

Rice Cale Young

Sea Poems



Cale Rice

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FOREWORD

The poems of this volume, gathered here after many requests, are, with a few exceptions, from my previous lyrical publications. They are also in a real sense an intimate record. For the sea has often enough seemed to me almost as a vast external subconsciousness in which the forces of my being – as well as the world's – were at play.

Cale Young Rice.

Louisville, Ky., August, 1921.

SEA-HOARDINGS

My heart is open again and sea flows in,
It shall fill with a summer of mists and winds and clouds and waves
breaking,
Of gull-wings over the green tide, of the surf's drenching din,
Of sudden horizon-sails that come and vanish, phantom-thin,
Of arching sapphire skies, deep and unaching.

I shall lie on the rocks just over the weeds that drape
The clear sea-pools, where birth and death in sunny ooze are teeming.
Where the crab in quest of booty sidles about, a sullen shape,
Where the snail creeps and the mussel sleeps with wary valves agape,
Where life is too grotesque to be but seeming.

And the swallow shall weave my dreams with threads of flight,
A shuttle with silver breast across the warp of the waves gliding;
And an isle far out shall be a beam in the loom of my delight,
And the pattern of every dream shall be a rapture bathed in light —
Its evanescence a beauty most abiding.

And the sunsets shall give sadness all its due,
They shall stain the sands and trouble the tides with all the ache of
sorrow.
They shall bleed and die with a beauty of meaning old yet ever new,
They shall burn with all the hunger for things that hearts have failed
to do,
They shall whisper of a gold that none can borrow.

And the stars shall come and build a bridge of fire
For the moon to cross the boundless sea, with never a fear of sinking.
They shall teach me of the magic things of life never to tire,
And how to renew, when it is low, the lamp of my desire —
And how to hope, in the darkest deeps of thinking.

THE SHORE'S SONG TO THE SEA

Out on the rocks primeval,
The grey Maine rocks that slant and break to the sea,
With the bay and juniper round them,
And the leagues on leagues before them,
And the terns and gulls wheeling and crying, wheeling and crying over,
I sat heart-still and listened.

And first I could only hear the wind in my ears,
And the foam trying to fill the high rock-shallows.
And then, over the wind, over the whitely blossoming foam,
Low, low, like a lover's song beginning,
I heard the nuptial pleading of the old shore,
A pleading ever occultly growing louder: —

*O sea, glad bride of me!
Born of the bright ether and given to wed me,
Given to glance, ever, for me, and gleam and dance in the sun —
Come to my arms, come to my reaching arms,
That seem so still and unavailing to take you, and hold you,
Yet never forget,
Never by day or night,
The hymeneal delights of your embracings.*

*Come, for the moon, my rival, shall not have you;
No, for tho twice daily afar he beckons and you go,
You, my bride, a little way back to meet him,
As if he once had been your lover, he too, and again enspelled you,
Soon, soon, I know it is only feigning!
For turning, playfully turning, tidally turning,
You rush foamingly, swiftly back to my arms!*

*And so would I have you rush; so rush now!
Come from the sands where you have stayed too long,
Come from the reefs where you have wandered silent,
For ebbings are good, the restful ebbings of love,
But, oh, the bridal flowings of it are better!
And now I would have you loose again my tresses,
My locks rough and weedy, rough and brown and brinily tangled,
But, oh, again as a bridegroom's, when your tide, whispering in,
Lifts them up, pulsingly up with kisses!*

*Come with your veil thrown back, breaking to spray!
And oh, with plangent passion!
Come with your naked sweetness, salt and wholesome, to my bosom;
Let not a cave or crevice of me miss you, or cranny,*

*For, oh, the nuptial joy you float into me,
The cooling ambient clasp of you, I have waited over-long,
And I need to know again its marriage meaning!*

*For I think it is not alone to bring forth life, that I mate you;
More than life is the beauty of life with love!
Plentiful are the children that you bear to me, the blossoms,
The fruits and all the creatures at your breast dewily fed,
But mating is troubled with a far higher meaning —
A hint of a consummation for all things.
Come utterly then,
Utterly to me come,
And let us surge together, clasped close, in infinite union,
Until we reach a transcendence of all birth, and all dying,
An ecstasy holding the universe blended —
Such ecstasy as is its ultimate Aim!*

*So sang the shore, the long bay-scented shore,
Broken by many an isle, many an inlet bird-embosomed,
And the sea gave answer, bridally, tidally turning,
And leapt, radiant, into his rocky arms!*

TO A FIREFLY BY THE SEA

Little torch-bearer, alone with me in the night,
You cannot light the sea, nor I illumine life.
They are too vast for us, they are too deep for us.
We glow with all our strength, but back the shadows sweep:
And after a while will come – unshadowed Sleep.

