

J. Peter Meluhay.

in constant friendship

Nov 15

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# Lines

IN  
MEMORY  
OF

EDMUND MORRIS

BY

DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT



Senate Cup'd XIX  
Sl. D



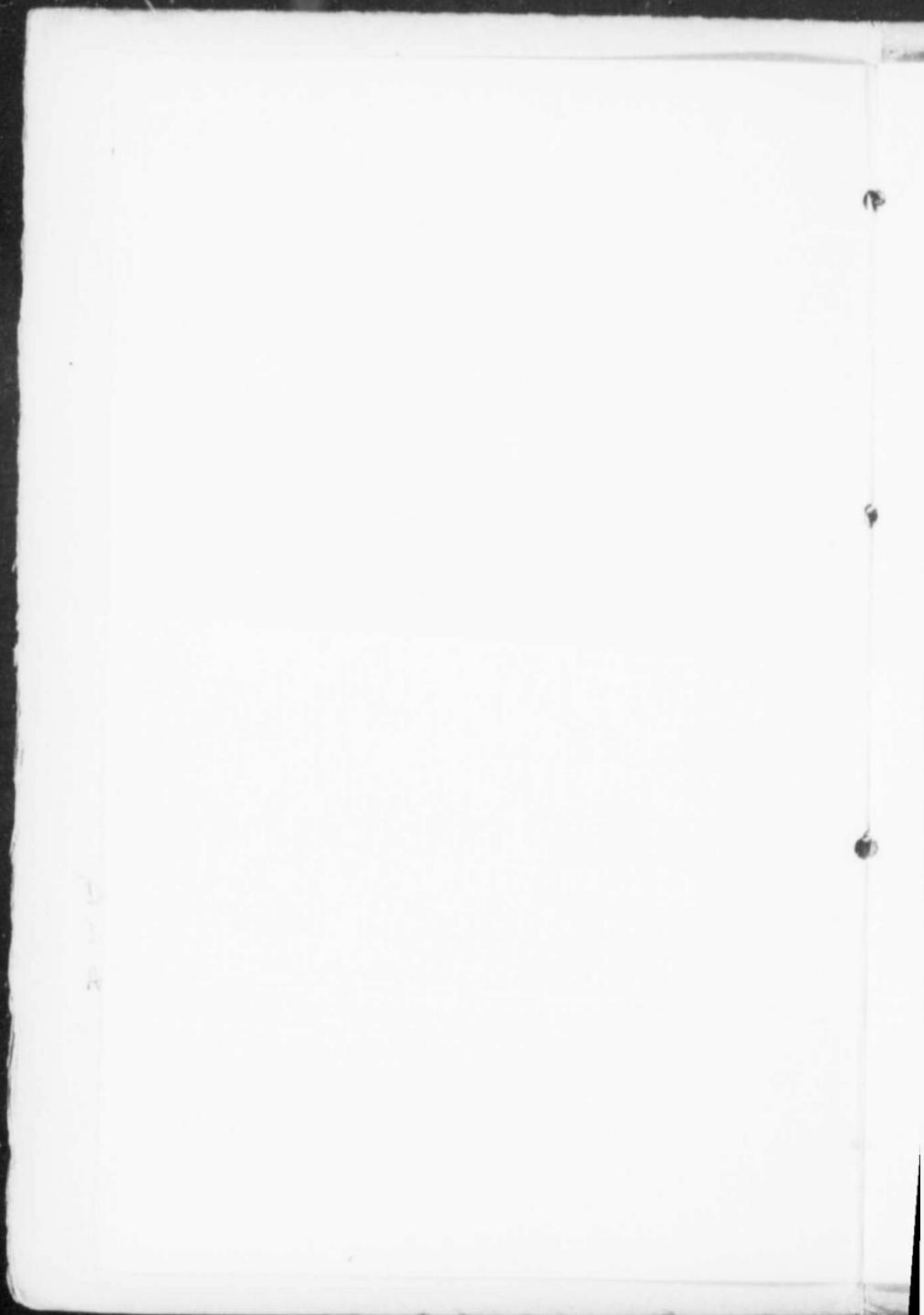
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LINES IN MEMORY  
OF  
EDMUND MORRIS



DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT

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By Duncan Campbell Scott

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**D**EAR MORRIS—here is your letter—  
Can my answer reach you now?  
Fate has left me your debtor,  
You will remember how;  
For I went away to Nantucket,  
And you to the Isle of Orleans,  
And when I was dawdling and dreaming  
Over the ways and means  
Of answering, the power was denied me,  
Fate frowned and took her stand;  
I have your unanswered letter  
Here in my hand.  
This—in your famous scribble,  
It was ever a cryptic fist,  
Cuneiform or Chaldaic  
Meanings held in a mist.

Dear Morris, (now I'm inditing  
And poring over your script)  
I gather from the writing,  
The coin that you had flipt,  
Turned tails; and so you compel me  
To meet you at Touchwood Hills:  
Or, mayhap, you are trying to tell me  
The sum of a painter's ills:  
Is that Phimister Proctor  
Or something about a doctor?  
Well, nobody knows, but Eddie,  
Whatever it is I'm ready.

