

# Mossback Minstrelsy: the British Columbia Verse of Robert W. Service

Edited and Introduced by Peter J. Mitham

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## Introduction

When Robert W. Service left Scotland for North America in the spring of 1896, he professed to have lost interest in writing poems. "In Glasgow I had been known as a scribbler of poetry. But I had not kept up the practice after I left school; the outbreak in the Yukon was an absolutely new manifestation."<sup>1</sup> Yet prior to arriving in Whitehorse in November 1904, Service spent seven years in British Columbia (1896-97; 1899-1904) and a year and a half rambling about the western United States and Mexico (1897-99); during this time he wrote verse intermittently. Service's autobiography, *Ploughman of the Moon* (1945), indicates that a Los Angeles paper published "The Hobo's Lullaby" and some other verses of his shortly after Christmas 1897, and admits that *Munsey's Magazine* published a poem he wrote in 1903.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the details remain ambiguous; *Ploughman of the Moon* names neither the California paper nor the *Munsey's* poem.

Scholars have not challenged Service's autobiographical evasiveness, almost completely ignoring the work he published in newspapers and periodicals before his first collection, *Songs of a Sourdough*, appeared in 1907. Carl F. Klinck's 1976 biography of Service identifies the *Munsey's* poem as "Apart and Together," but fails to mention its inclusion in *Songs of a Sourdough* as "Unforgotten."<sup>3</sup> Klinck notes that another *Sourdough* poem, "The Little Old Log Cabin," appeared in the Whitehorse *Semi-Weekly Star*, 10 May 1902, but assumes that Service sent the poem directly to the *Star* because it bears his British Columbia address. Yet the Yukon papers frequently reprinted material from those in Victoria and Vancouver, and the poem previously appeared, with address, in the Victoria *Daily Colonist* on 16 March 1902.<sup>4</sup> To Klinck's credit, however, is the fact of citation; a bibliography of Service's work, also published in 1976, includes nothing prior to 1907.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the most recent biography of Service, James

Mackay's *Vagabond of Verse*, does not contradict Service's account of his earliest publications.<sup>6</sup> Although Mackay frequently notes that Service is a master of autobiographical obfuscation, he does not exhaust the several clues, at the provincial archives in Victoria and elsewhere, that indicate Service enjoyed a healthy literary career while in British Columbia.

This neglect is startling, considering that when *Songs of a Sourdough* first appeared, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* and the *Vancouver Daily World* proudly acknowledged that they occasionally published Service's work while he lived in British Columbia. "This circumstance was never overlooked by Charlie Gregg," recalls Frank Kelley, a former worker in the editorial room of the *Colonist*. Gregg was city editor of the Victoria paper at the time, and, continues Kelley, "used to brag a bit chestily about how he had introduced Service to a local audience and helped him over the first hurdles of getting editorial recognition for his verse-making, after he began to win plaudits far and near for his colourful 'pieces.'"<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the fact of his publication in the *Daily Colonist* was known as far away as Toronto.<sup>8</sup> Service appears to have rarely contributed beyond the *Colonist* and *World*, however. Both served a middle-class readership of which Service was a part, and unlike the *Victoria Daily Times* and the *Vancouver Province* and *Weekly News*, regularly featured verse in their columns. At least one poem appeared in the Cowichan Valley's *Duncans Enterprise*, but as only three issues of this smaller paper survive it is impossible to gauge the frequency of Service's contributions.<sup>9</sup>

Upon his arrival in Canada in 1896, Service made his way westward with the intention of becoming a cowboy. Reaching Vancouver Island, he served as a farmhand—colloquially known in the British Columbia backwoods as a 'mossback'—on the ranch of J. Islay Mutter at Chemainus. In 1899, after a stint of hobbing through the American southwest and a nasty accident following his return to Canada, Service became the clerk in G. T. Corfield's store on the bank of the Koksilah River, overlooking Cowichan Bay.<sup>10</sup> Here he had access to local and regional papers, pursuing work "mainly meditative" in nature.<sup>11</sup> Although he claims to have "made no music and composed no verse" at the store,<sup>12</sup> verses bearing the initials "R. S." soon appeared in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* from "Cowichan, B.C."

Charles H. Gibbons, editor of the *Colonist* at the time, recalls how he coaxed Service to submit some of his verse for publication:

It was my good fortune to make [G. T. Corfield's] store my headquarters one happy week-end when the trout were leaping. . . . Service had shamefacedly confessed that to beguile the dead

monotony of his days he amused himself by writing verse stuff. Said stuff he produced for inspection, under pressure. One item was a four-verse pulsating human interest bit—minor Boer war incident, worked up artistically, that gripped.

"Give me this, Bob, for the Sunday paper," I said to him.

"Oh, it isn't worth printing in a newspaper," he demurred. His objections were overborne and "The Christmas Card" duly appeared in the "Colonist"—the first work from Service's pen that was ever printed.<sup>13</sup>

"The Christmas Card" appeared in the *Colonist* on 21 December 1899. Service immediately submitted a second poem, two more in January, and by 6 July 1900 he had six poems to his credit. Each deals with the Anglo-Boer War (11 October 1899-31 May 1902), which enjoyed widespread media coverage prior to June 1900. In June, Lord Roberts departed for England and declared the war over, taking with him the correspondents who had focussed the Empire's attention on South Africa. With the decline in news reports and the marginalization of the war in the public consciousness, Service sought other sources of inspiration.

"The March of the Dead," the last of these poems, is written in the wake of Lord Roberts' pronouncement. Although the poem shares in the prevailing optimism of the moment, its ghastly vision of a spectral army returning alongside the living veterans reminds readers of the human cost of the war. The five earlier poems do not challenge popular opinion regarding the conflict—"The Rhyme of the Roughrider," for instance, proclaims

O ye heroes gaunt and gory!  
If there's still a deed of glory  
Seeks the doing, save it till we come;  
Let us have a chance of trying—  
If we fall we don't mind dying  
To the music of a British drum.<sup>14</sup>

—but the horror present in "The March of the Dead" is coherent with post-war feelings of shame at the excessive loss of life incurred.<sup>15</sup> This quality made the poem Service's most successful piece related to the war, and afforded it a place in *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907). "The March of the Dead" shares in the emerging horror of modern battle and anticipates the verse Service published during the First World War in *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916). Although *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* was directly inspired by Service's experiences as an ambulance driver in France, it is significant to note that Service also had a personal involvement in the South African conflict: on 15 November 1899, his brother Alick became a

prisoner of the Boers alongside Winston Churchill. While Churchill made his famous escape, Alick remained a prisoner in Pretoria for the next two years.<sup>16</sup> Service was aware of his brother's capture, and his concern may have contributed to his unquestionably patriotic stance. At the same time, however, Alick's continued imprisonment following Lord Roberts' premature announcement of peace may have led Service to bid readers reflect on the cost of involvement in South Africa. "The March of the Dead" is comparable to "The Mourners" in *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man*, in which a vision of mourning women recalls the speaker to the scene of carnage before him:

The slain I *would* not see . . . and so I lift  
My eyes from out the shambles where  
they lie;  
When lo! a million woman-faces drift  
Like pale leaves through the sky.

The cheeks of some are channelled deep with  
tears;  
But some are tearless with wild eyes that  
stare  
Into the shadow of the coming years  
Of fathomless despair.

.....

They fill the vast of Heaven, face on face;  
And then I see one weeping with the rest,  
Whose eyes beseech me for a moment's space .  
..

Oh! eyes I love the best!<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, in "The March of the Dead," a spectral army interrupts victory celebrations with a grim reminder:

"Oh, they left us on the veldt-side, but we felt  
we  
couldn't stop  
On this our England's crowning festal day.  
We're the men of Magersfontein, we're the  
men of Spion  
Kop,  
Colenzo,—We're the men who had to pay.  
We're the men who paid the blood-price. Shall  
the grave

be all our gain?  
You owe us. Long and heavy is the score.  
Then cheer us for our glory now, and cheer us  
for our pain,  
And cheer us as ye never cheered before."<sup>18</sup>

In each case, Service demands tribute on behalf of the dead and those not usually recognized in standard victory celebrations. He achieves a sympathy for the victims of war, both on the battlefield and at home, the latter being particularly important during the First World War in a situation where Service was attempting to distil the horror of the battlefield for those who could not experience it first-hand. In "The March of the Dead" the dominant voice comes from the battlefield, and urges people not to forget those still in South Africa; for Service personally, this included his imprisoned brother.

Having achieved success with his verse of the South African conflict, Service turned his attention to local themes. Just as critics hailed his Yukon verse for reflecting the North, the 1907 reviewer of *Songs of a Sourdough* in the *Vancouver World* praised Service for setting forth "some of the basic facts of the industrial development of the west":

Whatever Kipling may have done for the other parts of the empire  
he  
has done little or nothing for British Columbia and the eldorado  
to the north of it, . . . nor . . . has there arisen until now a poet who  
has become so saturated with all the loveliness and loneliness . . .  
of the farthest west."<sup>19</sup>

The Vancouver reviewer cites "Music in the Bush," first published in the *Daily Colonist* on 18 September 1901, as the preeminent example of Service's ability to express the British Columbia experience in verse. For the reviewer, that experience is the experience of the immigrant: the newcomer who arrives in a strange country and finds, after a length of time, that it has captured the heart. "There is a time in the life of every man who comes here," states the reviewer, "when the forests seem to stand a dark barrier between him and the home he has left. This passes away sooner or later and British Columbia becomes home."<sup>20</sup> "Music in the Bush" depicts an aging lady, once the glory of the stage in England, now resigned to singing her songs (the reviewer implies) to the darkness of the timber stands of Vancouver Island.

The transition the reviewer describes is perhaps more clearly depicted in "The Little Old Log Cabin," where the mossback longs for his cabin in the bosom of the backwoods. The "little old log cabin" has a maternal role,

where "you'll be like a kid again, an' nestle to her breast, / An' never leave its shelter, an' forget, an' love, an' rest." The Yukon later assumes the same role, beckoning the speaker back to "the beauty that thrills [him] with wonder, / . . . the stillness that fills [him] with peace."<sup>21</sup> The reprinting of the poem in the Whitehorse *Semi-Weekly Star* prior to its inclusion in *Songs of a Sourdough* betokens Service's success before a national audience. Service's northern ballads, such as "The Spell of the Yukon," share the focus of "The Little Old Log Cabin" on frontier life and the overpowering, yet often comforting presence of nature.