Here on the rocks that take the turning tide;
Here by the wide lone waves and lonelier wastes of sky,
We keep our poet-watch, as patient poets should,
Questioning earth's commingled ill and good to us.
Yet little of them, or naught, have truly understood.

Bright are the stars, and constellated thick.
To you, so quick to flit along your flickering course,
They seem perhaps as glowing mates in other fields.
And all the knowledge I have gathered yields to me
Scarce more of the great mystery their wonder wilds.

For the moon we are waiting – and behold
Her ardent gold drifts up, her sail has caught the breeze
That blows all being thro the Universe always.
So now, little light-keeper, you no more need nurse
Your gleam, for lo! she mounts, and sullen clouds disperse.

And I with aching thought may cease to burn,
And humbly turn to rest – knowing no glow of mine
Can ever be so beauteous as have been to me
Your soft beams here beside the sea's elusive din:
For grief too oft has kindled me, and pain, and the world's sin.

INVOCATION

(From a High Cliff)

Sweep unrest
Out of my blood,
Winds of the sea! Sweep the fog
Out of my brain
For I am one
Who has told Life he will be free.
Who will not doubt of work that's done,
Who will not fear the work to do,
Who will hold peaks Promethean
Better than all Jove's honey-dew.
Who when the Vulture tears his breast
Will smile into the Terror's Eyes.
Who for the World has this Bequest —
Hope, that eternally is wise.

I KNOW YOUR HEART, O SEA!

I know your heart, O Sea!
You are tossed with cold desire to flood earth utterly;
You run at the cliffs, you fling wild billows at beaches,
You reach at islands with fingers of foam to crumble them;
Yes, even at mountain tops you shout your purpose
Of making the earth a shoreless circle of waters!

I know your surging heart!
Tides mighty and all-contemptuous rise within it,
Tides spurred by the wind to champ and charge and thunder —
Tho the sun and moon rein them —
At the troubling land, the breeding-place of mortals,
Of men who are ever transmuting life to spirit,
And ever taking your salt to savor their tears.

I know your tides, I know them!
"Down," they rage, "with the questing of men, and crying!
With their continents – cradles of grief and despair!
Better entombing waters for them, better our deeps unfathomed,
Where birth is soulless, life goalless, death toll-less for all,
And where dark ooze enshrouds past resurrection!"

Ah, yes, I know your heart!
I have heard it raving at coast-lights set to reveal you,
I have watched it foam at ships that sought to defy you,
I have seen it straining at cables that cross you, bearing whispers hid
to you,
Or heaving at waves of the air that tell your hurricanes.

I know, I know your heart!
Men you will sink, and shores will sink; but a shore shall be man's
forever,
From whence his lighthouse soul shall signal the Infinite,
Whose fleets go by, star after star, bearing their unknown burden
To a Port which only eternity shall determine!

A SEA-GHOST

Oh, fisher-fleet, go in from the sea
And furl your wings.
The bay is gray with the twilit spray
And the loud surf springs.

The chill buoy-bell is rung by the hands
Of all the drowned,
Who know the woe of the wind and tow
Of the tides around.

Go in, go in! Oh, haste from the sea,
And let them rest —
The throng who long for the air – still long,
But are still unblest.

Aye, even as I, whose hands at the bell
Now labour most.
The tomb has gloom, but oh, the doom
Of the drear sea-ghost!

He evermore must wander the ooze
Beneath the wave,
Forlorn – to warn of the tempest born,
And to save – to save!

Then go, go in! and leave us the sea,
For only so
Can peace release us and give us ease
Of our salty woe.

FINITUDE

I

One ruby, amid a diamond spray of stars,
The coast light flashes;
The tide plashes,
Across a mile of bay-sweet land the moon
Comes soon:
She has lost half of her lustre and looks old.

A cricket, finitude's incarnate cry,
And the infinite waters with their hushless sigh
Are the two sounds
The night has:
Each in eternal wistfulness abounds.

II

I have wakened out of my sleep because I too
Am wistful,
Tristeful;
Because I know that half of *me* is gone,
And that all frailty cries in the cricket's tone.

I have wakened out of my sleep to watch and listen.
For what?
To see for a moment universes glisten;
To wonder and want – and go to sleep again,
And die,
And be forgot.

THE COLONEL'S STORY

No, no, my friend; there is an agony
Not to be exorcised out of the world
By any voice of hope. – But, I will tell you.

The *Sonia* was sailing without lights —
Bearing three hundred souls – and without bells;
For she had reached the "Zone," where the Hun sharks
With their torpedo tongues could spit death at us
Out of the inky sea-hells where they hid.
On the main deck we stood, in a wind-shelter, —
My wife, and by us a pale girl whose eyes
Had all disaster in them. And my thought was,
"I hope to God the moon is shut so deep
In cloud-murk there in the East that hurricanes
Can't blow her out of it." For in the Zone
The moon had come to mean only betrayal,
And now, if ever, was her wanton chance.

