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THE
SINGERS
OF
THE
SOUTH
BY
E. Paulson Johnson



FOREWORD

*Know by the thread of music woven through
This fragile web of melodies I bring,
That song is soul, and soul is song, if you
Be who in your hearts—the songs I sing.*

E. Paulson Johnson.

“WHEN GEORGE WAS KING ”
AND OTHER POEMS

BY

E. PAULINE JOHNSON
(TEKAHIONWAKE)

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E. PAULINE JOHNSON
(TEKAHIONWAKE).

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When George was King

Cards, and swords, and a lady's love
That is a tale worth reading,
An insult veiled, a downcast glove
And rapiers leap unheeding,
And 'tis O! for the brawl,
The thrust, the fall,
And the foe at your feet a'bleeding.

Tales of revel at wayside inns
The goblets gaily filling,
Braggarts boasting a thousand sins
Though none can boast a shilling.
And 'tis O! for the wine
The frothing stein,
And the clamour of cups a'spilling.

Tales of maidens in rich brocade,
Powder and puff and patches,
Gallants liltng a serenade
Of old-time trolls and catches.
And 'tis O! for the lips
And the finger tips
And the kiss that the boldest snatches.

Tales of buckle and big rosette
The slender shoe adorning,
Of curtsying through the minuet
With laughter, love, or scorning,
And 'tis O! for the shout
Of the roustabout
As he hies him home in the morning.

Cards and swords, and a lady's love,
Give to the tale God-speeding,
War and wassail, and perfumed gloves,
And all that's rare in reading.
And 'tis O! for the ways
Of the olden days,
And a life that was worth the leading.

A Prodigal

My heart forgot its God for love of you,
And you forget me, other loves to learn;
Now through a wilderness of thorn and rue
Back to my God I turn.

And just because my God forgets the past,
And in forgetting does not ask to know
Why I once left His arms for yours, at last
Back to my God I go.

Lady Lorgnette

I

Lady Lorgnette, of the lifted lash,
The curling lip and the danty nose,
The shell-like ear where the jewels flash,
The arching brow and the languid pose,
The rare old lace and the subtle scents,
The slender foot and the fingers frail,—
I may act till the world grows wild and tense,
But never a flush on your features pale,
The footlights glimmer between us two,—
You in the box and I on the boards,—
I am only an actor, Madame, to you,
A mimic king 'mid his mimic lords,
For you are the belle of the smartest set,
Lady Lorgnette.

II

Little Babette, with your eyes of jet,
Your midnight hair and your piquant chin,
Your lips whose odors of violet
Drive men to madness and saints to sin,—
I see you over the footlights' glare
Down in the pit 'mid the common mob,—
Your throat is burning, and brown, and bare,
You lean, and listen, and pulse, and throb;
The viols are dreaming between us two,
And my gilded crown is no make-believe,
I am more than an actor, dear, to you,
For you called me your king but yester eve,
And your heart is my golden coronet,
Little Babette.

Autumn's Orchestra

INSCRIBED TO ONE BEYOND SEAS.

Know by the thread of music woven through
This fragile web of cadences I spin,
That I have only caught these songs since you
Voiced them upon your haunting violin.

THE OVERTURE.

October's orchestra plays softly on
The northern forest with its thousand strings,
And Autumn, the conductor wields anon
The Golden-rod—The baton that he swings.

THE FIRS.

There is a lonely minor chord that sings
Faintly and far along the forest ways
When the firs finger faintly on the strings
Of that rare violin the night wind plays,
Just as it whispered once to you and me
Beneath the English pines beyond the sea.

MOSSES.

The lost wind wandering, forever grieves
Low overhead,
Above grey mosses whispering of leaves
Fallen and dead.
And through the lonely night sweeps their refrain
Like Chopin's prelude, sobbing 'neath the rain.

THE VINE.

The wild grape mantling the trail and tree,
Festoons in graceful veils its drapery,
Its tendrils cling, as clings the memory stirred
By some evasive haunting tune, twice heard.

THE MAPLE.

I.

It is the blood-hued maple straight and strong,
Voicing abroad its patriotic song.

II.

Its daring colors bravely flinging forth
The ensign of the Nation of the North.

HARE-BELL.

Elfin bell in azure dress,
Chiming all day long,
Ringing through the wilderness
Dulcet notes of song.
Daintiest of forest flowers
Weaving like a spell—
Music through the Autumn hours,
Little Elfin bell.

