

Taylor Bert Leston

A line-o'-verse or two



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NOTE

For the privilege of reprinting the rimes gathered here I am indebted to the courtesy of the *Chicago Tribune* and *Puck*, in whose pages most of them first appeared. “The Lay of St. Ambrose” is new.

One reason for rounding up this fugitive verse and imprisoning it between covers was this: Frequently – more or less – I receive a request for a copy of this jingle or that, and it is easier to mention a publishing house than to search through ancient and dusty files.

The other reason was that I wanted to.

B. L. T.

TO MY READERS

Not merely of this book, – but a larger company, with whom, through the medium of the Chicago Tribune, I have been on very pleasant terms for several years, – this handful of rime is joyously dedicated.

THE LAY OF ST. AMBROSE

*“And hard by doth dwell, in St. Catherine’s cell,
Ambrose, the anchorite old and grey.”*

– The Lay of St. Nicholas.

Ambrose the anchorite old and grey
Larruped himself in his lonely cell,
And many a welt on his pious pelt
The scourge evoked as it rose and fell.

For hours together the flagellant leather
Went whacketty-whack with his groans of pain;
And the lay-brothers said, with a wag of the head,
“Ambrose has been at the bottle again.”

And such, in sooth, was the sober truth;
For the single fault of this saintly soul
Was a desert thirst for the cup accurst, —
A quenchless love for the Flowing Bowl.

When he woke at morn with a head forlorn
And a taste like a last-year swallow’s nest,
He would kneel and pray, then rise and flay
His sinful body like all possessed.

Frequently tempted, he fell from grace,
And as often he found the devil to pay;
But by diligent scourging and diligent purging
He managed to keep Old Nick at bay.

This was the plight of our anchorite, —
An endless penance condemned to dree, —
When it chanced one day there came his way
A Mystical Book with a golden Key.

This Mystical Book was a guide to health,
That none might follow and go astray;
While a turn of the Key unlocked the wealth
That all unknown in the Scriptures lay.

Disease is sin, the Book defined;
Sickness is error to which men cling;
Pain is merely a state of mind,
And matter a non-existent thing.

If a tooth should ache, or a leg should break,
You simply “affirm” and it’s sound again.
Cut and contusion are only delusion,
And indigestion a fancied pain.

For pain is naught if you “hold a thought,”
Fevers fly at your simple say;
You have but to affirm, and every germ

Will fold up its tent and steal away.

From matin gong to even-song
Ambrose pondered this mystic lore,
Till what had seemed fiction took on a conviction
That words had never possessed before.

“If pain,” quoth he, “is a state of mind,
If a rough hair shirt to silk is kin, —
If these things are error, pray where’s the terror
In scourging and purging oneself of sin?”

“It certainly seemeth good to me,
By and large, in part and in whole.
I’ll put it in practice and find if it fact is,
Or only a mystical rigmarole.”

The very next night our anchorite
Of the Flowing Bowl drank long and deep.
He argued this wise: “New Thought applies
No fitter to lamb than it does to sheep.”

When he woke at morn with a head forlorn
And a taste akin to a parrot’s cage,
He knelt and prayed, then up and flayed
His sinful flesh in a righteous rage.

Whacketty-whack on breast and back,
Whacketty-whack, before, behind;

But he held the thought as he laid it on,
“Pain is merely a state of mind.”

Whacketty-whack on breast and back,
Whacketty-whack on calf and shin;
And the lay-brothers said, with a wag of the head,
“*Ain't* he the glutton for discipline!”

Now every night our anchorite
Was exceedingly tight when he went to bed.
The scourge that once pained him no longer restrained him,
Nor even the fear of an aching head.

For he woke at morn with a pate as clear
As the silvery chime of the matin bell;
And without any jogging he fell to his flogging,
And larruped himself in his lonely cell.

But the leather had lost its power to sting;
To pangs of the flesh he was now immune;
His rough hair shirt no longer hurt,
Nor the pebbles he wore in his wooden shoon.

When conscience was troubled he cheerfully doubled
His matinal dose of discipline; —
A deuce of a scourging, sufficient for purging
The Devil himself of original sin.

Whacketty-whack on breast and back,

Whacketty-whack from morn to noon;
Whacketty-whacketty-whacketty-whack! —
Till the abbey rang with the dismal tune.

Deacon and prior, lay-brother and friar
Exclaimed at these whoppings spectacular;
And even the Abbot remarked that the habit
Of scourging oneself might be carried too far.

“My son,” said he, “I am pleased to see
Such penance as never was known before;
But you raise such a racket in dusting your jacket,
The noise is becoming a bit of a bore.