The slipping water soaked with soulless dark
Fell under and around us shudderingly,
Yet somehow brought an anxious hopefulness.
"We're making twenty knots," I said; and felt
Our bow cut thro the tangle of the waves
As if the No Man's *Sea* ahead of us
Would soon be crossed; and I, out to rejoin
My regiment, could set my wife safe somewhere,
And help again to stab that curst amphibian,
Autocracy – whose spawn in the sea gave it
A terror greater than infinitude's.
For God knows, with the woman that one loves
Aboard a ship, and only a cloud perhaps
Between the Hun's shark eyes and sure escape
From the black icy fathoms that would choke her,
There's little left within a man but nerves.
So when I drew her closer into the shelter,
Out of the sheering wind, the life belt
She wore seemed like a coffin in that sepulchre
Of night and sea. And when the other, there,
With the disaster eyes and pallid face,
Turned half toward us, I was shaken as if
The moon had suddenly walked out of her shroud
With phosphorescent purpose to reveal us.

But on we plunged and tumbled, till at last
The blank monotonous sink and swell lulled me

To faith. And I was only thinking softly
Of her – my wife's – first kiss on a summer night
Under the moonlit laurels of our home,
When came a cry from the wan girl gazing
Frozenly on the sea – where the moon now
Indeed was pointing at us pallidly
A death-path. And my throat was gripped by it,
That clutching cry, as if the glacial depths
Down under us already had risen up.
So starting toward the slipping rail I called,
"What is it? where?" For, tense as a clairvoyant,
With eyes that seemed to feel under the tide
The stealthy peril stalking us, she stood there.

After a moment's gazing, I too saw —
What she foresensed – destruction seething toward us.
"The boats!" I cried, "the rafts!" And stumbled back
Over the streaming deck to her I loved.
Then the shock came, as if the sea's wild heart
Had broken under us, and ripped the entrails,
The human hundreds, out of our vessel's hold,
To strew the foam with mania and despair,
With shrieks strangled by wind and wave and terror.
And thro that floating, mangled, blind confusion,
Where hands reached at the infinite then sank,
Where faces clung to wreckage as to eternity,
I sought for her who shared my life's voyage,
Who had been my heart's pilot; and who now,
Wrecked with me, swirled, too, in the torn waters...
And soon I saw her, still by that wan girl,
Tossed on a watery omnipotence.

Blind with brine I swam for her – as the moon,
Her treachery done, again got to a cloud.
Flung back by every wave, I fought; beating
Against them as against God. And soon, somehow,
Had reached to a limp body on the surge,
Limp and strange – but living ... and not drowned!
Then seeing a raft near, I struggled onward,
Gulping the sea and being gulped by it,
But finding arms at last that drew my burden
And me from horror to half-swooning safety.

I could have died, I think, of the relief.
But the moon came again, nakedly out,
As if to see what she had done. Then I,
Bending over the form that I had fought for,
And chafing it, saw ... not her I loved!
Infinite Cruelty, not her I loved!..

But that pale girl, with the eyes of all disaster.

Oh, yes, I raved, and said God was a Hun,
A Kaiser of a Universe that loathed him.
And back, too, would have leapt, into the waves,
But the same hands that saved were ready to hold me.

COSMISM

The sea asleep like a dreamer sighs;
The salt rock-pools lie still in the sun,
Except for the sidling crab that creeps
Thro the moveless mosses green and dun.
The small gray snail clings everywhere,
For the tide is out; and the sea-weed dries
Its tangled tresses in the warm air,
That seems to ooze from the far blue skies,
Where not a white gull on white wing flies.

The mollusc gleams like a gem amid
The scurf and the clustered green sea-grapes,
Whose trellis is but the rock's bare side,
Whose husbandman but the tide that drapes.
The little sandpiper tilts and picks
His food, on the wet sea-marges hid,
Till sudden a wave comes in and flicks
Him off, then flashes away to bid
Another frighten him – as it did.

O sweet is the world of living things,
And sweet are the mingled sea and shore!
It seems as if I never again
Shall find life ill – as oft before.
As if my days should come as the clouds
Come yonder – and vanish without wings;
As if all sorrow that ever shrouds
My soul and darkly about it clings
Had lost forever its ravennings.

As if I knew with a deeper sense
That good alone is ultimate;
That never an evil wrought of God
Or man came truly out of hate.
That Better springs from the heart of Worse,
As calm from the heaving elements;
That all things born to the Universe
May suffer and perish utterly hence,
But never refute its Innocence.

