

## Reflections on My Twenty-second Birthday

(By Robert E. Steele—Deceased.)

The verses quoted below are culled from about a dozen written by the late Robert E. Steele, Vancouver, who died a number of years ago, aged 22. There is a pathetic interest in the lines because the writer of them was a young man of much promise in musical ability and otherwise. In sentiment the first verse may remind us of Henry Kirke White, well known in English literature as a youth of great promise, who, early last century passed away at about the same age as Steele, and from the same kind of illness (tuberculosis). Robert Southey, the poet, wrote a "Life" of H. K. White, whose death called forth many tributary verses.

The late Robert Steele was a brother of Mr. Ben. Steele, a well-known business man in Vancouver. Our attention was called to the verses by Mr. A. L. Struthers, who remarks that "the poem as a whole was the boy's death song, as he died soon afterwards."

Another heavy year with all its weight  
Of grief compounded rolls upon my head:  
How many more ere that my lease of fate  
Expires; I care not. Little reck the dead  
If eight or eighty be their lot. This state  
Once finished, what may then be said?  
The dust's the same of youth or grizzly age,  
Of babe or poet, warrior or sage.

I'm twenty-two! Life's springtime scarce complete!  
The season when the bounding heart should burst  
With love in almost every throb to greet  
Fair Nature in her varied beauty dressed:  
But chiefly in that form where it is meet  
That true love stand in all its charms confessed;  
When two pure souls, with love o'erflowing quite,  
As mountain streams their courses blend, unite.

Man's life is like an hour, his years as minutes,  
Which, being spent and ever past recall,  
Form but the threads for busy Fate to spin its  
Hateful web. The destiny of all  
Is weighed and worked, nor will Time linger in its  
Onward course to spare the fruitless fall  
Of some fair blossoms, but the jealous tomb  
Must seize the best, ere scarce begun to bloom.

The future holds but little charm for me;  
The past cries out with voices of regret;  
A wild ambition, like a storm at sea,  
My frail and dizzy barque has long beset;  
And now, a helpless wreck, I drift "aglee,"  
With ne'er a voice to hail "Good friend, well met!"  
The dreary breakers darkly loom before,  
And hungry rocks enfold the lonely shore

Of my existence. But when all is done  
The thin spun life is slit, the sands are run,  
And "dust to dust" returns, how little trace  
Remains of all our woes. The very place  
Wherein our bones decay shall be the tomb  
Of others who shall in their turn become  
The grave within a grave. E'en our clay  
Shall in a generation pass away.

Though the closing thought recalls W. C. Bryant's "Thanatopsis," readers may wish, with us, that the verses had ended with a more optimistic note. But the writer was

only 22. Nowadays common sense will qualify regret, and fortify the faith which constrains us to say with Tennyson:

"I know, transplanted, human worth  
Will bloom to profit elsewhere."

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