For our friendship was always fortunate  
In its greetings and adieux,  
Nothing flat or importunate,  
Nothing of the misuse  
That comes of the constant grinding  
Of one mind on another.  
So memory has nothing to smother,  
But only a few things captured  
On the wing, as it were, and enraptured.  
Yes, Morris, I am inditing—  
Answering at last it seems,  
How can you read the writing  
In the vacancy of dreams?

I would have you look over my shoulder  
Ere the long, dark year is colder,  
And mark that as memory grows older,  
The brighter it pulses and gleams.  
And if I should try to render  
The tissues of fugitive splendour  
That fled down the wind of living,  
Will they read it some day in the future,  
And be conscious of an awareness  
In our old lives, and the bareness  
Of theirs, with the newest passions  
In the last fad of the fashions?

\* \* \* \* \*

**H**OW often have we risen without daylight  
When the day star was hidden in mist,  
When the dragon-fly was heavy with dew  
and sleep,

And viewed the miracle pre-eminent, match-  
less,

The prelusive light that quickens the morning.  
O crystal dawn how shall we distill your vir-  
ginal freshness

When you steal upon a land that man has  
not sullied with his intrusion,

When the aboriginal shy dwellers in the broad  
solitudes

Are asleep in their innumerable dens and night  
haunts

Amid the dry ferns, in the tender nests  
Pressed into shape by the breasts of the  
Mother birds?

How shall we simulate the thrill of announce-  
ment

When lake after lake lingering in the star-  
light

Turn their faces towards you,  
And are caressed with the salutation of  
colour?

How shall we transmit in tendril-like images,  
The tenuous tremour in the tissues of ether,

Before the round of colour buds like the dome  
of a shrine,  
The preconscious moment when love has  
fluttered in the bosom,  
Before it begins to ache?

How often have we seen the even  
Melt into the liquidity of twilight,  
With passages of Titian splendour,  
Pellucid preludes, exquisitely tender,  
Where vanish and revive, thro' veils of the  
ashes of roses,  
The crystal forms the breathless sky dis-  
closes.

The new moon a slender thing,  
In a snood of virgin light,  
She seemed all shy on venturing  
Into the vast night.

Her own land and folk were afar,  
She must have gone astray,  
But the gods had given a silver star,  
To be with her on the way.

\* \* \* \* \*

I CAN feel the wind on the prairie  
And see the bunch-grass wave,  
And the sunlights ripple and vary  
The hill with Crowfoot's grave,  
Where he "pitched off" for the last time  
In sight of the Blackfoot Crossing,  
Where in the sun for a pastime  
You marked the site of his tepee  
With a circle of stones. Old Napiw  
Gave you credit for that day.  
And well I recall the weirdness  
Of that evening at Qu'Appelle,  
In the wigwam with old Sakimay,  
The keen, acrid smell,  
As the kinnikinick was burning;  
The planets outside were turning,  
And the little splints of poplar  
Flared with a thin, gold flame.  
He showed us his painted robe  
Where in primitive pigments  
He had drawn his feats and his forays,  
And told us the legend  
Of the man without a name,  
The hated Blackfoot,  
How he lured the warriors,  
The young men, to the foray  
And they never returned.

Only their ghosts  
Goaded by the Blackfoot  
Mounted on stallions:  
In the night time  
He drove the stallions  
Reeking into the camp;  
The women gasped and whispered,  
The children cowered and crept,  
And the old men shuddered  
Where they slept.  
When Sakimay looked forth  
He saw the Blackfoot,  
And the ghosts of the warriors,  
And the black stallions  
Covered by the night wind  
As by a mantle.

\* \* \* \* \*

**R**EMEMBER well a day,  
When the sunlight had free play,  
When you worked in happy stress,  
While grave Ne-Pah-Pee-Ness  
Sat for his portrait there,  
In his beaded coat and his bare  
Head, with his mottled fan  
Of hawk's feathers, A Man!  
Ah Morris, those were the times  
When you sang your inconsequent rhymes  
Sprung from a careless fountain:

*"He met her on the mountain,  
"He gave her a horn to blow,  
"And the very last words he said to her  
"Were, 'Go 'long, Eliza, go'".*

Foolish,—but life was all,  
And under the skilful fingers  
Contours came at your call—  
Art grows and time lingers;—  
But now the song has a change  
Into something wistful and strange.  
And one asks with a touch of ruth  
What became of the youth  
And where did Eliza go?  
He met her on the mountain,  
He gave her a horn to blow,  
The horn was a silver whorl