In addition to the poems later included in *Songs of a Sourdough*, Service wrote ballads relating to the social life of Cowichan. He was a popular participant in the social life of the community, and regularly took part in local theatrical productions.<sup>22</sup> Although Service had sent the "Song of the Social Failure" to the *Colonist* in June 1902, he was actually quite a success.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, six months later he fell in love with Constance M. MacLean, a cousin of Duncan physician Dallas Perry who was visiting from Vancouver. It was a classic case of love at first sight, and the event once again motivated his muse. During the two days after meeting Connie, as she was known, at a dance on the first weekend of December 1902, Service penned "The Coming of Miss McLean [*sic*]." Connie was thrilled. "I appreciate it fully!" she replied, and Service, who had not signed the poem, feigned ignorance: "By the way did someone (dash his cheek, anyway) really send you verses or are you only fooling?"<sup>24</sup>

The following Friday the two formed a couple at another dance, and the relationship became a significant part of Service's life. "Apart and Yet Together," written following Service's departure from Cowichan in 1903, may owe its existence to an evening spent gazing at the moon in melancholy meditation regarding the future of his relationship with Connie. Service describes an incident of this sort in a letter to Connie written at approximately the time in the autumn of 1903 when he claims to have written the poem.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, when the success of *Songs of a Sourdough* became certain in the summer of 1907, Service dedicated the collection, which included many of his British Columbia ballads, "to C. M." The latter fact alone adds interest to "The Coming of Miss McLean," which is composed in the standard Service style and metre with the surprise ending characteristic of more famous selections such as "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

Curiously, in *Ploughman of the Moon* Service used his British Columbia poems to document his earlier attempts at versification. A passage from the grimly defiant "Song of the Social Failure," published in 1902, appears in Service's autobiography as a "morbid and disillusioned" effort of his

Glasgow youth.<sup>26</sup> "It Must Be Done" is another poem that Service cites among his Glasgow publications. Like "The Song of the Social Failure," Service indicates that it was one of his first contributions to the periodical press, but given its publication in the *Duncans Enterprise* on 5 December 1903, it seems more likely to have been written in Victoria after he became a teller with the Canadian Bank of Commerce in the autumn of 1903.<sup>27</sup> Service claims "the idea came to me one wintry morning, as I poised over my icy bath," and the December publication date accords with the "wintry" genesis of the poem. Furthermore, Service describes "It Must Be Done" as "comic," while the Glasgow work was "along more conventional lines, and on more conventional subjects."<sup>28</sup> He substitutes the British Columbia verse he favoured less for the actual Glasgow material in *Ploughman of the Moon* because the conventionality of the latter did not accord with the rugged persona behind *Songs of a Sourdough* and similar collections. The British Columbia material, presented as the work of fourteen years earlier, suggests that Service maintained a relatively consistent style throughout his career.

An example of the "more conventional" verse is "To Moses Risson: A Glasgow Literateur," submitted to the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* in 1899 after Service heard of the death of his friend Arthur Morrison. Morrison was part of a bohemian circle that Service and some of his friends formed in Glasgow. The group issued, Service recalls in *Ploughman of the Moon*, a short-lived literary magazine during the winter of 1893-94: "We all contributed. It was typed and neatly bound and had a great success. I was represented by two triolets and a villanelle in which I aped Austin Dobson and Arthur Symonds. We all looked forward to the next number, when suddenly everything crashed and our whole community split and dissolved."<sup>29</sup> To acknowledge the death of his friend, Service resumed the persona he had assumed in the journal six years before, and submitted a piece replete with the romanticism of the late-Victorian era:

I would like to think that perchance the tune,  
Faint through the din of the Glasgow street,  
Of a lark gone mad with the joy of June  
Far away in the fields of wheat,  
Might sometimes drift like a ghostly rune  
Down to your last retreat.<sup>30</sup>

The freedom of the lark in contrast to the grime of Glasgow, and the romantic reverence for the countryside, typifies the "more conventional" verse from which Service sought to distance himself when he became known for his frontier ballads. He remained capable of writing such verse,

however, and later ballads such as "The Spell of the Yukon" and "The Nostomaniac," though dressed in less-refined language and metres, continued to express the romanticism Service imbibed during his youth in Glasgow.<sup>31</sup>

The dearth of manuscripts from any point in Service's career heightens the significance of these poems. Although four pages of corrected galley proofs for *Songs of a Sourdough* are in the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, the proofs include none of the verse previously published in British Columbia. These poems therefore supplement the proofs and shed light on the degree to which Service revised his material. The selections in *Songs of a Sourdough*, Service claims, were written "with no thought of publication"; "when at last I decided to submit some of them for publication I did not then seek to change or improve them in any way."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, most of the poems published prior to *Songs of a Sourdough* and later included in that collection show some alteration. "The Ballad of the Bold Bohemian and the Philistine Maid," however, was not republished until *Ballads of a Bohemian* (1921), and the eighteen-year lapse utterly refutes Service's pretended nonchalance towards publication and revision.

Originally published in 1903, the ballad undergoes drastic revision that both improves its structure and reflects the new artistic and social context of the post-War era. The later version mentions "Vorticist's suppers," an impossible reference before 1914, and "pink teas" in 1903 becomes "Tango teas" in 1921.<sup>33</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the expression "pink teas" is of North American origin, whereas "Tango teas" gained currency in 1913 and had greater popular resonance.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the 1921 poem emphasizes the mutual shock the characters receive from their attempts to please each other. "'Ass!'" declares the bohemian before transforming himself into the "simpering dandy" that makes him "an ass" to the former philistine, who thought herself an "insipid doll" before becoming the "bore" she now appears.<sup>35</sup> The 1903 version lacks this parallel between self-criticism and the beloved's identical reaction a year later that heightens the irony. Although the revisions to other poems are not as severe, the alteration of whole stanzas in "The Ballad of the Bold Bohemian and the Philistine Maid" sufficiently proves that Service took a long-term interest in his work.

Service, I believe, composed and published other poems during his time in British Columbia. Gibbons mentions "The Little Red Cent," a poem that I have presented as it appeared in his recollections of Service.<sup>36</sup> It apparently first appeared in a Vancouver paper during the autumn of 1903, but I have



not located the original. Nor have I found "Shun Not the Strife," a poem Service cites in addition to "The Song of the Social Failure" and "It Must Be Done" when discussing his Glasgow verse in *Ploughman of the Moon*.<sup>37</sup> Considering that the latter two poems were written in British Columbia rather than Scotland, it is quite possible that "Shun Not the Strife" was written in Canada as well. "'Fighting Mac.' A Life Tragedy" is another of the poems in *Songs of a Sourdough* that Service may have written in British Columbia. It refers to the suicide of Sir Hector Macdonald on 25 March 1903. Macdonald was a hero to the Highlanders who fought in South Africa, and his death provided Service with fit material for a ballad.<sup>38</sup> The poems that follow, then, have fellow fugitive poems that may yet appear with further searching.<sup>39</sup>

Following the publication of *Songs of a Sourdough*, Service rarely contributed new verse to periodicals. Although he had contributed twenty-three ballads to *MacLean's Magazine* during the First World War, in 1953 he snubbed a request regarding periodical publication from Lorne Pierce of the Ryerson Press.<sup>40</sup> In a beautifully brief and sweeping statement, Service declared: "In reply to your letter of Jan. 2nd the answer is that I never publish in periodicals. I see no reason to modify my rule in the present case."<sup>41</sup> The refusal is intriguing since Ryerson was not publishing Service's new verse at the time, and the request probably related to earlier poems such as "The Land of Beyond" from *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone*—which appeared in that month's issue of *Good Housekeeping*.<sup>42</sup> One can only imagine Pierce's reaction to Service's reply!

Between the publication of *Songs of a Sourdough* and his second volume of verse, *Ballads of a Cheechako* (1909), Service rarely submitted his work to local papers as he had in British Columbia. "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill" is the only piece I have found, having searched the Whitehorse and Dawson papers from 1904 through to the publication of *Ballads of a Cheechako* in August 1909.<sup>43</sup> "Blasphemous Bill" is the transcript of a recitation Service gave in Dawson, and it suggests that he possibly recited ballads in British Columbia that eventually entered his collections, making revisions in accordance with the reaction of his audience. Unfortunately, without manuscripts or newspaper reports, the pre-publication texts of these poems are lost to history. With continued searching, however, further manuscripts and periodical sources may turn up, increasing our understanding of the early career of this notable Canadian writer.

## Notes to Introduction

The author received the Marie Tremaine and Bernard Amtmann Fellowships from the Bibliographical Society of Canada in 1995, awards that enabled him to visit Vancouver Island in September 1995 and complete research required for this paper.

1. "Arctic Poet in the City Says He is Rolling Stone," *Daily Star* (Toronto) 20 Sep. 1921: 1. [\[back\]](#)
2. Robert W. Service, *Ploughman of the Moon* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945) 221, 287. [\[back\]](#)
3. Carl F. Klinck, *Robert Service: A Biography* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976) 38; Service, *Songs of a Sourdough*, Author's ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907) 42. "Apart and Together" is indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Anna L. Guthrie (Minneapolis: H. W. Wilson, 1905) 1307. [\[back\]](#)
4. Klinck 38; see "The Little Old Log Cabin." [\[back\]](#)
5. R. X. Roberts, "A Bibliography of Robert William Service 1874-1958," *Four Decades of Poetry* 1.1 (1976): 75-85. [\[back\]](#)
6. James Mackay, *Vagabond of Verse* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1995) 86-7; 142. [\[back\]](#)
7. Frank Kelley, "The Yukon Poet," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 25 Nov. 1950: 4. [\[back\]](#)
8. "Songs of a Sourdough," *Daily World* (Vancouver) 10 Jun. 1907: 4; Donald G. French, "Robert W. Service, the Poet of the Yukon," *Globe* (Toronto) 26 Dec. 1908, Saturday magazine sec.: 6. [\[back\]](#)
9. Hana Komorous, comp., *Union Catalogue of British Columbia Newspapers*, vol. 1 (Vancouver: British Columbia Library Association, 1987) 104. [\[back\]](#)
10. Elizabeth B. Norcross, *The Warm Land* (Duncan, BC: E. B. Norcross, 1959) 104. [\[back\]](#)
11. Service, *Ploughman* 274. [\[back\]](#)
12. Service, *Ploughman* 279. [\[back\]](#)
13. Charles H. Gibbons, "When Robert Service, Bard of the Yukon, Was Verse-Writing Store Clerk at Cowichan" *Province* (Vancouver) c. Dec. 1921: n.p. I discovered a clipping of the original article in the Gillis Family collection (Yukon Archives, Whitehorse, acc. 82/40, pt. 2, mss. 3, folder 6). The article also appeared, without the poem "The Little Red Cent," as "The Sourdough Poet's Start: Past and Present of Robert W. Service" in *Saturday Night* (37.8 [24 Dec. 1921]: 3). [\[back\]](#)
14. *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 23 Jan. 1900: 1. [\[back\]](#)
15. Malvern van Wyk Smith, *Drummer Hodge: The Poetry of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 306-07.

- [\[back\]](#)
16. Typescript autobiography of Stanley F. Service, Stanley Service Papers, National Archives of Canada, MG 30, D285, vol. 1, file 6, pp. 1-4. [\[back\]](#)
  17. "The Mourners," *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1916) 191-92.
  18. *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 6 Jul. 1900: 2. [\[back\]](#)
  19. *Daily World* (Vancouver) 10 Jun. 1907: 4. [\[back\]](#)
  20. *Daily World* (Vancouver) 10 Jun. 1907: 4. [\[back\]](#)
  21. "The Little Old Log Cabin," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 16 Mar. 1902: 9; "The Spell of the Yukon," *Songs of a Sourdough* 18. [\[back\]](#)
  22. Jack Fleetwood, letter to the author, 3 January 1994. Mr. Fleetwood is a local historian who has recorded the recollections of several who knew Service during his time in the Cowichan area. [\[back\]](#)
  23. "The Song of the Social Failure," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 15 Jun. 1902: 11. [\[back\]](#)
  24. Telephone communication with Beatrice Corbett, 2 November 1995; Beatrice Corbett collection, Queen's University Archives, coll. 2098. Constance M. MacLean to Robert W. Service, [9 December 1902]; Robert W. Service to Constance M. MacLean, 10 December 1902. [\[back\]](#)
  25. Corbett collection, Service to MacLean, [4] October 1903 (the date is unclear, but is stated to be "Sunday Evening"); Service, *Ploughman* 288. [\[back\]](#)
  26. "The Song of the Social Failure"; Service, *Ploughman* 84. [\[back\]](#)
  27. Service, *Ploughman* 84; Klinck 28. [\[back\]](#)
  28. Service, *Ploughman* 84; French 6. [\[back\]](#)
  29. Service, *Ploughman* 120. I have yet to locate copies of the magazine. "To Moses Risson" is therefore the only known example of Service's work under the pseudonym "Sil Rivers." [\[back\]](#)
  30. Sil Rivers, "To Moses Risson: A Glasgow Literateur," *Weekly Herald* (Glasgow) 2 Dec. 1899: 5; see also "Corfield's Store, Once A Poet's Abode, Passes On," *Cowichan Leader* (Duncan, BC) 24 Jan. 1946: 4. The latter article confirms Service's identity as Sil Rivers, and reprints two stanzas of "To Moses Risson." [\[back\]](#)
  31. See "The Spell of the Yukon," *Songs of a Sourdough* 15-18; "The Nostomaniac," *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912) 56-61. [\[back\]](#)
  32. Service, *Ploughman* 326; *Daily Star* (Toronto) 20 Sep. 1912: 1. [\[back\]](#)
  33. See "The Ballad of the Bold Bohemian and the Philistine Maid" (16); "The Philistine and the Bohemian," *Ballads of a Bohemian* (Toronto: Barse & Hopkins, 1921) 70. [\[back\]](#)
  34. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. 11, 871; vol. 17, 612. [\[back\]](#)
  35. "The Philistine and the Bohemian" 70-72. [\[back\]](#)