“How would it do if you whaled yourself
From eight to ten or from one to three?
Or if ‘More’ is your motto, pray hire a grotto;
I know of one you can have rent free.”

Ambrose the anchorite bowed his head,
And girded his loins and went away.
He rented a cavern not far from a tavern,
And tiddled by night and scourged by day.

The more the penance the more the sin,
The more he whopped him the more he drank;
Till his hair fell out and his cheeks fell in,
And his corpulent figure grew long and lank.

At Whitsuntide he up and died,
While flaying himself for his final spree.
And who shall say whether 'twas liquor or leather
That hurried him into eternity?

They made him a saint, as well they might,
And gave him a beautiful aureole.
And – somehow or other, this circle of light
Suggests the rim of the Flowing Bowl.

TO A TALL SPRUCE

Pride of the forest primeval,
Peer of the glorious pine,
Doomed to an end that is evil,
Fearful the fate that is thine!

Peer of the glorious pine,
Now the landlooker has found you,
Fearful the fate that is thine —
Fate of the spruces around you.

Now the landlooker has found you,
Stripped of your beautiful plume —
Fate of the spruces around you —
Swiftly you'll draw to your doom.

Stripped of your beautiful plume,
Bzzng! into logs they will whip you.
Swiftly you'll draw to your doom;
To the pulp mill they will ship you.

Bzzng! into logs they will whip you,
Lumbermen greedy for gold.
To the pulp mill they will ship you.
Hearken, there's worse to be told!

Lumbermen greedy for gold
Over your ruins will caper.
Hearken, there's worse to be told:
You will be made into paper!

Over your ruins will caper
Murderous shavers and hooks.
You will be made into paper!
You will be made into books!

Murderous shavers and hooks
Swiftly your pride will diminish.
You will be made into books!
Horrible, horrible finish!

Swiftly your pride will diminish.
You will become a romance!
Horrible, horrible finish!
Fate has no sadder mischance.

You will become a romance,
Filled with "Gadzooks!" and "Have at you!"
Fate has no sadder mischance;
It would wring tears from a statue.

Filled with "Gadzooks!" and "Have at you!"
You may become a "Lazarre" —
(It would wring tears from a statue) —

“Graustark,” “Stovepipe of Navarre.”

You may become a “Lazarre”;
Fate has still worse it can turn on —
“Graustark,” “Stovepipe of Navarre,”
Even a “Dorothy Vernon”!

Fate has still worse it can turn on —
Lower you cannot descend;
Even a “Dorothy Vernon”! —
That is the limit – the end.

Lower you cannot descend.
Doomed to an end that is evil,
That *is* the limit – the *end*!
Pride of the forest primeval.

IN THE LAMPLIGHT

The dinner done, the lamp is lit,
And in its mellow glow we sit
And talk of matters, grave and gay,
That went to make another day.
Comes Little One, a book in hand,
With this request, nay, this command —
(For who'd gainsay the little sprite) —
“Please – will you read to me to-night?”

Read to you, Little One? Why, yes.
What shall it be to-night? You guess
You'd like to hear about the Bears —
Their bowls of porridge, beds and chairs?
Well, that you shall... There! that tale's done!
And now – you'd like another one?
To-morrow evening, Curly Head.
It's “hass-pass seven.” Off to bed!

So each night another story:
Wicked dwarfs and giants gory;
Dragons fierce and princes daring,
Forth to fame and fortune faring;
Wandering tots, with leaves for bed;
Houses made of gingerbread;

Witches bad and fairies good,
And all the wonders of the wood.

“I like the witches best,” says she
Who nightly nestles on my knee;
And why by them she sets such store,
Psychologists may puzzle o’er.
Her likes are mine, and I agree
With all that she confides to me.
And thus we travel, hand in hand,
The storied roads of Fairyland.

Ah, Little One, when years have fled,
And left their silver on my head,
And when the dimming eyes of age
With difficulty scan the page,
Perhaps *I’ll* turn the tables then;
Perhaps *I’ll* put the question, when
I borrow of your better sight —
“Please – will you read to me to-night?”

THE BREAKFAST FOOD FAMILY

John Spratt will eat no fat,
Nor will he touch the lean;
He scorns to eat of any meat,
He lives upon Foodine.

But Mrs. Spratt will none of that,
Foodine she cannot eat;
Her special wish is for a dish
Of Expurgated Wheat.

To William Spratt that food is flat
On which his mater dotes.
His favorite feed – his special need —
Is Eata Heapa Oats.

But sister Lil can't see how Will
Can touch such tasteless food.
As breakfast fare it can't compare,
She says, with Shredded Wood.

Now, none of these Leander please,
He feeds upon Bath Mitts.
While sister Jane improves her brain
With Cero-Grapo-Grits.