With a mouthpiece of pure pearl,  
And the mountain was all one glow,  
With gulfs of blue and summits of rosy snow.  
The cadence she blew on the silver horn  
Was the meaning of life in one phrase caught,  
And as soon as the magic notes were born,  
She repeated them once in an afterthought.  
They heard in the crystal passes,  
The cadence, calling, calling,  
And faint in the deep crevasses,  
The echoes falling, falling.  
They stood apart and wondered;  
Her lips with a wound were aquiver,  
His heart with a sword was sundered,  
For life was changed forever  
When he gave her the horn to blow:  
But a shadow arose from the valley,  
Desolate, slow and tender,  
It hid the herdsmen's chalet,  
Where it hung in the emerald meadow,  
(Was death driving the shadow?)  
It quenched the tranquil splendour  
Of the colour of life on the glow-peaks,  
Till at the end of the even,  
The last shell-tint on the snow-peaks  
Had passed away from the heaven.  
And yet, when it passed, victorious,  
The stars came out on the mountains,

And the torrents gusty and glorious,  
Clamoured in a thousand fountains,  
And even far down in the valley,  
A light re-discovered the chalet.  
The scene that was veiled had a meaning,  
So deep that none might know;  
Was it here in the morn on the mountain,  
That he gave her the horn to blow?

\* \* \* \* \*

**T**EARS are the crushed essence of this  
world,

The wine of life, and he who treads the press  
Is lofty with imperious disregard  
Of the burst grapes, the red tears and the  
murk.

But nay! that is a thought of the old poets,  
Who sullied life with the passional bitterness  
Of their world-weary hearts. We of the  
sunrise,

Joined in the breast of God, feel deep the  
power

That urges all things onward, not to an end,  
But in an endless flow, mounting and  
mounting,

Claiming not overmuch for human life,  
Sharing with our brothers of nerve and leaf  
The urgency of the one creative breath,—  
All in the dim twilight—say of morning,  
Where the florescence of the light and dew  
Haloes and hallows with a crown adorning  
The brows of life with love; herein the clue,  
The love of life—yea, and the peerless love  
Of things not seen, that leads the least of  
things

To cherish the green sprout, the hardening  
seed;

Here leans all nature with vast Mother-love,  
Above the cradled future with a smile.  
Why are there tears for failure, or sighs for  
weakness,  
While life's rhythm beats on? Where is  
the rule  
To measure the distance we have circled  
and clomb?  
Catch up the sands of the sea and count  
and count  
The failures hidden in our sum of conquest.  
Persistence is the master of this life;  
The master of these little lives of ours;  
To the end—effort—even beyond the end.

\* \* \* \* \*

**H**ERE Morris, on the plains that we have  
loved,  
Think of the death of Akoose, fleet of foot,  
Who, in his prime, a herd of antelope  
From sunrise, without rest, a hundred miles  
Drove through rank prairie, loping like a  
wolf,  
Tired them and slew them, ere the sun went  
down.  
Akoose, in his old age, blind from the smoke  
Of teepees and the sharp snow light, alone  
With his great grandchildren, withered and  
spent,  
Crept in the warm sun along a rope  
Stretched for his guidance. Once when sharp  
autumn  
Made membranes of thin ice upon the sloughs,  
He caught a pony on a quick return  
Of prowess and, all his instincts cleared  
and quickened,  
He mounted, sensed the north and bore away  
To the Last Mountain Lake where in his  
youth  
He shot the sand-hill-cranes with his flint  
arrows.  
And for these hours in all the varied pomp  
Of pagan fancy and free dreams of foray

And crude adventure, he ranged on entranced,  
Until the sun blazed level with the prairie,  
Then paused, faltered and slid from off his  
pony.

In a little bluff of poplars, hid in the bracken,  
He lay down; the populace of leaves  
In the lithe poplars whispered together and  
trembled,

Fluttered before a sunset of gold smoke,  
With interspaces, green as sea water,  
And calm as the deep water of the sea.

There Akoose lay, silent amid the bracken,  
Gathered at last with the Algonquin Chief-  
tains.

Then the tenebrous sunset was blown out,  
And all the smoky gold turned into cloud  
wrack.

Akoose slept forever amid the poplars,  
Swathed by the wind from the far-off Red Deer  
Where dinosaurs sleep, clamped in their rocky  
tombs.

Who shall count the time that lies between  
The sleep of Akoose and the dinosaurs?  
Innumerable time, that yet is like the breath  
Of the long wind that creeps upon the prairie  
And dies away with the shadows at sundown.

\* \* \* \* \*

WHAT we may think, who brood upon  
the theme,

Is, when the old world, tired of spinning,  
has fallen

Asleep, and all the forms, that carried the fire  
Of life, are cold upon her marble heart—

Like ashes on the altar—just as she stops,  
That something will escape of soul or  
essence,—

The sum of life, to kindle elsewhere:  
Just as the fruit of a high sunny garden,  
Grown mellow with autumnal sun and rain,  
Shrivelled with ripeness, splits to the rich  
heart,

And looses a gold kernel to the mould,  
So the old world, hanging long in the sun,  
And deep enriched with effort and with love,  
Shall, in the motions of maturity,  
Wither and part, and the kernel of it all  
Escape, a lovely wraith of spirit, to latitudes  
Where the appearance, throated like a bird,  
Winged with fire and bodied all with passion,  
Shall flame with presage, not of tears, but joy.

