that matter had it ever been?
Who advised man to come and live therein?

TO THE RIGHT PERSON

In the one state of ours that is a shire,
There is a District Schoolhouse I admire
As much as anything for situation.
There are few institutions standing higher
This side the Rockies in my estimation --
Two thousand feet above the ocean level.
It has two entries for co-education.
But there's a tight shut look to either door
And to the windows of its fenestration,
As if to say mere learning was the devil
And this school wasn't keeping any more
Unless for penitents who took their seat
Upon its doorsteps as at mercy's feet
To make up for a lack of meditation.

NOTES

- PAGE 64 'their wooden rings'. Ripton rings.
- PAGE 79 Etookashoo and Couldlooktoo who accompanied Dr. Cook to the North Pole.
- PAGE 84 The Fear of God – Acknowledgment to the Papyrus Prisse.
- PAGE 88 The Courage to Be New
No one cavils at their killing
And being killed for speed.
Then why be so unwilling
They should do as much for creed?
- PAGE 107 Haec Fabula Docet – Alternatively
The moral is it hardly need be shown,
All those who try to go it sole alone,
Or with the independence of Vermont
Are absolutely sure to come to want.
- PAGE 115 U. S. 1946 King's X – Recent Riptonian.
- PAGE 116 The Ingenuities of Debt – PreFranconian.