36. Gibbons, "When Robert Service, Bard of the Yukon, Was Verse-Writing Store Clerk at Cowichan." [\[back\]](#)
37. Service, *Ploughman* 85. [\[back\]](#)
38. "'Fighting Mac.' A Life Tragedy," *Songs of a Sourdough* 66-69; Mackay also mentions "Fighting Mac," p. 142. [\[back\]](#)
39. Thus far, I have checked the *Victoria Daily Colonist* (25 Nov. 1896-18 May 1897; 1 Aug. 1899-30 Sep. 1904), the *Vancouver Daily World* (14 Feb. 1902-30 Sep. 1904), and the *Vancouver Province* (Sep.-Dec. 1903); the three surviving issues of the *Duncans Enterprise*; and the *Standard* and *Inland Sentinel* of Kamloops, where Service worked as a bank teller from July to November 1904. [\[back\]](#)
40. The twenty-three poems appeared in two series, the first comprising twelve poems and beginning in January 1916 and ending in January 1917; the second comprising eleven poems and appearing between December 1917 and November 1919 (*An Index to Maclean's Magazine, 1914-1937*, comp. Peter Mitchell, Canadian Library Association, Occasional Paper 47 [Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1965]). [\[back\]](#)
41. Lorne Pierce Papers, Queen's University Archives, coll. 2001a, box 22, file 13, item 22, Robert W. Service to Lorne Pierce, 5 Feb. 1953. [\[back\]](#)
42. "Land of Beyond," *Good Housekeeping* 136.1 (Jan. 1953): 4. [\[back\]](#)
43. "The Ballad of Blasphemous Bill," *Daily News* (Dawson) 14 Jun. 1909: 2; rpt. *Weekly Star* (Whitehorse) 2 Jul. 1909: 3. This version was recited in Dawson, Friday, 11 June 1909, and includes the lines Briggs ordered cut: "Me that's a pillar of the church, and takes the rake-off there, / And says: 'Gol-darn you, dig for the Lord,' if the boys don't ante fair" (*Ploughman* 312). When collated with a typescript of the ballad in the Barrett collection at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia (acc. 8524), sundry other textual variants also appear. [\[back\]](#)

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### **To Moses Risson: A Glasgow Literateur Died August, 1899.**

I would die in the south where the roses bloom  
 At Christmastide, where the soil is sweet;  
 I would lie in the south in a lowly tomb,  
 Where the wind would scatter the fragrant  
 bloom  
 Softly                    down                    to                    my

But you, my friend, who, even as I,  
 Were ever in love with the blue of the sky,  
 And song and the summer's gold:  
 Under the smoky sod you lie,  
 While over the city the winds go  
 by, 10  
 Harsh, and bitter, and cold.

Down from the darkness slips the snow,  
 Stilling the curses, stilling the cries.  
 Sorrow and shame, and want and woe  
 Shadow your resting-place, and  
 though 15  
 You cannot see and you cannot know,  
 I would it were otherwise.

I would like to think that perchance the tune,  
 Faint through the din of the Glasgow Street,  
 Of a lark gone mad with the joy of  
 June 20  
 Far away in the fields of wheat,  
 Might sometimes drift like a ghostly rune  
 Down to your last retreat.

### **The Christmas Card**

"A letter, sir, for Sergeant Joseph Scott;  
 One of your men, I think, sir; is he not?"  
 "He was till yesterday," the captain said.  
 "But now," he sighed, "go, search among the  
 dead."

They found him on the kopje's ghastly crest—  
 5  
 A shapeless, shattered thing of blood and clay;  
 They found him with the bravest and the best,  
 The captured guns not twenty feet away.

The captain turned the letter o'er and o'er;  
 A man of iron, his face was grim and  
 hard. 10  
 At last the envelope aside he tore,

And out there dropped a little tawdry card.

He picked it up: "It's from a kid," he said.  
And then he softly swore: "Too bad, too bad;"  
And bit his lip, and cleared his throat, and  
read: 15  
"A merry Christmas to my dearest Dad."

They raised the dead man with his fellows  
brave;  
They stretched his mangled limbs in shape of  
rest;  
And ere they placed him in the common grave,  
They laid the little card upon his  
breast. 20

### **Scamp of the Family**

The scamp of the family has gone to the front,  
Gallant and fresh and gay;  
Right in the thick of it, bearing the brunt  
Throwing his life away.  
He was always a sorrow to us, you  
know, 5  
As long as he hung round here;  
But we buried the past when it came to the last,  
And we gave him a farewell cheer.

The father, he stopped in the busy street:  
"A paper, quick, boy," he  
said; 10  
And he eagerly scanned the crowded sheet,  
Till he came to the list of the dead.  
Then a sob rose up to the quivering lips:  
"O, God, if it be Thy will;"  
And the passers-by all wondered  
why 15  
He stood so long and still.

Now the mother sits in her room alone;  
(She is failing fast, they say);  
She would give her life if she could atone  
To the boy they sent  
away; 20  
The boy who died in the black, black night,

And who proved in the bloody test  
Of the shrieking shell, and the battle-hell,  
That the worst is often the best.

There's none to sneer at the scapegrace  
now;                   25

He has wiped out every shame;  
He has done his work, and we all allow  
He's a credit to his name.  
We call him the pride of the family now,  
And the moral is quickly seen—  
                                  30

There is always a place for the hardest case  
In the service of the Queen.

### **Magersfontein**

Wae's me for Scotland: hear the wind sighing;  
Hark, ye, the wave as it moans on the shore;  
Tune up the pipes for the dead and the dying;  
Play for the laddies we'll never see more.

Blythely they left us, stepping  
together:                   5  
Sporrans were swinging and buckles a-gleam;  
Some of them sporting a sprig of the heather—  
O how we cheered them! It's all like a dream.

Bright was the sunshine to gladden their  
sailing;  
See how the mist hangs so caller and  
grey.                   10  
Strike up the coronach, set the pipes wailing;  
Tell the black cairns that we sorrow to-day.

Tell peak and glen that our hearts are like  
breaking,  
To think of our bairns who were marched to  
their end,  
Close-ranked, grim, silent, no question  
making—                   15  
Like sheep to the shambles, no chance to  
defend.

To think of our sons in the wan moonlight  
lying,  
The sons of our bosom, so fond, true and  
brave;  
The dew on their faces, their hearts' blood  
deep-dying  
The pink sprig of heather we kissed ere we  
gave.        20

To think of their fathers who gained their grim  
guerdon,  
Whose bones cry for vengeance from Majuba's  
side;  
To think of the boys who will take up the  
burden,  
And die in their turn as their forefathers died.

Honor to Scotland! There's more of our  
breeding,        25  
Who climb on the fell, or who swim in the torr,  
Who long for the calling, who wait for the  
leading—  
Then tune the wild pipes to the glory of war.

## **Rhyme of the Roughrider**

### **I.**

Listen! There's a murmur swelling on the southern breeze,  
And it echoes with a strange and savage thrum;  
And it sets our hearts a-longing o'er the circle of the seas—  
Do you hear it? It's the mandate of the drum.  
It has been so long arriving, while we waited helpless  
here,        5  
That we half expected it would never come;  
But it's better late than never—let us greet it with a cheer,  
Let us muster to the summons of the drum.  
For we're going, yes, we're going  
Where the bugles all are  
blowing;        10  
We are going where the lead bees hum.  
We are bound to have a showing,  
And we glory in the knowing  
That they want us round that same old drum.

### **II.**



We have leapt into our manhood in this fringe of far-flung

West;

15

We have dreamed beneath the shadow of the pine;  
Till there came a sudden vision, and it would not let us rest,  
And we started, and we knew it for a sign.

We saw the crimson flicker through the lurid rift of smoke;

We saw the maddened legions roaring  
down;

20

And we shivered in our saddles, and the fighting spirit woke,  
And we knew that we must join the boys in brown.

So we're going, yes, we're going

Where a brother's blood is flowing;

We are going to the great, grim

land;

25

There are dirty weeds a-growing,

And old Death is busy mowing,

And we want to take a hand.

O ye heroes, gaunt and gory!

If there's still a deed of

glory

30

Seeks the doing, save it till we come;

Let us have a chance of trying—

If we fall, we don't mind dying

To the music of a British drum.

### **The Pro-Boer**

You're for the Boers, my friend; you hope  
they'll win.

You think you see our Britain's overthrow.

When decent folks are dumb you sit and grin

Through tap-room smoke, and say: "I told you  
so."

You're for the Boers; if windy phrase could  
kill,

5

Over your pipe and beer you'd wage great war:

Freedom of speech is good, my friend, but still

Freedom of speech may sometimes go too far.

You're smart, sir, at such arguments as these.

You've given this here company your  
views.

10

You've had your say, and now, sir, if you  
please,

I'll have a little argument with you.

I had a brother once, older than I,  
And at the shining threshold of our days,  
He romped with me beneath the summer  
sky,                   15  
And taught me secrets of the woodland ways.  
And then he left the green fields for the brown  
Of desert sands, and fierce burning suns;  
Till tired of wandering he settled down  
In gladness where the Orange river  
runs.                   20  
He built a home in beauty unsurpassed;  
His flocks and herds increased on every hand;  
He wedded, and had children, and at last  
Became a burgher in that golden land.  
And then the trouble fell he long had  
feared,                   25  
The war-cloud burst in sudden, deadly rage,  
The burghers rose; the whites were  
comandeered,  
The veldt became a bloody battle-stage.  
"You'll have to fight for us," they cried; "the  
time has come  
To drive the hated English to the  
sea,                   30  
To still forever their accursed drum."  
"I'm English to the very heart," said he,  
"It's life or death, and quick for you to choose  
Honor and wealth against a speedy fate."  
"Well, be it death," he answered; "I  
refuse."                   35  
"You'll change," they told him at the prison  
gate.  
"Change! If my body limb from limb you rend,  
And there be life in every dripping shred,  
And yours to take, I scorn you to the end.  
I will not fight, against my kin," he  
said.                   40  
Three days he mocked them thus with fierce  
disdain.  
Three nights he paced his prison to and fro.  
And when they brought him to the light again,  
Three times with bitter laugh he answered  
"No!"  
At last they led him to a lonely

place, 45  
A place of peace. The setting sun deep dyed  
A cypress grove, and lit his listless face;  
" 'Tis well. My country will avenge," he cried.  
He looked undaunted in the eyes of Death.  
"Good-bye, dear absent ones! Good-bye, sweet  
sun! 50  
Good-bye, O love." He drew a last deep  
breath—  
The guns ring out. The dastard deed is done.  
I hear the thud; I see him huddled there;  
I see his butchers slip in stealth away;  
And here, by the God who gave me life, I  
swear 55  
Four-fold I will repay, I will repay.  
I go to-morrow as a volunteer.  
Spirit of vengeance! shape my aim death-true—  
And you, who sit with sullen face and sneer,  
O traitor tongue! I will begin with  
you. 60

\* \* \* \* \*

You think I've proved my case with right good  
will.  
Yea, by the token of that bloody scar—  
Freedom of speech is good, my friend, but still  
Freedom of speech may sometimes go too far.