Lycurgus votes for Father's Oats;
Proggine appeals to May;
The junior John subsists upon
Uneda Bayla Hay.

Corrected Wheat for little Pete;
Flaked Pine for Dot; while "Bub"
The infant Spratt is waxing fat
On Battle Creek Near-Grub.

“TREASURE ISLAND”

Comes little lady, a book in hand,
A light in her eyes that I understand,
And her cheeks aglow from the faery breeze
That sweeps across the uncharted seas.
She gives me the book, and her word of praise
A ton of critical thought outweighs.
“I’ve finished it, daddie!” – a sigh thereat.
“Are there any more books in the world like that?”

No, little lady. I grieve to say
That of all the books in the world to-day
There’s not another that’s quite the same
As this magic book with the magic name.
Volumes there be that are pure delight,
Ancient and yellowed or new and bright;
But – little and thin, or big and fat —
There are no more books in the world like that.

And what, little lady, would I not give
For the wonderful world in which you live!
What have I garnered one-half as true
As the tales Titania whispers you?
Ah, late we learn that the only truth
Was that which we found in the Book of Youth.

Profitless others, and stale, and flat; —
There are no more books in the world like that.

A BALLADE OF SPRING'S UNREST

Up in the woodland where Spring
Comes as a laggard, the breeze
Whispers the pines that the King,
Fallen, has yielded the keys
To his White Palace and flees
Northward o'er mountain and dale.
Speed then the hour that frees!
Ho, for the pack and the trail!

Northward my fancy takes wing,
Restless am I, ill at ease.
Pleasures the city can bring
Lose now their power to please.
Barren, all barren, are these,
Town life's a tedious tale;
That cup is drained to the lees —
Ho, for the pack and the trail!

Ho, for the morning I sling
Pack at my back, and with knees
Brushing a thoroughfare, fling
Into the green mysteries:
One with the birds and the bees,

One with the squirrel and quail,
Night, and the stream's melodies —
Ho, for the pack and the trail!

L'Envoi

Pictures and music and teas,
Theaters – books even – stale.
Ho, for the smell of the trees!
Ho, for the pack and the trail!

WHY?

Why, when the sun is gold,
The weather fine,
The air (this phrase is old)
Like Gascon wine; —

Why, when the leaves are red,
And yellow, too,
And when (as has been said)
The skies are blue; —

Why, when all things promote
One's peace and joy, —
A joy that is (to quote)
Without alloy; —

Why, when a man's well off,
Happy and gay,
Why must he go play golf
And spoil his day!

THE RIME OF THE CLARK STREET CABLE

(Now happily extinct.)

Twas in a vault beneath the street,
In the trench of the traction rope,
That I found a guy with a fishy eye
And a think tank filled with dope.

His hair was matted, his face was black,
And matted and black was he;
And I heard this wight in the vault recite,
“In a singular minor key”:

“Oh, I am the guy with the fishy eye
And the think tank filled with dope.
My work is to watch the beautiful botch
That’s known as the Clark Street Rope.

“I pipes my eye as the rope goes by
For every danger spot.
If I spies one out I gives a shout,
And we puts in another knot.

“Them knots is all like brothers to me,
And I loves ’em, one and all.”
The muddy guy with the fishy eye
A muddy tear let fall.

“There goes a knot we tied last week,
There’s one what we tied to-day;
And there’s a patch was hard to reach,
And caused six hours’ delay.

“Two hundred seventy-nine, all told,
And I knows their history;
And I’m most attached to a break we patched
In the winter of ’eighty-three.

“For every time that knot comes round
It sings out, ‘Howdy, Bill!
We’ll walk ’em home to-night, old man,
From here to the Ferris Wheel.

““We’ll walk ’em in the rush hours, Bill,
A swearing company,
As we’ve walked ’em, Bill, since I was tied,
In the winter of ’eighty-three.””

The muddy guy with the fishy eye
Let fall another tear.

“Them knots is wife and child to me;

I've known 'em forty year.

“For I am the guy with the fishy eye
And the think tank filled with dope,
Whose work is to watch the lovely botch
That's known as the Clark Street Rope.”

MISS LEGION

She is hotfoot after Cultyure,
She pursues it with a club.
She breathes a heavy atmosphere
Of literary flub.
No literary shrine so far
But she is there to kneel;
But —
Her favorite line of reading
Is O. Meredith's "Lucille."

Of course she's up on pictures —
Passes for a connoisseur.
On free days at the Institute
You'll always notice her.
She qualifies approval
Of a Titian or Corot;
But —
She throws a fit of rapture
When she comes to Bouguereau.

