

Rice Cale Young

# Many Gods



Cale Rice

**Many Gods**

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## Many Gods

### "ALL'S WELL"

#### I

The illimitable leaping of the sea,  
The mouthing of his madness to the moon,  
The seething of his endless sorcery,  
His prophecy no power can attune,  
Swept over me as, on the sounding prow  
Of a great ship that steered into the stars,  
I stood and felt the awe upon my brow  
Of death and destiny and all that mars.

#### II

The wind that blew from Cassiopeia cast  
Wanly upon my ear a rune that rung;  
The sailor in his eyrie on the mast  
Sang an "All's well," that to the spirit clung  
Like a lost voice from some aërial realm  
Where ships sail on forever to no shore,  
Where Time gives Immortality the helm,  
And fades like a far phantom from life's door.

#### III

"And is all well, O Thou Unweariable  
Launcher of worlds upon bewildered space,"  
Rose in me, "All? or did thy hand grow dull  
Building this world that bears a piteous race?  
O was it launched too soon or launched too late?  
Or can it be a derelict that drifts  
Beyond thy ken toward some reef of Fate  
On which Oblivion's sand forever shifts?"

## IV

The sea grew softer as I questioned – calm  
With mystery that like an answer moved,  
And from infinity there fell a balm,  
The old peace that God *is*, tho all unproved.  
The old faith that tho gulfs sidereal stun  
The soul, and knowledge drown within their deep,  
There is no world that wanders, no not one  
Of all the millions, that He does not keep.

## THE PROSELYTE RECANTS

(In Japan)

Where the fair golden idols  
Sit in darkness and in silence  
While the temple drum beats solemnly and slow;  
Where the tall cryptomerias  
Sway in worship round about  
And the rain that is falling whispers low;  
I can hear strange voices  
Of the dead and forgotten,  
On the dimly rising incense I can see  
The lives I have lived,  
And my lives unbegotten,  
*Namu Amida Butsu* pity me!

I was born this karma  
Of a mother in Chuzenji,  
Where Nantai-zan looks down into the lake;  
Where the white-thronged pilgrims  
Climb to altars in the clouds  
And behold the holy eastern dawn awake.  
It was there I wandered  
Till a priest of the Christians  
With the crucifix he wore compelled my gaze.  
In grief I had grown,  
So upon its grief I pondered.  
*Namu Amida Butsu*, keep my days!

It was wrong, he told me,  
To pray Jiso for my children,  
And Binzuru for healing of my ills.  
And our gods so many  
Were conceived, he said, in sin,  
From Lord Shaka to the least upon the hills.  
In despair I listened  
For my heart beat hopeless,  
Not a temple of my land had helped me live.  
But alas that day  
When I let my soul be christened!  
*Namu Amida Butsu*, O forgive!

For the Christ they gave me  
As the only Law and Lotus,

As the only way to Light that will not wane,  
May perchance have power  
For the people of the West,  
But to me he seemed the servitor of pain.  
For in pain he perished  
As one born to passion:  
In some other life no doubt his sin was great,  
Tho they told me no,  
Those who followed him and cherished.  
*Namu Amida Butsu*, such is fate.

So again to idols  
Of the Buddha who is boundless,  
While the temple drum is beating thro the rain,  
I have turned from treason  
Into Meditation's truth,  
From the strife the Western god regards as gain.  
And if now I'm dying  
As the voices tell me,  
To the lives that I must live I'll meekly go;  
Till my long grief ends  
In Nirvana, and my sighing.  
*Namu Amida Butsu*, be it so!



## LOVE IN JAPAN

### I

Dragon-fly lighting  
On the temple-bell,  
Whose soul do you hear  
On the Day of the Dead?  
The soul of my lover?  
Ah me, the plighting  
Between two hearts  
That were never wed!

Dragon-fly, quickly,  
The priest is coming!  
Oh, the boom  
Of the bitter bell!  
Now you are gone  
And my tears fall thickly.  
How of Heaven  
Do the gods make Hell!

### II

The sêmi is silent  
(Autumn rains!)  
The wind-bells tinkle  
(How chill it is!)  
The quick lights come  
On the shoji-panes.  
Come, O Baku,  
Eater of dreams!

The maple darkens  
(Pale grow I!)  
The near night shivers  
(The temple fades.)