### **The March of the Dead**

The cruel war was over—O, the triumph was so sweet!  
We watched the troops returning through our tears,  
There was triumph, triumph, triumph down the scarlet  
glittering  
street,  
And you scarce could hear the music for the cheers.  
And you scarce could see the house-tops for the flags  
that flew  
between, 5  
The bells were pealing madly to the sky;  
And everyone was shouting for the Soldiers of the  
Queen,  
And the glory of an age was passing by.

And then there came a shadow, swift and sudden, dark  
and drear;

The bells were silent, not an echo  
stirred. 10

The flags were drooping sullenly, the men forgot to  
cheer;

We waited, and we never spoke a word.  
The sky grew darker, darker, till from out the gloomy  
rack,

There came a voice that checked the heart with  
dread:

"Tear down, tear down your bunting now, and hang up  
sable 15

black—

They are coming—it's the Army of the Dead."

They were coming, they were coming, gaunt and ghastly,  
sad and

slow;

They were coming, all the crimson wrecks of pride.  
With faces seared, and cheeks red smeared, and haunting  
eyes of

woe,

And clotted holes the khaki couldn't  
hide. 20

O, the clammy brow of anguish! the livid foam-flecked  
lips!

The reeling ranks of ruin swept along!  
The limb that trailed, the hand that failed, the bloody  
finger tips!

And O the dreary rhythm of their song!

"Oh, they left us on the veldt-side, but we felt we couldn't  
stop 25

On this our England's crowning festal day.  
We're the men of Magersfontein, we're the men of Spion  
Kop,

Colenzo,—We're the men who had to pay.  
We're the men who paid the blood-price. Shall the grave  
be all our

gain?

You owe us. Long and heavy is the  
score. 30

Then cheer us for our glory now, and cheer us for our  
pain,

And cheer us as ye never cheered before."

The folks were white and stricken, and each tongue  
seemed

weighed with lead;

Each heart was clutched in hollow hand of ice;  
And every eye was staring at the horror of the  
dead, 35

The pity of the men who paid the price.  
They were come, were come to mock us in the first flush  
of our

peace;

Through withering lips their teeth were all agleam;  
They were coming in their thousands, O, would they  
never cease!

I closed my eyes, and then—it was a  
dream. 40

There was triumph, triumph, triumph, down the scarlet-  
gleaming street;

The town was mad, a man was like a boy.  
A thousand flags were flaming where the sky and city  
meet,

A thousand bells were thundering the joy.  
There was music, mirth and sunshine; but some eyes  
shone

with

regret: 45

And while we stun with cheers our homing braves,  
O God, in Thy great mercy, let us nevermore forget  
The graves they left behind, the bitter graves.

### **The Rhyme of the Remittance Man**

There's a four-pronged buck a-swinging in the shadow  
of my

cabin,

And it roamed the velvet valley till to-day;  
But I tracked it by the river, and I trailed it in the cover,  
And I killed it on the mountain miles away  
Now I've had my lazy supper, and the level sun is  
gleaming 5

On the water where the silver salmon play;  
And I light my little corn-cob, and I linger softly  
dreaming

In the twilight of a land that's far away.

Far away, so faint and far is flaming London, fevered  
Paris,

That I fancy I have gained another  
star; 10

Far away the din and hurry, far away the sin and worry,  
Far away, God knows they cannot be too far.

Guilded galley slaves of mammon—how my purse-  
proud

brothers taunt me:

"I might have been as well to do as they,  
Had I clutched like them my chances, learned their  
wisdom,

crushed my

fancies 15

Starved my soul and gone to business every day."

Well, the cherry bends with blossom, and the vivid grass  
is

springing,

And the star like lily nestles in the green,  
And the frogs their joys are singing, and my heart in tune  
is

ringing,

And it dos'nt matter what I might have  
been. 20

While above the scented pine-gloom, piling heights of  
golden

glory,

The sun-god paints his canvas in the west,  
I can couch me deep in clover, I can listen to the story  
Of the lazy, lapping water—it is best.

While the trout leaps in the river, and the blue grouse  
thrills

the cover,

25

And the frozen snow betrays the panther's track,  
And the robin greets the day-spring with the rapture of a  
lover,

I am happy, and I'll nevermore go back.

For I know I'd just be longing for the little old log cabin,  
With the morning glory clinging to the  
door, 30

Till I loathed the city places, cursed the care on all the  
faces,  
Turned my back on lazar London evermore.

So send me far from Lombard Street, and write me down  
a failure;  
Put a little in my purse and leave me free.  
Say: "He turned from Fortune's offering to follow up a  
pale

lure, 35  
He is one of us no longer—let him be."  
I am one of you no longer: by the trails my feet have  
broken,  
The dizzy peaks I've scaled, the camp fires glow,  
By the lonely seas I've sailed in—Yea, the final word is  
spoken,  
I am signed and sealed to nature. Be it  
so. 40

### **The Younger Son**

If you leave the gloom of London, and you seek a glowing land,  
Where all except the flag is strange and new,  
There's a bronzed and stalwart fellow who will grip you by the  
hand,  
And greet you with a welcome warm and true;  
For he's your younger brother, the one you sent  
away, 5  
Because there wasn't room for him at home;  
And now he's quite contented, and he's glad he didn't stay,  
And he's building Britain's greatness o'er the foam.

When the giant herd is moving at the rising of the sun,  
And the prairie is lit with rose and  
gold; 10  
And the camp is all a-bustle, and the busy day's begun,  
He leaps into the saddle sure and bold.  
Through the round of heat and hurry, through the racket and the  
rout,  
He rattles at a pace that nothing mars;  
And when the night-winds whisper, and the camp-fires flicker  
out, 15  
He is sleeping like a child beneath the stars.

When the wattle-blooms are drooping in the sombre shed-oak  
glade,

And the breathless land is lying in a swoon,  
He leaves his work a moment, leaning lightly on his spade,  
And he hears the bell-bird chime the Austral  
noon. 20

The parrakeets are silent in the gum-tree by the creek;  
The ferny grove is sunshine-steeped and still;  
But the dew will gem the myrtle in the twilight ere he seek  
His little lonely cabin on the hill.

Around the purple, vine-clad slope the argent river  
dreams; 25

The roses almost hide the house from view;  
A snow peak of the Winterberg in crimson splendour gleams;  
The shadow deepens down on the karoo.  
He seeks the lily-scented dusk beneath the orange tree;  
His pipe in silence glows and fades and  
glows; 30  
And then two little maids come out and climb upon his knee,  
And one is like the lily, one the rose.

He sees his white sheep dapple o'er the green New Zealand plain,  
And where Vancouver's shaggy ramparts frown,  
When the sun-light threads the pine-gloom he is fighting might and  
main, 35

To clinch the rivets of an Empire down.  
You will find him toiling, toiling, in the south or in the west,  
A child of nature, fearless, frank and free;  
And the warmest heart that beats for you is beating in his breast,  
And he sends you loyal greeting o'er the  
sea. 40

You've a brother in the army, you've another in the Church;  
One of you is a diplomatic swell;  
You've had the pick of everything and left him in the lurch;  
And yet I think he's doing very well.  
I'm sure his life is happy, and he doesn't envy  
yours; 45

I know he loves the land his pluck has won;  
And I fancy in the years unborn, while England's fame endures,  
She will come to bless with pride—The Younger Son.

### **The Rhyme of the Restless Ones**



We couldn't sit and study for the law,  
The stagnation of a bank we couldn't stand  
For : our riot blood was surging, and we didn't need  
much urging,  
To excitements and excesses that are banned.  
So we took to cards and drink and other  
things, 5  
And the devil in us struggled to be free:  
Till our friends rose up in wrath, and then pointed out  
the path,  
And they paid our debts and packed us o'er the sea.  
Oh, they shook us off and shipped us o'er the foam,  
To the larger lands that lure a man to  
roam; 10  
And we took the chance they gave  
Of a fair and foreign grave,  
And we bade good-bye for evermore to home.

And some of us are climbing on the peak,  
And some of us are camping on the  
plain; 15  
By pine and palm you'll find us, with never claim to bind  
us,  
By track and trail you'll meet us once again.  
We are fated serfs to freedom—sky and sea;  
We have failed where slummy cities overflow;  
But the stranger ways of earth know our pride and know  
our worth, 20  
And we go into the dark as brave men go.  
Yes, we go into the night as fighters go  
Though our faces they be often streaked with woe;  
Yet we're hard as cats to kill,  
And our hearts are reckless  
still, 25  
And we've danced with Death a dozen times or so.

And you'll find us in Alaska after gold,  
And you'll find us herding cattle in the south;  
We like strong drink and fun, and when the race is run,  
We often die with curses in our  
mouth; 30  
We are wild as colts unbroke, but never mean;  
Of our sins we've shoulders broad to bear the blame;  
But we'll never stay in town, and we'll never settle  
down,

And we'll never have an object or an aim.  
No, there's that in us that time can never  
tame;    35  
And life will always seem a ceaseless game;  
And they'd better far forget,  
Those who say they love us yet,  
Forget, blot out with bitterness our name.

### Music in the Bush

O'er the dark pines she sees the silver moon,  
And in the West, all tremulous, a star;  
And soothing sweet she hears the mellow tune  
Of cowbells jangled in the fields afar.

Quite listless, for her daily stent is  
done,    5  
She stands, sad exile, at her rose-wreathed  
door;  
And sends her love eternal with the sun  
That goes to guild the land she'll see no more.

The grave gaunt pines imprison her sad gaze;  
All still the sky and darkling  
drearily;                                      10  
She feels the chilly breath of dear dead days  
Come sifting through the alders eerily.

Oh how the roses riot in their bloom;  
The curtains stir as with an ancient pain;  
Her old piano gleams from out the  
gloom,                                         15  
And waits and waits for tender touch in vain.

But now her hands like moonlight brush the  
keys  
With velvet grace, melodious delight;  
And now a sad refrain from over seas;  
Goes sobbing on the bosom of the  
night.                                         20

And now she sings (O singer in the gloom,  
Voicing a sorrow we can ne'er express,  
Here in the Farness where we few have room  
Unshamed to show our love and tenderness.

Our hearts will echo till they beat no  
more,                             25  
That song of sadness and of motherland;  
And stretched in deathless love to England's  
shore,  
Some day she'll understand, she'll understand.)

A prima-donna in the shining past,  
But now a mother growing old and  
grey,                             30  
She thinks of how she held a people fast  
In thrall and gleaned the triumphs of a day.

She sees a sea of faces like a dream;  
She sees herself a queen of song once more;  
She sees lips part in rapture eyes  
agleam;                             35  
She sings as never once she sang before.

She sings a wild sweet song that throbs with  
pain,  
The added pain of life that transcends art,  
A song of home, a deep celestial strain,  
The glorious swan-song of a dying  
heart.                             40

A lame tramp comes along the railway track,  
A grizzled dog whose day is nearly done;  
He passes, pauses, then comes slowly back,  
And listens there—an audience of one.