And when you talk of music,
She is Music's devotee.
She will tell you that Beethoven
Always makes her wish to pray;

And “dear old Bach!” His very name

She says, her ear enchants;

But —

Her favorite piece is Weber’s

“Invitation to the Dance.”

A BALLADE OF DEATH AND TIME

I hold it truth with him who sweetly sings —
The weekly music of the *London Sphere*—
That deathless tomes the living present brings:
Great literature is with us year on year.
Books of the mighty dead, whom men revere,
Remind me I can make *my* books sublime.
But prithee, bay my brow while I am here:
Why do we always wait for Death and Time?

Shakespeare, great spirit, beat his mighty wings,
As I beat mine, for the occasion near.
He knew, as I, the worth of present things:
Great literature is with us year on year.
Methinks I meet across the gulf his clear
And tranquil eye; his calm reflections chime
With mine: “Why do we at the present flee?
Why do we always wait for Death and Time?”

The reading world with acclamation rings
For my last book. It led the list at Weir,
Altoona, Rahway, Painted Post, Hot Springs:
Great literature is with us year on year.
The *Bookman* gives me a vociferous cheer.
Howells approves! I can no higher climb.

Bring then the laurel, crown my bright career.
Why do we always wait for Death and Time?

L'Envoi

Critics, who pastward, ever pastward peer,
Great literature is with us year on year.
Trumpet my fame while I am in my prime.
Why do we always wait for Death and Time?

THE KAISER'S FAREWELL TO PRINCE HENRY

Aufwiedersehen, brother mine!
Farewells will soon be kissed;
And ere you leave to breast the brine
Give me once more your fist;

That mailed fist, clenched high in air
On many a foreign shore,
Enforcing coaling stations where
No stations were before;

That fist, which weaker nations view
As if 'twere Michael's own,
And which appals the heathen who
Bow down to wood and stone.

But this trip no brass knuckles. Glove
That heavy mailed hand;
Your mission now is one of Love
And Peace – you understand.

All that's American you'll praise;
The Yank can do no wrong.
To use his own expressive phrase,

Just “jolly him along.”

Express surprise to find, the more
Of Roosevelt you see,
How much I am like Theodore,
And Theodore like me.

I am, in fact, (this might not be
A bad thing to suggest,)
The Theodore of the East, and he
The William of the West.

And, should you get a chance, find out —
If anybody knows —
Exactly what it’s all about,
That Doctrine of Monroe’s.

That’s *entre nous*. My present plan
You know as well as I:
Be just as Yankee as you can;
If needs be, eat some pie.

Cut out the ’kraut, cut out Rhine wine,
Cut out the Schützenfest,
The Sängerbund, the Turnverein,
The Kommers, and the rest.

And if some fool society
“Die Wacht am Rhein” should sing,

You sing “My Country, ’Tis of Thee” —
The tune’s “God Save the King.”

To our own kindred in that land
There’s not much you need tell.
Just tell them that you saw me, and
That I was looking well.

TO LILLIAN RUSSELL

(A reminiscence of 18 – .)

Dear Lillian! (The “dear” one risks;
“Miss Russell” were a bit austerer) —
Do you remember Mr. Fiske’s
Dramatic Mirror

Back when – ? (But we’ll not count the years;
The way they’ve sped is most surprising.)
You were a trifle in arrears
For advertising.

I brought the bill to your address;
I was the *Mirror’s* bill collector —
In Thespian haunts a more or less
Familiar spectre.

On that (to me) momentous day
You dwelt amid the city’s clatter,
A few doors west of old Broadway;
The street – no matter.

But while you have forgot the debt,

And him who called in line of duty,
He never, never shall forget
Your wondrous beauty.

You were too fair for mortal speech, —
Enchanting, positively rippin’;
You were some dream, and quelque peach,
And beaucoup pippin.

Your “fight with Time” had not begun,
Nor any reason to promote it;
No beauty battles to be won.
Beauty? You wrote it!

“A bill?” you murmured in distress,
“A bill?” (I still can hear you say it.)
“A bill from Mr. Fiske? Oh, yes ...
I’ll call and pay it.”

And he, the thrice-requited kid,
That such a goddess should address him,
Could only blush and paw his lid,
And stammer, “Yes’m!”

Eheu! It seems a cycle since,
But still the nerve of memory tingles.
And here you’re writing Beauty Hints,
And I these jingles.

DORNRÖSCHEN

In the great hall of Castle Innocence,
Hedged round with thorns of maiden doubts and fears, —
Within, without, a silence grave, intense, —
Her soul lies sleeping through the rose-leaf years.

Hedged round with thorns of maiden doubts and fears;
And all save one the thither path shall miss.
Her soul lies sleeping through the rose-leaf years,
Waiting the Prince and his awakening kiss.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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