Haunting love  
Will not cease to cry!  
Come, O Baku,  
Eater of dreams!

The wild mists gather  
(Ah, my tears!)  
The pane-lights vanish  
(For some there is rest.)  
But for me —  
The remembered years!  
Come, O Baku,  
Eater of dreams!

## MAPLE LEAVES ON MIYAJIMA

The summer has come,  
The summer has gone,  
And the maple leaves lift fairy hands  
That ripple upon the winds of dawn  
Where the dim pagoda stands.  
They ripple and beckon yearningly  
To their sister fairies over the sea,  
But help comes not,  
So they fall and flee  
From Autumn over the sands.

And down the mountain  
And into the tide,  
Some are blown where the sampans glide,  
And some are strewn by the temple's side,  
And some by the torii.  
But Autumn ever  
Pursues them till,  
As ever before,  
She has her will,  
And leaves them desolate, dead and still,  
Ravished afar and wide;  
Leaves them desolate; crying shrill,  
"No beauty shall abide!"

# TYPHOON

(At Hong-kong)

I was weary and slept on the Peak;  
The air clung close like a shroud,  
And ever the blue-fly's buzz in my ear  
Hung haunting and hot and loud;  
I awoke and the sky was dun  
With awe and a dread that soon  
Went shuddering thro my heart, for I knew  
That it meant typhoon! typhoon!

In the harbour below, far down,  
The junks like fowl in a flock  
Were tossing in wingless terror, or fled  
Fluttering in from the shock.  
The city, a breathless bend  
Of roofs, by the water strewn,  
Lay silent and waiting, yet there was none  
Within it but said typhoon!

Then it came, like a million winds  
Gone mad immeasurably,  
A torrid and tortuous tempest stung  
By rape of the fair South Sea.  
And it swept like a scud escaped  
From craters of sun or moon,  
And struck as no power of Heaven could,  
Or of Hell – typhoon! typhoon!

And the junks were smitten and torn,  
The drowning struggled and cried,  
Or, dashed on the granite walls of the sea,  
In succourless hundreds died.  
Till I shut the sight from my eyes  
And prayed for my soul to swoon:  
If ever I see God's face, let it  
Be guiltless of that typhoon!

## PENANG

I want to go back to Singapore  
And ship along the Straits,  
To a bungalow I know beside Penang;  
Where cocoanut palms along the shore  
Are waving, and the gates  
Of Peace shut Sorrow out forevermore.  
I want to go back and hear the surf  
Come beating in at night,  
Like the washing of eternity over the dead.  
I want to see dawn fare up and day  
Go down in golden light;  
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

I want to go back to Singapore  
And up along the Straits  
To the bungalow that waits me by the tide.  
Where the Tamil and Malay tell their lore  
At evening – and the fates  
Have set no soothless canker at life's core.  
I want to go back and mend my heart  
Beneath the tropic moon,  
While the tamarind-tree is whispering thoughts of sleep.  
I want to believe that Earth again  
With Heaven is in tune.  
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

I want to go back to Singapore  
And ship along the Straits  
To the bungalow I left upon the strand.  
Where the foam of the world grows faint before  
It enters, and abates  
In meaning as I hear the palm-wind pour.  
I want to go back and end my days  
Some evening when the Cross  
On the southern sky hangs heavily far and sad.  
I want to remember when I die  
That life elsewhere was loss.  
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

## WHEN THE WIND IS LOW

(To A. H. R.)

When the wind is low, and the sea is soft,  
And the far heat-lightning plays  
On the rim of the West where dark clouds nest  
On a darker bank of haze;  
When I lean o'er the rail with you that I love  
And gaze to my heart's content;  
I know that the heavens are there above —  
But you are my firmament.

When the phosphor-stars are thrown from the bow  
And the watch climbs up the shroud;  
When the dim mast dips as the vessel slips  
Thro the foam that seethes aloud;  
I know that the years of our life are few,  
And fain as a bird to flee,  
That time is as brief as a drop of dew —  
But you are Eternity.

## THE PAGODA SLAVE

(At Shwe Dagohn, in old Rangoon)

All night long the pagoda slave  
Hears the wind-bells high in the air  
Tinkle with low sweet tongue and grave  
In praise of Lord Gautama.  
All night long where the lone spire sends  
Its golden height to the starry light  
He hears their tune  
And watches the moon  
And fears he shall never reach Nirvana.