She sings—her golden voice is passion  
fraught,                             45  
As when she charmed a thousand eager ears;  
He listens trembling, and she knows it not,  
And down his hollow cheeks roll bitter tears.

She ceases and is still as if to pray;  
There is no sound, the stars are all alight—  
50

Only a wretch who stumbles on his way,  
Only a vagrant sobbing in the night.

### **The Little Old Log Cabin**

When a man gits on his uppers in a hard-pan sort of town,  
An' he ain't got nuthin' comin' an' he can't afford ter eat,  
An' he's in a fix fer lodgin', an, he wanders up an' down,  
An' you'd fancy he'd been boozin', he's so loosed 'bout the feet;  
When he's feelin' sneakin' sorry, an' his belt is hangin'  
slack, 5  
An' his face is peaked an' grey-like, an' his heart gits down an'  
whines,  
Then he's apt ter git a-thinkin' an' a-wishin' he was back,  
In the little ol' log cabin in the shadder of the pines.

When he's on the blazin' desert, an' his canteen's sprung a leak,  
An' he's all alone an' crazy, an' he's crawlin' like a  
snail, 10  
An' his tongue's so black an' swollen that it hurts him fer to  
speak,  
An' he gouges down fer water, an' the raven's on his trail;  
When he's done with care an' cursin' an' he feels more like to cry,  
An' he sees ol' Death a-grinnin' an' he thinks upon his crimes,  
Then he's like ter hev' a vision as he settles down ter  
die, 15  
Of the little ol' log cabin, and' the roses an' the vines.

O, the little ol' log cabin, it's a solemn shinin' mark,  
When a feller gits ter sinnin', and' a-goin' ter the wall,  
An' folks don't understand him, an' he's gropin' in the dark,  
An' he's sick of bein' cursed at, an' he's longin' fer his  
call: 20  
When the sun of life's a-sinkin' you can see it 'way above,  
On the hill from out the shadder in a glory 'gin the sky,  
An' your mother's voice is callin' an' her arms are stretched in  
love,  
An' somehow you're glad you're goin', an' you ain't a-scared to  
die;  
When you'll be like a kid again, an' nestle to her  
breast, 25  
An' never leave its shelter, an' forget, an' love, an' rest.

## The Three Voices

### I.

The waves have a story to tell me,  
As I lie on the lonely beach;  
Chanting aloft in the pine-tops,

The wind has a lesson to teach;  
But the stars sing an anthem of  
glory 5  
I cannot put into speech.

## II.

The waves tell of vanished races;  
Of hearts that were bold and brave;  
Of populous city places;  
Of desolate shores they  
lave; 10  
Of men who sally in quest of gold,  
To sink in an ocean grave.

## III.

The wind is a joyous roamer,  
He bids me keep me free;  
Clean from the taint of the gold  
lust; 15  
Hardy and pure as he;  
Cling with my love to nature,  
As child to the mother knee.

## IV.

But the stars throng out in triumph,  
And they sing of the God in  
man; 20  
They sing of the great Creator;  
Of the loom his fingers span—  
Where a star or a soul is a thread of the whole,  
And weft in the perfect plan.

## V.

Here by the campfire's  
flicker, 25  
Deep in my blanket curled,  
I long for the dewy nightfall,  
When the scroll of the Lord is unfurled,  
And the silence is tense in the pine gloom,  
And world is singing to  
world. 30

Spring was a season of joy and song;  
Summer a gay and festive dance;  
Autumn a dream: O the days were long!  
Little we reck'd of time's advance.  
Then when the withered leaves dropt  
down 5  
And all the winds grew harsh and keen,  
Then, 'neath the stern sky's wintry frown,  
Then came the voice of the might-have-been.  
The might-have-been, the might-have-been,  
The haunting, taunting might-have-  
been; 10  
We all can hear in our hearts, I ween,  
The grim reproach of the might-have-been.

Ours was a banquet: remain but crumbs,  
Sad is the heart, the fire is low.  
Hark! with his stealthy tread he comes—  
15  
Comes like a fiend to mock our woe.  
"Sit ye here, starveling!" hear him cry;  
"Others the golden harvests glean;  
Yours are the poppies, reap! they die,"  
Such is the jeer of the might-have-  
been. 20  
The might-have-been, the might-have-been,  
The leering, sneering might-have-been;  
The soul must writhe in its fleshly screen  
At the scornful taunt of the might-have-been.

Life is a breath, and death ends  
all; 25  
Why should we care if fortune spurn?  
What does it matter? Great or small,  
Each to the worm must serve his turn.  
Here we sit in a tavern bright:  
Now let us banish woe and  
spleen; 30  
We'll be lords of the world to-night:  
Come, let us drown this might-have-been.  
The might-have-been, the might-have-been,  
The hateful, fateful might-have-been.  
Comrades, all to your glasses lean, 35  
And drink down death to this might-have-

been.

## The Coming of Miss McLean

The snow lay deep in Duncan at the dying of the day;  
A hundred happy hearths were gleaming bright;  
The rancher chewed his supper in a cheerful sort of way,  
And murmured: "There's a dance on for tonight."

There was hurry, there was flurry, mid the eager belles and  
beaux;                                      5  
Refurbishing their charms to highest mark;  
A-cleaning gloves with benzine, a-fixing evening clothes,  
A-hitching up of horses in the dark.

And now the dance goes gaily, the music swells o'er all;  
A radiance illumines each beaming  
swain;    10  
Till suddenly a whisper goes 'round the giddy hall:  
"Have *you* been introduced to Miss McLean."

They come, the unsuspecting ones, they come with smiles so  
bland;  
They dance, they talk things trivial and vain;  
Then somehow in a manner it is hard to  
understand    15  
They surrender to the Charms of Miss McLean.

They go away; they fain would stay, but others take their place;  
And 'round their hearts in turn she winds a chain;  
The dance is done, and one by one, they hurry home to trace  
In dreams a face, the face of Miss  
McLean.    20

She came, she saw, she conquered; now they would fain forget;  
Alas! their loss must be Vancouver's gain.  
They'll hide their grief in ashes —ashes-à-la-cigarette,  
For that dear departed darling Miss McLean.

### —— Envoi ——

Yes, she'll go away from Duncan's in the  
train,    25  
And their hearts will ever beat a sad refrain;  
For the One they can't forget, the One they'll  
e'er regret,

The dancing, fair, entrancing Miss McLean.

## **The Ballad of Mt. Sicker Ball**

### **A WAIL FROM THE HEIGHTS.**

Upon the mountain's brow we stand, and anxiously we scan the skies,  
A lonely longing little band, with horny hands and eager eyes.

On every hand is piled the snow. Our feet are cold but not our hearts,  
They glow with joy, for well we know today the fair invasion starts;  
From distant Duncan's liveree, a cavalcade of dainty  
charms, 5

Three wagon loads of girlish glee, right into our long empty arms.  
They've had their share, the chaps below. We've struggled in the damp  
and dirt;

It's time we had our little show. (We've half forgotten how to flirt.)  
O maiden, bring your sweetest smile, and, maiden, don your fairest dress,  
We mean to do the thing in style. Have pity on our  
loneliness. 10

O, Nellie, Mollie, Bess and Flo, fresh from the fray of Cupid's waves,  
Come listen to our plaint of woe. We are the Tyee bachelors.

### **Chorus of Ascending Angels.**

We are struggling up the awfu' hill. We're all of us damaged, more or  
less.

We're bumped and shaken and cramped and chill: but sorry at heart for  
your distress.

We heard from afar your yearning prayer. We jumped at the chance of a  
wider range. 15

We're rather tired of the boys down there, and every girl is fond of a  
change.

So we're coming to see you, twenty strong. Into your arms we are fain to  
jump.

The way is weary, the way is long, (there's a hole, look out for a bump),  
Merry of heart and full of chaff (the horses are blown, we'll have to  
stop),

Ready of tongue and quick to laugh (Oh! how we wish we were at the  
top). 20

Cheeks like roses and eyes so bright. Bravely we fare and hardships  
scorn.

Won't we have a good time tonight. (Won't we look tough tomorrow  
morn.)

Onward then through the mud and the dirt. On to the goal of adoring  
man,

Maiden, matron, chaperone, flirt; onward the girls of the Cowichan clan.



## Voces de Profundis.

Oh, you who have left us in deep despair—we who have loved you the season through. 25

Left us to rave and tear our hair, and drown our grief in a drink or two. You've gone to brighten the boys up there, gone in your glory of silk and lace,

Deserted us and you do not care—fickle of heart and fair of face. From the cosy corners we did not shrink. 'Twas easy to look at you and sit

And squeeze your hands, and yet I think—we're growing blase a little bit. 30

We watched you depart with a broken heart, and our eyes with the bitter tears were wet,

Then we turned our backs on your mud-lined tracks, and we kindled the end of a cigarette.

And we will not fret and we will not pine, and we'll wish a jolly good time to you.

And we hope that the men of the Tyee mine have their little cosy corners too.

And we trust that their ennui to beguile, you'll be extra sweet and nice and kind: 35

And you won't forget, and you'll save a smile for the lonely boys you've left behind.

## Some Quatrains From Omar

One said: Thy life is thine to make or mar;  
To flicker feebly, or to soar, a star;  
It lies with thee—the choice is thine, is thine,  
To hit the ties, or drive thy autocar.

I answered Her: The choice is mine. Ah,  
no! 5  
We all were made or marred long, long ago.  
The parts are written: hear the "super" wail;  
"Who is stagemanaging this cosmic show."

Blind fools of Fate, and slaves of  
Circumstance!  
Life is a fiddler and we all must  
dance, 10  
From gloom where mocks that will-o'-wisp  
"Free-will,"  
I heard a voice cry: "Say, give us a chance."

Chance! O there is no chance. The scene is set.  
Up with the curtain. Man, the marionette  
Resumes his part. The Gods will work the  
wires.                   15  
They've got it all down fine—you bet, you bet.

It's all decreed: the mighty earthquake crash;  
The countless constellations' wheel and flash;  
The rise and fall of Empire, war's red tide;  
The composition of your dinner  
hash.                   20

There's no hap-hazard in this world of ours.  
Cause and Effect are grim, relentless powers.  
They rule the world. (A king was shot last  
night.  
Last night I held the joker and both bowers.)

From out the mesh of Fate our heads we  
thrust,                   25  
We can't do what we would, but what we  
must.  
Heredity has got us all in a cinch,  
(Consoling thought, when you've been on a  
"bust.")

Hark to the song, where spherical voices blend,  
"There's no beginning, never will be  
end."                   30  
It makes us nutty, hang the astral chimes:  
The table's spread, come, let us dine, my friend.

### **The 'Longshoremen**

Its cruel cold on the waterfront, silent, and dark, and drear;  
Only the black tide weltering, only the hissing snow,  
And I alone like a wreck accurst, on this night of the glad New  
Year,  
Shuffling along in the icy wind, ghastly, and gaunt, and slow.

And they're playing a tune in McGuffy's saloon, and its cheer and  
bright in there,     5  
(God! but I'm weak—since the bitter dawn, and never a scrap of  
food)  
I'll just go over and slip inside, I mustn't give way to despair.

Perhaps I can bum a booze or two, if the boys are feeling good.

They'll jeer at me, and they'll sneer at me, and they'll call me a  
whiskey soak,

(Have a drink? well, thankee kindly, my friend, I don't mind if I  
do.) 10

A drivelling, low down, gin-joint fiend, the butt of the barroom  
joke,

Sunk and sod sodden and hopeless. (Another? well here's to you.)