OFF THE IRISH COAST

Gulls on the wind,
Crying! crying!
Are you the ghosts
Of Erin's dead?
Of the forlorn
Whose days went sighing
Ever for Beauty
That ever fled?

Ever for Light
That never kindled?
Ever for Song
No lips have sung?
Ever for Joy
That ever dwindled?
Ever for Love that stung?

THE FAIRIES OF GOD

Last night I slipt from the banks of dream
And swam in the currents of God,
On a tide where His fairies were at play,
Catching salt tears in their little white hands,
For human hearts;
And dancing, dancing, in gala bands,
On the currents of God;
And singing, singing: —

*There is no wind blows here or spray —
Wind upon us!
Only the waters ripple away
Under our feet as we gather tears.
God has made mortals for the years,
Us for alway!
God has made mortals full of fears,
Fears for the night and fears for the day.
If they would free them of grief that sears,
If they would keep what love endears,
If they would lay no more lilies on biers —
Let them say!
For we are swift to enchant and tire
Time's will!
Our feet are wiser than all desire,
Our song is better than faith or fame;
To whom it is given no ill e'er came,
Who has it not grows chill!
Who has it not grows laggard and lame,
Nor knows that the world is a Minstrel's lyre,
Smitten and never still!..*

Last night on the currents of God.

THE SONG OF THE HOMESICK GAEL

(In the characteristic minor of a recent literary movement)

I long to see the solan-geese
Wing over Ailsa crag
At dusk again – or Girvan gulls at dawn;
To see the osprey grayly glide
The winds of Kamasail:
For grayness now my heart is set upon.

The grayness of sea-spaces where
There's loneliness alone,
Save for the wings that sweep it with unrest,
Save for the hunger-cries that sound
And die into a moan,
Save for the moaning hunger in my breast.

For grayness is the hue of all
In life that is not lies.
A thousand years of tears are in my heart;
And only in their mystery
Can I be truly wise:
From light and laughter follies only start.

I long to see the mists again
Above the tumbling tide
Of Ailsa, at the coming of the night.
There's weariness and emptiness
And soul unsatisfied
Forever in the places of delight.

PAGEANTS OF THE SEA

What memories have I of it,
The sea, continent-clasping,
The sea whose spirit is a sorcery,
The sea whose magic foaming is immortal!
What memories have I of it thro the years!

What memories of its shores!..
Of shadowy headlands doomed to stay the storm;
And red cliffs clawing ever into the tides;
Of misty moors whose royal heather purples;
Of channeled marshes, village-nesting hills;
Of crags wind-eaten, homes of hungry gulls;
Of bays —
Where sails float furled, resting softly at harbour,
Until, winging again, they sweep away.

What memories have I, too,
Of faring out at dawn upon tameless waters,
Upon the infinite wasted yearning of them,
While winds, the mystic harp-strings of the world,
Were sounding sweet farewells;
While coast and lighthouse tower were fading fast,
And from me all the world slipped like a garment.

What memories of mid-deeps!..
Of heaving on thro haunted vasts of foam,
Thro swaying terrors of tormented tides;
While the wind, no more singing, took to raving,
In rhythmic infinite words,
A chantey ancient and immeasurable
Concerning man and God.

What memories of fog-spaces —
Wide leaden deserts of dim wavelessness,
Smooth porpoise-broken glass
As gray as a dream upon despair's horizon;
What sailing soft till lo the shroud was lifted
And suddenly there came, as a great joy,
The blue sublimity of summer skies,
The azure mystery of happy heavens,
The passionate sweet parley of the breeze,
And dancing waves – that lured us on and on
Past islands above whose verdant mountain-heads
Enchanted clouds were hanging,
And whence wild spices wandered;

Past iridescent reefs and vessels bound
For ports unknown:
O far, far past, until the sun, in fire,
An impotent and shrunken orb lay dying,
On heaving twilight purple gathered round.

And then, what nights!..
The phantom moon in misty resurrection
Arising from her sepulchre in the East
And sparkling the dark waters —
The unremembering moon!
And covenants of star to faithful star,
Dewy, like tears of God, across the sky;
And under the moon's fair ring Orion running
Forever in great war adown the West.
What far, infinite nights!
With cloud-horizons where the lightning slumbered
Or wakened once and again with startled watch,
Again to fall asleep
And leave the moon-path free for all my thoughts
To wander peacefully
Away and still away
Until the stars sighed out in dawn's great pallor,
Just as the lands of my desire appeared.

What memories ... have I of it!

A SONG OF THE OLD VENETIANS

The seven fleets of Venice
Set sail across the sea
For Cyprus and for Trebizond
Ayoub and Araby.
Their gonfalons are floating far,
St. Mark's has heard the mass,
And to the noon the salt lagoon
Lies white, like burning glass.

The seven fleets of Venice —
And each its way to go,
Led by a Falier or Tron,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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