Round and round by a hundred shrines  
Glittering at the great Shwe's base  
Falls the sound of his feet mid lines  
Droned from the sacred Wisdom.  
Round and round where the idols gaze  
So pitiless on his pained distress  
He passes on,  
Pale-eyed and wan —  
A pariah like the dogs behind him.

Oh, what sin in a life begot  
Thousands of lives ago did he sin  
That he is now by all forgot,  
Even by Lord Gautama?  
Oh, what sin, that the lowest shun  
His very name as a thing of shame —  
A sound to taint  
The winds that faint  
From the high bells that hear it uttered!

Midnight comes and the hours of morn,  
Tapers die and the flowers all  
From the most fêted altars: lorn  
And desolate is their odour.  
Midnight goes, but he watches still  
By each cold spire the moon sets fire,  
By every palm  
Whose silvery calm  
Pillar and jewelled porch pray under.

Is it dawn that is breaking?.. No,

Only a star that falls in the sea,  
Only a wind-bell's louder flow  
Of praise to Lord Gautama.  
Faithless dawn! with illusive feet  
It comes too late to ease his fate.  
He sinks asleep  
A helpless heap,  
Tho for it he may never reach Nirvana.



## THE SHIPS OF THE SEA

Into port when the sun was setting  
Rode the ship that bore my love,  
Over the breakers wildly fretting,  
Under the skies that shone above.

Down to the beach I ran to meet him;  
He would come as he had said:  
And he came – in a sailor's coffin,  
Dead!..

O the ships of the sea! the women  
They from all hope but Heaven part!  
The tide has nothing now to tell me,  
The breakers only break my heart!

# KINCHINJUNGA

(Which is the next highest of mountains)

## I

O white Priest of Eternity, around  
Whose lofty summit veiling clouds arise  
Of the earth's immemorial sacrifice  
To Brahma in whose breath all lives and dies;  
O Hierarch enrobed in timeless snows,  
First-born of Asia whose maternal throes  
Seem changed now to a million human woes,  
Holy thou art and still! Be so, nor sound  
One sigh of all the mystery in thee found.

## II

For in this world too much is overclear,  
Immortal Ministrant to many lands,  
From whose ice-altars flow to fainting sands  
Rivers that each libation poured expands.  
Too much is known, O Ganges-giving sire;  
Thy people fathom life and find it dire,  
Thy people fathom death, and, in it, fire  
To live again, tho in Illusion's sphere,  
Behold concealed as Grief is in a tear.

## III

Wherefore continue, still enshrined, thy rites,  
Tho dark Thibet, that dread ascetic, falls  
In strange austerity, whose trance appals,  
Before thee, and a suppliant on thee calls.  
Continue still thy silence high and sure,  
That something beyond fleeting may endure —  
Something that shall forevermore allure  
Imagination on to mystic flights  
Wherein alone no wing of Evil lights.

#### IV

Yea, wrap thy awful gulfs and acolytes  
Of lifted granite round with reachless snows.  
Stand for Eternity while pilgrim rows  
Of all the nations envy thy repose.  
Ensheath thy swart sublimities, unscaled.  
Be that alone on earth which has not failed.  
Be that which never yet has yearned or ailed,  
But since primeval Power upreared thy heights  
Has stood above all deaths and all delights.

#### V

And tho thy loftier Brother shall be King,  
High-priest be thou to Brahma unrevealed,  
While thy white sanctity forever sealed  
In icy silence leaves desire congealed.  
In ghostly ministrations to the sun,  
And to the mendicant stars and the moon-nun,  
Be holy still, till East to West has run,  
And till no sacrificial suffering  
On any shrine is left to tell life's sting.

## THE BARREN WOMAN

(Benares)

At the burning-ghat, O Kali,  
Mother divine and dread,  
See, I am waiting with open lips  
Over the newly dead.  
I am childless and barren; pity  
And let me catch the soul  
Of him who here on the kindled bier  
Pays to Existence toll.

See, by his guileless body  
I cook the bread and eat.  
Give me the soul he does not need  
Now, for conception sweet.  
Hear, or my lord and husband  
Shall send me from his door  
And take to his side a fairer bride  
Whose breast shall be less poor.

Oft I have sought thy temples,  
By Ganges now I seek,  
Where ashes of all the dead are strewn,

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