McGuffy is jawing of prize ring shows and how Fitzsimmons hit;  
And politics, and Tammany Hall, and how the new boss was  
fired;

I'll just sneak into a corner and they'll let me alone a  
bit. 15

(The room is reeling round and round—O God! but I'm tired, I'm  
tired.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Roses she wore on her breast that night—O but the scent was  
sweet!

Alone we sat on the balcony, and the fan-palms arched above.  
The witching strain of a waltz by Strauss came up to our cool  
retreat,

And I prisoned her little hand in mine, and I whispered my prayer  
of love. 20

Then suddenly the laughter died on her lips and lowly she bent her  
head;

And O there came in the deep dark eyes a look that was Heaven to  
see;

And the moments went, and I waited there and never a word was  
said;

And she plucked from her bosom a rose of red and shyly gave it  
to me.

Then the music swelled to a crash of joy, and the lights blazed up  
like day; 25

And I held her fast to my bursting heart, and I kissed her bonny  
brow,

"She is mine, she is mine, forevermore," the violas seemed to say,

And the bells were ringing the New Year in—O God! I can  
hearthem now.

Don't you remember that long last waltz,

Don't you remember that last good-bye, and the dear eyes dim  
with tears;                    30

Don't you remember that golden dream with never a hint of pain,  
Of lives that would blind like an angel song in the joy of the  
coming years.

O, what have I lost! What have I lost! Ethel!—forgive—forgive,  
The red, red rose is faded, and its fifty years ago.

'Twere better to die a dozen deaths than to live each day as I  
live.                                35

I have sinned, I have sunk to the lowest depths, but O, I have  
suffered so.

Hark! O hark! I can hear the bells. Look! I can see her there,  
Pure as a dream—but it fades—and now I can hear the hum  
Of the crowded court. See! The judge looks down—Not guilty,  
my lord, I swear.

The bells! The bells are ringing again—Ethel! I come, I  
come.                                40

\* \* \* \* \*

Rouse up, old chap, you've slept enough; 'taint no doss-house y'  
know.

Here, ain't you got no sentiments? Lift up your muddled head.  
Just have a drink to the glad New Year, a drop before you go;  
I'll have to shake you now. Look up! My God! Here boys, he's  
DEAD.

## **The Ballad of the Bold Bohemian and the Philistine Maid**

### **I.**

She was a Philistine, spick and span;

He was a bold Bohemian.

She was flippant and fresh and fair;

He was witty and debonnair.

At fetes and assemblies she would  
shine;                                5

He cultivated the muses nine.

She revelled in Crockett, Corelli, Caine;

He quoted Huysmans and Paul Verlaine.

She loved artifice. He loved art.

They were as far as the poles  
apart                                10

Yet—Cupid with Puck is hand in glove—  
They met at a crush: they fell in love.

## II.

He hurried home to his attic den,  
Do you think he seized his decadent pen,  
To dash off sonnets, ballades,  
rondeaux, 15  
On the charms of his lady love? Ah, no!  
He seized with the scissors his flowing locks,  
His beard and whiskers came off in blocks.  
He gazed at himself with a gold-capped smile;  
He polished his long discarded  
tile. 20  
He tenderly polished his best frock coat;  
Wound a three-inch collar around his throat.  
He blandly remarked when he got through:  
"I look like a brother to Kyrie Bellew."  
He tore from his bosom the muses  
nine, 25  
And shrined there his dainty Philistine.

## III.

And she—went she back to pink teas and such,  
Daffodil luncheons, bridge parties? Not much.  
She returned to her home in the indigo blues:  
She arrayed in the most exotic of  
hues 30  
She wore a bandeaux upon her hair;  
She cultivated a delphic stare.  
She used strange perfumes, and used to sink  
In a faint at the sight of some shades of pink.  
She loathed all the crude, crass world  
outside, 35  
She developed a Sara Bernhardt glide.  
She cheerfully suffered Society's ban  
For the sake of her dear Bohemian.

## IV.

They met again and a month had passed.  
Their hearts beat madly: "At last", "At  
last." 40  
She gazed a moment: "Can this be he?"

He stared a moment: "Can this be she?"  
"This mould of fashion a la John Drew?"  
"This Burne-Jones maiden in peacock blue?"  
They certainly suffered a mutual  
shock. 45

In accents faint, they began to talk.  
She talked of nuance and minor keys,  
And Ibsen's meaning, and things like these.  
He chattered of football and ragtime shows,  
And automobiles, and George Ade's  
prose. 50  
In the realms of the abstract she vainly soared;  
He froze to the concrete—they both were  
bored.  
The spell was broken; so was each heart,  
They knew it was up to them to part.

\* \* \*

He was a Philistine, spick and  
span; 55  
She, a bizarre Bohemian.  
And ere a year, I am grieved to state,  
Each met their matrimonial fate.  
He paired with a widow—the worse for wear;  
She hitched to a bran-new  
millionaire. 60

\* \* \*

And what is the moral of all this rot?  
Never try to be what you know you're not.  
Be true to yourself, e'en in Love's despite,  
And Love in the end will treat you white.

### **The Little Red Cent**

The little red cent lay clasped in his hand  
And his blue eyes shone with glee  
As he left his play in the shining sand  
And hurried to show it to me:  
And gaily he polished it into  
gold, 5  
And proud as a prince was he —  
And oh what a wondrous tale he told  
Of his luck by the shell-girt sea!

And then when I started out for the West  
And the dear folks wept good-  
bye, 10  
He was the last, for I loved him best,  
And the love shone in his eye.  
But he said no word—just kissed me and  
pressed  
Something bright in my hand as I went;  
And the tears blurred all as the gift I guessed—  
15  
His treasure, the little red cent!

Time has a fortune for those who till,  
Yet fate has a cruel spite—  
There's a tiny grave on the lonely hill,  
And I'm a rich man  
tonight! 20  
Yet 'twas but for him I toiled and planned,  
Dreaming that 'I' might be 'we'—  
And the little red cent I hold in my hand  
Is all that is left to me.

Oh little red cent! Full a million-  
fold 25  
Would I gladly, gladly pay  
Could I just for a moment closely hold  
That golden head to my grey!  
Oh pure little heart, it is long ago,  
But I've mourned you all these  
years, 30  
And the gift you gave, for you loved me so,  
Is stained with an old man's tears.

### **Apart and Yet Together**

I know a garden where the lilies gleam,  
And one who lingers in the sunshine there;  
She is than white-stoled lily far more fair,  
And oh, her eyes are heaven-lit with a dream!

I know a garret, cold and dark and  
drear, 5  
And one who toils and toils with tireless pen  
Until his brave, sad eyes grow weary—then  
He seeks the stars, pale silent as a seer.

And ah, 'tis strange, for desolate and dim  
 Between these two there rolls an ocean  
 wide;                     10  
 Yet he is in the garden by her side,  
 And she is in the garret there with him!

### **It Must Be Done**

He stands alone by the water's edge,  
 With pale and anguished brow,  
 And shudders as he murmurs low;  
 "It must be done, and now."

He looks into those icy  
 depths,   5  
 With wildly starting eye;  
 And from his panting breast there breaks  
 A deep and bitter sigh.

Through all his tense and rigid frame  
 Great thrills of horror  
 run;   10  
 And once again he murmurs hoarse:  
 "It must and shall be done."

His mind's made up. A long, last look!  
 A plunge! and all is o'er.  
 He's taken—what was his intent—  
   15  
 His morning bath—no more.

### **Spring in Cowichan**

Oh to feel the paddle dipping,  
 Hear the crystal water dripping,  
 See the alders softly slipping  
 Past the little light canoe;  
 When the smile of May is  
 beaming,   5  
 And the dog-woods blooms are gleaming  
 And the days are dreaming, dreaming,  
 'Neath the skies bright blue.

Fragrant, vagrant winds a-blowing  
 Over oat-fields greenly



glowing, 10  
Scented, pink-stained blossoms snowing  
From the orchards' jeweled spray;  
Lily hosts their bells a-ringing  
Maple boughs their tassels swinging,  
And the robin singing,  
singing, 15  
In the fern-lit way.

King-fishers like arrows flying,  
Hooters faintly flute-like crying,  
Gay cock pheasants fear defying  
Where the lady-slippers  
bloom; 20  
Scarlet-capped wood-peckers drumming,  
Blossom cozened bees a-humming,  
Barking squirrels going, coming  
In the lone pine-gloom.

Dreams of primroses a-  
glimmer, 25  
Dreams of Springtide and the shimmer  
Of hay-meadows growing dimmer  
Where the silver river gleams;  
Dreams of restful, peaceful places,  
Dreams of flower-lit, sun-steeped  
spaces, 30  
Dreams of kindly, smiling faces—  
Idle dreams, vain dreams.

### Grin

If you're up against a bruiser, and you're getting knocked about,  
Grin.

If you're feeling pretty groggy, and you're licked beyond a doubt,  
Grin.

Don't give a sign you're funkng; let him see with every  
clout 5

Although your face is smashed to pulp, your blooming heart is  
stout;

Just stand upon your pins until the beggar knocks you out,  
And grin.

This life's a bally battle, and the same advice holds true  
Of

grin.

10

If you're up against it badly—well, it's only one on you,

So grin.

If the future's black as thunder don't let people see you're blue;

Just cultivate a cast-iron smile of joy the whole day through;

If they call you "Little Sunshine," "Wish that they'd no troubles,  
too,"

15

Well—you may grin.

Just rise up in the morning with the will that smooth or rough

You'll grin.

Sink to sleep at midnight, and although you're feeling tough,

Yet

grin.

20

There is nothing gained by whining, and you're not that kind of  
stuff;

You're a fighter from away back, and you won't take a rebuff;

Your trouble is that you just don't know when you have had  
enough

Don't give in.

If Fate should down you just get up and take another cuff—

25

You'll win.

You may bank on it that there is no philosophy like Bluff,

And Grin.

## Notes on the Poems

The following notes primarily record editorial emendations to the newspaper or manuscript text, and variant readings in the Whitehorse *Semi-Weekly Star* (1902), *Songs of a Sourdough* (Author's edition, 1907) and *Ballads of a Bohemian* (1921). The notes also occasionally supply pertinent historical details. The collation features the current reading of the text before the lemma, and the original reading of an emended text and the reading in the final published text after the lemma. When I have emended the original text of the poem, on account of typographical or orthographical errors, an 'N' in parentheses follows the original reading; later readings are followed by the date of publication, also in parentheses. An ellipsis is used in the collation to shorten an entry when one or more differences appear in a line. A wavy dash indicates that the identical word appears in the reading collated with the current reading. An inferior caret indicates a missing

article of punctuation.

The editor is grateful for the permission of the author's daughter, Iris Service Davies, to publish these poems.

• • •

**"To Moses Risson: A Glasgow Literateur."** *Weekly Herald* (Glasgow) 2 Dec. 1899: 5; subscribed "SIL RIVERS." "Moses Risson" is Arthur Morrison, a friend of Service who died in August 1899. In "Corfield's Store, Once A Poet's Abode, Passes On" (*Cowichan Leader* [Duncan, BC] 24 Jan. 1946: 4), Morrison's cousin A. A. Mutter confirms Service's identity as Sil Rivers. The article also reprints the second and fourth stanzas of the poem.

**"The Christmas Card."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 21 Dec. 1899: 4; subscribed "R. S. | Cowichan B. C., 18th December, 1899."

6 shapeless] shapless

9-16 The original arranges the lines in one eight-line stanza; I have created two four-line stanzas, in accordance with the arrangement of the surrounding lines.

13 It's] Its

14 bad;"] ~";

**"Scamp of the Family."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 25 Dec. 1899: 8; subscribed "R.S. | Cowichan, B. C., 21st. December, 1899."

4 Indented in the current text, in accordance with the arrangement of the surrounding lines.

14 will;"] ~";

25 scapegrace] skapegrace

**"Magersfontein."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 16 Jan. 1900: 8; subscribed "R. S. | Cowichan, B. C."

**"Rhyme of the Roughrider."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 23 Jan. 1900: 1;

subscribed "R. S. | Cowichan, B. C., 20th January, 1900."

"**The Pro-Boer.**" *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 13 Mar. 1900: 7; subscribed "R. S. | Cowichan, B. C., March, 1900."

44 laugh] laught

50 sweet] sweat

"**The March of the Dead.**" *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 6 Jul. 1900: 2; subscribed "—R.S. | Cowichan, B. C." Printed across two columns and enclosed in a border of alternating bullets and crosses. Reprinted in *Songs of a Sourdough*.

1 O] oh

2 returning ^ . . . tears,] ~, . . . ~;

13 rack,] ~^

15 βλακκ∇ ] ~; 18 πριδε.] ~;

19 Λεφτ φουστιφιεδ ιν τηε χυρρεντ τεξτ, ιν αχχορδανχε  
ωιτη συρρουνδινγ λινεσ; οριγιναλλψ ινδεντεδ.

21 O] Oη

23 τραιλεδ] φαιλεδ (N) τραιλεδ (1907) Εμενδεδ ον τηε  
πρινχιπλε τηατ Σερπιχε ωουλδ νοτ ηαπε ρεπεατεδ α  
ωορδ φορ τηε σακε οφ αν ιντερναλ ρηψμε; συππορτεδ βψ  
τηε τεξτ οφ τηε φιρστ εδιτιον.

24 O] οη,

25 Oη, τηεψ . . . πελδτσιδε . . . στοπ^ ] They . . . veldt-side . . .  
~,

26 this . . . day.] ~, . . . ~;

28 Colenzo,—We're] Colenzo,—we're

37 us] ~,

38 withering] writhing

39 thousands, O] ~—oh

41 triumph, down . . . scarlet-gleaming] ~^ ~ . . . scarlet gleaming

43 meet,] ~;

**"The Rhyme of the Remittance Man."** *British Columbia Mining Record* (Christmas 1900): 112. Left-justified; every second line indented in *Songs of a Sourdough*, and the third and fourth stanzas are accidentally printed as one stanza prior to the thirty-first printing (1911).

2 The semi-colon at the end of this line is inverted in the original; *Songs of a Sourdough* corrects this typographical error.

4 I've] I've (N)

7 dreaming^ ] ~,

8 twilight^ ] ~,

9 far] ~,

12 away,] ~—

13 Gilded galley slaves of mammon . . . me:] Gilded ~~~ ~  
Mammon . . . ~!

14 " . . . well to do . . . ,] ^ . . . ~~~~ . . . ^

15 φανχιεσ] ~,

16 δαψ.© ] ~.^

18 σταρ λικε . . . γρεεν,] ~~~ . . . ~;

20 δοσΠ ντ] δοεσνΠ τ

22 ωεστ,] ~;

27 δαψ-σπρινγ] δαψσπρινγ

30 μορνινγ γλορψ] ~~~

34 λιττλε] λλττλε (N)

38 χαμπ φιρεσ] χαμπ-φιρεΠ σ

39 Ψεα]ψεα

40 Νατυρε] νατυρε

® **The Younger Son.** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 19 Feb 1901: 6; signed "R. S."; Printed across two columns; left-justified. Reprinted in *Songs of a Sourdough*, every second line indented.

1 London,] ~^

6 Βεχαυσε] αυσε (N) ~ (1907)

Τηε πριντ ισ βροκεν ιν τηε νεωσπαπερ τεξτ.

11 α-βυστλε . . . δαψΠ σ] ~ . . . δαψσ (N) αβυστλε . . . ~  
(1907)

12 ανδ] αν (N) ~ (1907)

15 ανδ τηε χαμπ-φιρεσ] ανδ χαμπ-φιρεσ

21 παρρακεετσ] παρραβεετσ (N) ~ (1907)

25–40 *Songs of a Sourdough* originally presented these lines as one stanza; later editions restore them to their original arrangement.

27 snow peak . . . splendour] ~-~ . . . splendor

28 karoo] karroo

35 sun-light . . . main,] sunlight . . . ~^

® **The Rhyme of the Restless Ones.** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 15 Sep. 1901: 4; subscribed "ROBERT W. SERVICE | Corfield, B. C." Reprinted in *Songs of a Sourdough*, where the poem's three stanzas are broken into six. The collection also indents every second line of the first, third, and fifth stanzas, and the third and fourth lines of the remaining three, whereas the *Colonist* left-justifies the ballad, save for the last five lines of each stanza (the three new stanzas in the *Sourdough* collection), which are indented.

1 law] ~;

2 stand] ~;

3 For : our . . . urging,] ~^ ~ . . . ~^

5 καρδσ] ωινε

6 φρεε:] ~;

7 τηεν] τηεψ

9 σηοοκ υσ] ~ υπ (N) ~ υσ (1907)

11 γαπε^ ] ~,

12 fair] far

17 meet up] ~ us

21 brave men] fighters

22 fighters go^ ] brave men ~,

26 Death] death

28 south;] South.

29 fun,] ~;

30 mouth;] ~.

36 always . . . ceaseless] alwas . . . ~ (N) ~ . . . careless (1907)

37 forget,] ~—

38 yet,] ~—

**"Music in the Bush."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 18 Sep. 1901: 6;  
subscribed "ROBERT W. SERVICE | Corfield, B. C." Printed across two  
columns and enclosed in a border of bullets. Reprinted in *Songs of a  
Sourdough*, every second line indented.

2 West] west

4 cowbells] cow-bells

8 guild] gild

9 grave^ ] ~,

11 dear^ ] ~,

13 Oh . . . bloom;] ~, . . . ~!

16 for] her

19 over seas;] overseas^

21 σινγσ^ ] ~.

24 tenderness.] ~,

25 echo^ ] ~,

28 she'll understand, she'll understand] ~ hearken and she'll understand

32 thrall^ ] ~,

35 rapture^ ] ~,

37 wild^ ] ~,

39 deep^ ] ~,

43 back,] ~^

45 πασσιον φραυγητ,] ~--~^

49 στιλλ^ ] ~,

"**The Little Old Log Cabin.**" *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 16 Mar. 1902: 9. Rpt. *Semi-Weekly Star* (Whitehorse) 10 May 1902: 3; subscribed "— Robert Service. | Cowichan, B. C." Left-justified; enclosed in a border of crosses in the *Colonist*. Carl Klinck claims that Service sent this poem directly to Whitehorse (38); its prior appearance in the *Daily Colonist* casts doubt on this. The *Star's* editor may merely have found it appealing and lifted it from the B. C. paper. Reprinted in *Songs of a Sourdough*, every second line indented.

2 nuthin' comin' ] nothin' ~ (1902) nothin' ~, (1907)

3 lodgin', ] ~', (1902) ~,' (1907)

4 loosed 'bout] ~ about (1902) locoed ~ (1907)



14 a-grinnin'^ ] ~ (1902) ~, (1907)

17 O] ~ (1902) Oh (1907)

18 and'] and^ (1902) an' (1907)

23 callin'^ ] ~^ (1902) ~, (1907)

24 an' you] and ~ (1902) ~ ~ (1907)

26 an' love] an'' ~ (1902) ~ ~ (1907)

**"The Three Voices."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 18 May 1902: 9; subscribed "—Robert Service. | Corfield, B. C." Included in *Songs of a Sourdough* following the release of the American edition, *The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses* (used here as the comparison), by Edward Stern of Philadelphia in November 1907. It was one of seven poems added to the collection at this point. The 1907 version does not print stanza numbers, but retains the arrangement of the lines.

7 vanished races;] ocean spaces,

8 were bold . . . ;] are wild . . . ,

9 places;] ~,

10 lave;] ~,

11 gold,] ~—

13 joyous roamer,] mighty ~;

14 free;] ~,

15 gold lust;] ~--~,

18 As child . . . mother knee^ ] As a child . . . mother-knee.

19 triumph] their glory

21 great Creator;] Mighty Master,

22 span\_] ~,

23 thread] part

24 perfect] wondrous

25 campfire's] camp-fire's

27 dewy nightfall] peace of the pine-gloom

29 silence is tense in the pine gloom] wind and the wave are silent

**"The Song of the Social Failure."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 15 Jun. 1902: 11; subscribed "—Robert Service. | Corfield, B. C." *Ploughman of the Moon* cites this poem as his first effort; it reputedly appeared in a Glasgow weekly in 1889-90. Service describes it as a "morbid and disillusioned poem," and provides the following extract:

The Might Have Been, the Might Have Been,  
The haunting, taunting Might Have Been;  
We all can hear in our hearts, I ween,  
The grim reproach of the Might Have Been.  
(PM 84)

4 time's] times

9 might-have-been] -might-have been

17 starveling] starvelling

24 might-have-been] might have-been

**"The Coming of Miss McLean."** Unpublished manuscript. Queen's University Archives, Beatrice Corbett collection, coll. 2098. Permission to publish has been kindly granted by Iris Service Davies, daughter of the author. The emendations listed below only affect typography and spelling.

7 Evening Clothes] evening clothes

11 round] 'round

12 you] *you* In accordance with the typographical directions indicated on Service's later manuscripts, such as those in the Barrett collection at the University of Virginia, and common practice, I have set the underlined word in italics.

18 round] 'round

21 Conquered] conquered

23 a-la-cigarette] à-la-cigarette

27 regret] ~,

**"The Ballad of Mt. Sicker Ball."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 8 Feb. 1903: 10; subscribed "Robert W. Service." The newspaper misprints the title as "The Ballard of Mt. Sicker Ball," and provides the following introduction: "A ball was recently given by the bachelors of the Tyee Mining Co. at Mount Sicker. Owing to the scarcity of girls in this new mining town it was found necessary to import them. Invitations were accordingly issued to most of the young ladies in and around Duncans; many were accepted, parties were formed, and a most enjoyable trip and dance was the consequence." The fact that the ballad details a local event probably explains its absence from any of Service's collected works.

**"Some Quatrains From Omar."** *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 29 Mar. 1903: 7. "Translated," claims the *Colonist*, "by Robert Service." Title shortened to "Quatrains" in *Songs of a Sourdough*.

1 mar;] ~,

4 ties, . . . autocar] ~^ . . . auto-car

5 mine. Ah] ~—ah

7 "super"] ^ ~^

8 stagemanaging] stage-managing

9 Fate, . . . Circumstance!] fate; . . . circumstance,

10 fiddler] ~,

11 will-o'-wisp "Free-will,"] will-'o-wisp ~ (N) ~, Free-will, (1907)

13 O] Oh,

14 curtain. . . marionette] ~. . . marrionette (N) ~! . . . ~, (1907)

15 Gods] gods

16 fine— . . . bet.] ~, . . . ~!

18 constellations' . . . flash;] ~^ . . . crash; (N) ~' . . . ~; (1907)  
"Crash" emended on the grounds that Service did not generally repeat a word merely to achieve a rhyme.

19 Empire, war's red tide;] ~ wars ~ (N) empires, ~, (1907)

22 Effect] effect

25 Fate] fate'

29 song, . . . blend,] ~^ . . . ~:

31 nutty, . . . chimes:] ~; . . . ~!

32 spread,] ~;

"**The 'Longshoremen.**" *Daily World* (Vancouver) 6 Apr. 1903: 4; subscribed "—Robert W. Service, Cowichan, B. C." Retitled in *Songs of a Sourdough* as "New Year's Eve." The newspaper arranged the lines much as they appeared in the *Sourdough* collection, except for the third, fourth, seventh, tenth, and eleventh stanzas, in which the third line of the stanza is indented with the second and fourth lines instead of aligned with the first. In the collection, the latter stanzas are significantly revised to heighten the melodrama and excise profanity.

1 Its . . . waterfront, silent, and dark,] It's . . . water-front, ~^ ~ ~^

2 σνοω,] ~;

3 I^ alone^ . . . wreck accurst] ~, ~, . . . storm-tossed wreck

4 ghastly, and gaunt,] ~^ ~ ~^

5 Ανδ τηεψΠ ρε . . . τηερε,] ΤηεψΠ ρε . . . ~^

6 σχραπ . . . )] βιτε . . . ;

7 οπερ^ and slip inside, . . . despair ] ~, and slip inside— . . . ~—

8 booze or two,] little booze^

9 σοακ,] ~;

10 ^ . . . well, . . . my friend . . . ^ ] " . . . Well, . . . sir . . . "

11 low down, . . . barroom joke,] dirty . . . bar-room ~;

12 sod sodden . . . hopeless. (Another? well . . . you.)] sodden . . .  
~—"Another? Well, . . . ~!"

13 jawing of prize ring shows and how Fitzsimmons] showing a bunch of the boys how Bob Fitzsimmons

14 And politics, and Tammany Hall, and how the new boss was fired;] The barman is talking of Tammany Hall, and why the ward boss got ~;

15 corner^ . . . bit.] ~, . . . ~;

16 (The room is reeling round and round—O God! but I'm tired, I'm tired.)] ^ The room is reeling round and round . . . O God, but I'm tired, I'm tired. . . .

17 night—O but the . . . !] ~. Oh, but their . . . ;

18 'f' in "fan-palms" is broken in the newspaper.

20 prayer] plea

21 suddenly . . . lips ] sudden . . . ~,

22 O . . . deep . . . Heaven] oh, . . . ~, . . . heaven

23 there^ . . . said;] ~, . . . ~,

24 red^ ] ~,

26 bursting . . . brow,] throbbing . . . ~;

27 forevermore," the violas] for evermore!" the violins

29 long^ last waltz,] ~, last waltz, with its sobbing, sad refrain?

30 tears;] ~?

31 dream] ~,

32 angel song . . . joy . . . years.] ~-~ . . . bliss . . . ~?

33 O . . . Ethel!—forgive—forgive,] Oh . . . ~, ~, ~!

34 faded, and its] faded now, ~ it's

35 dozen . . . to live . . . live.] thousand . . . live . . . ~!

36 depths, but O . . . so.] depths—but oh . . . ~!

37 O hark! . . . bells. Look!] Oh ~! . . . ~! . . . Look!

38 Pure as a dream—but it fades—and now I can hear the hum]  
Fair ~ . . . but it fades . . . And now—I can hear the dreadful hum

39 Of the crowded court. See! The judge looks down—Not guilty,  
my lord, I swear.] Of the crowded court . . . See! the Judge looks  
down . . . NOT GUILTY, my Lord, I swear . . .

40 The bells! The bells are ringing again—Ethel! I come, I come.]  
The bells, I can hear the bells again . . . Ethel, I come, I come! . . .

41 Rouse up, old chap, you've slept enough; 'taint no doss-house  
y' know.] "Rouse up, old man, it's twelve o'clock. You can't  
sleep here, you know.

42 Here, . . . sentiments? . . . head.] Say! . . . sentiment? . . . ~;

43 Just have . . . go;] Have . . . ~—

44 I'll have to shake you now. Look up! My God! Here boys, he's  
DEAD.] You darned old dirty hobo . . . My God! Here, boys! He's  
DEAD!"

"**The Ballad of the Bold Bohemian and the Philistine Maid.**" *Daily World* (Vancouver) 26 Sep. 1903: 4; subscribed "—Robert Service, Vancouver." Significantly revised and retitled "The Philistine and the Bohemian" in *Ballads of a Bohemian* (1921). It decisively disproves Service's professed nonchalance towards publication and the final form of his ballads. The original does not have a Roman numeral "I." to indicate the first stanza.

1 Philistine, . . . span;] ~, . . . ~,

3-4 The *Bohemian* collection alters and expands these lines to

She had the *mode*, and the last at that;  
He had a cape and a brigand hat.  
She was so *riant* and *chic* and trim;  
He was so shaggy, unkempt and grim.

5-6 The 1921 version reads:

On the rue de la Paix she was wont to shine;  
The rue de la Gaîté was more his line.

7 She revelled in Crockett, Corelli, Caine;] She doted on Barclay  
and Dell and Caine

8 Huysmans] Malarmé

8-9 In 1921, Service added four new lines between these two:

She was a triumph at Tango teas;  
At Vorticist's suppers he sought to please.  
She thought that Franz Lehar was utterly great;  
Of Strauss and Stravinski he'd piously prate.

9 artifice. He loved art.] elegance, he ~;

10 far . . . apart] wide . . . ~:

11 with Puck is hand in] and Caprice are hand and

12 crush:] dinner,

13-26 Although the storyline remains the same, Service completely revised the second section of his ballad for publication in 1921:

Home he went to his garret bare,  
Thrilling with rapture, hope, despair.  
Swift he gazed in his looking-glass,  
Made a grimace and murmured: "Ass!"  
Seized his scissors and fiercely sheared,  
Severed his buccaneering beard;  
Grabbed his hair, and clip! clip! clip!  
Off came a bunch with every snip.  
Ran to a tailor's in startled state,  
Suits a dozen commanded straight;  
Coats and overcoats, pants in pairs,  
Everything that a dandy wears;  
Socks and collars, and shoes and ties,  
Everything that a dandy buys.  
Chums looked at him with wondering stare  
Fancied they'd seen him before somewhere;  
A Brummell, a D'Orsay, a *beau* so fine,  
A shining, immaculate Philistine.

27-38 Like the second section, the third suffered drastic revisions in 1921:

Home she went in a raptured daze,  
Looked in a mirror with startled gaze,  
Didn't seem to be pleased at all;  
Savagely muttered: "Insidious Doll!"  
Clutched her hair and a pair of shears,  
Cropped and bobbed it behind the ears;  
Aimed at a wan and willowy-necked  
Sort of a Holman Hunt effect;  
Robed in subtle and sage-green tones,  
Like the dames of Rossetti and F. B. Jones;  
Girdled her garments billowing wide,  
Moved with an undulating glide;  
All her frivolous friends forsook,  
Cultivated a soulful look;  
Gushed in a voice with a creamy throb  
Over some weirdly Futurist daub—  
Did all, in short, that a woman can  
To be a consummate Bohemian.

28 Daffodil] Daffodill (N) ~ (1921)

32 She cultivated a Delphic stare] Cultivated a soulful look;

36 She developed a Sara Bernhardt glide.] Moved with an undulating glide;

39-40 Expanded in 1921 to six lines:

A year went past with its hopes and fears,  
A year that seemed like a dozen years.  
They met once more. . . . Oh, at last! At last!  
They rushed together, they stopped aghast.  
They looked at each other with blank dismay,  
They simply hadn't a word to say.

41 She gazed a moment: "Can this be he?"] He thought with a shiver: "Can this be she?"

42 He stared a moment: "Can this be she?"] She thought with a shudder: "Can this be he?"



43-54 In 1921, Service revised the remainder of the fourth section (before the asterisks):

This simpering dandy, so sleek and spruce;  
This languorous lily in garments loose;  
They sought to brace from the awful shock:  
Taking a seat, they tried to talk.  
She spoke of Bergson and Pater's prose,  
He prattled of dances and ragtime shows;  
She purred of pictures, Matisse, Cezanne,  
His tastes to the girls of Kirchner ran;  
She raved of Tschaikowsky and Cæsar Franck,  
He owned that he was a jazz-band crank!  
They made no headway. Alas! alas!  
He thought her a bore, she thought him an ass.  
And so they arose and hurriedly fled;  
Perish Illusion, Romance, you're dead.  
He loved elegance, she loved art,  
Better at once to part, to part.

55-60 Cut from the 1921 version.

62 Never] Don't

63-64 Replaced in 1921 with

And if you're made on a muttonish plan,  
Don't seek to seem a Bohemian;  
And if to the goats your feet incline,  
Don't try to pass for a Philistine.

**"The Little Red Cent."** [c. 1903]. I have been unable to locate the first printing of this poem. The text printed here is, according to Charles Harrison Gibbons, that of the original manuscript. Gibbons included it in his article "When Robert Service, Bard of Yukon, Was Verse-Writing Store Clerk at Cowichan," *Province* (Vancouver) c. 1921 (an undated clipping of the article is in the Gillis Family collection at the Yukon Archives, acc. 82/40, pt. 2, mss. 3, folder 6). Gibbons states that following the poem's appearance in the Vancouver paper, the *Chicago News* copied it and assigned authorship to the late Eugene Field!

"**Apart and Yet Together.**" *Munsey's Magazine* 30 (Dec. 1903): 447. Reprinted in *Songs of a Sourdough* as "Unforgotten." Service recounts the birth of this poem in *Ploughman of the Moon* (287-88), possibly because the fact of its earlier publication was generally known. Although he claims to have composed it in Cowichan, B. C., during the spring, two months prior to publication, its actual publication in December suggests the possibility of the place and time being Vancouver, September 1903. The version in *Songs of a Sourdough* differs chiefly in lay-out: the publishers indent the second and third lines of each stanza, as well as indenting the second stanza in contrast to the first and third. Another notable feature is that printings from the original plates situate the poem unusually low on the page in relation to the other selections.

4 a dream!] dream.

6 pen^ ] ~,

9 'tis] it's

12 him!] ~.

"**It Must Be Done.**" *Duncans Enterprise* (Duncan, BC) 5 Dec. 1903: 4. This poem appears in one of only three surviving issues of the Duncan paper; whether or not Service published any other material here is unknown. I am indebted to Jack Fleetwood of Cowichan for referring me to this poem. Like "The Song of the Social Failure," Service claims that this poem appeared in *Scottish Nights*, a Glasgow weekly, sometime in 1889-90, where it began,

He stands upon the water brink  
With pale and anguished brow,  
And shudders as he murmurs low:  
"It must be done—and now."

and concluded with the lines

It's over now . . . he's only had  
*His morning bath*—no more. (PM 84)

"**Spring in Cowichan.**" *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 11 Feb. 1904: 4; subscribed "—Robert Service. | Victoria."

"Grin." *Daily Colonist* (Victoria) 1 Apr. 1904: 4; subscribed "—Robert Service, Victoria, B. C." Reprinted in *Songs of a Sourdough*.

1 *bruiser, . . . about,*] ~^ . . . ~—

3 *doubt,*] ~—

5 *give a sign . . . funking; . . . see*] *let him see . . . ~, . . . know*

6 *Although . . . smashed . . . pulp*] *Though . . . battered . . . a pulp*

7 *out,*] ~—

9 *true*] ~,

11 *badly—well,*] ~, *then*

13 *thunder*] ~,

15 "*Wish . . . they'd . . .too,*" ] *wish . . . they'd . . . too—*

16 *Well—you may grin.*] *You may—grin.*

17 *Just rise . . . that smooth or rough*] *Rise . . . that, ~,*

21 *There is*] *There's*

22 *won't*] *won't*

23 *Your . . . just don't . . . enough*] *You're (N) ~ . . . ^ don't . . . enough—(1907)*

25 *you . . . cuff—*] ~, . . . ~;

26 *You'll win.*] *line deleted in Songs of a Sourdough.*

27 *Bluff,*] *bluff^*

28 Γριν] γριν

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