THE GIANT OAK.

And then the sound of marching armies 'woke
Amid the branches of the soldier oak,
And tempests ceased their warring cry, and dumb
The lashing storms that muttered, overcome
Choked by the heralding of battle smoke,
When these gnarled branches beat their martial drum.

ASPENS.

A sweet high treble threads its silvery song,
Voice of the restless aspen, fine and thin
It trills its pure soprano, light and long—
Like the vibretto of a mandolin.

FINALE.

The cedar trees have sung their vesper hymn,
And now the music sleeps—
Its benediction falling where the dim
Dusk of the forest creeps,
Mute grows the great concerto—and the light
Of day is darkening, Goodnight, Goodnight.
But through the night time I shall hear within
The murmur of these trees,
The calling of your distant violin
Sobbing across the seas,
And waking wind, and star reflected light
Shall voice my answering. Goodnight, Goodnight.

The Trail to Lillooet

Sob of fall, and song of forest, come you here on haunting
quest,
Calling through the seas and silence, from God's country
of the west.
Where the mountain pass is narrow, and the torrent white
and strong,
Down its rocky-throated canon, sings its golden-throated
song.

You are singing there together through the God-begotten
nights,
And the leaning stars are listening above the distant
heights
That lift like points of opal in the crescent coronet
About whose golden setting sweeps the trail to Lillooet.

Trail that winds and trail that wanders, like a cobweb
hanging high,
Just a hazy thread out-lining mid-way of the stream and
sky,
Where the Fraser River Canon yawns its pathway to the
sea,
But half the world has shouldered up between its song
and me.

Here, the placid English August, and the sea-encircled
miles,
There—God's copper-coloured sunshine beating through
the lonely aisles
Where the water fall and forest voice forever their duet,
And call across the canon on the trail to Lillooet.

Canada

Crown of her, young Vancouver; crest of her, old Quebec;
Atlantic and far Pacific sweeping her, keel to deck.
North of her, ice and arctics; southward a rival's stealth;
Aloft, her Empire's pennant; below, her nation's wealth.
Daughter of men and markets, bearing within her hold,
Appraised at highest value, cargoes of grain and gold.

The Legend of Qu'Appelle Valley

I am the one who loved her as my life,
Had watched her grow to sweet young womanhood;
Won the dear privilege to call her wife,
And found the world, because of her, was good.
I am the one who heard the spirit voice,
Of which the paleface settlers love to tell;
From whose strange story they have made their choice
Of naming this fair valley the "Qu'Appelle."

She had said fondly in my eager ear—
"When Indian summer smiles with dusky lip,
Come to the lakes, I will be first to hear
The welcome music of thy paddle dip.
I will be first to lay in thine my hand,
To whisper words of greeting on the shore;
And when thou would'st return to thine own land,
I'll go with thee, thy wife for evermore."

Not yet a leaf had fallen, not a tone
Of frost upon the plain ere I set forth,
Impatient to possess her as my own—
This queen of all the women of the North.
I rested not at even or at dawn,
But journeyed all the dark and daylight through—
Until I reached the Lakes, and, hurrying on,
I launched upon their bosom my canoe.

Of sleep or hunger then I took no heed,
But hastened o'er their leagues of waterways;
But my hot heart outstripped my paddle's speed
And waited not for distance or for days,
But flew before me swifter than the blade
Of magic paddle ever cleaved the Lake,
Eager to lay its love before the maid,
And watch the lovelight in her eyes awake.

So the long days went slowly drifting past;
It seemed that half my life must intervene
Before the morrow, when I said at last—
"One more day's journey and I win my queen!"
I rested then, and, drifting, dreamed the more
Of all the happiness I was to claim,—
When suddenly from out the shadowed shore,
I heard a voice speak tenderly my name.

"Who calls?" I answered; no reply; and long
I stilled my paddle blade and listened. Then
Above the night's wind melancholy song
I heard distinctly that strange voice again—
A woman's voice, that through the twilight came
Like to a soul unborn—a song unsung.
I leaned and listened—yes, she spoke my name,
And then I answered in the quaint French tongue,

"Qu'Appelle ? Qu'Appelle ?" No answer, and the night
Seemed stiller for the sound, till round' me fell
The far-off echoes from the far-off height—
"Qu'Appelle?" my voice came back, "Qu'Appelle ?
Qu'Appelle ?"

This—and no more; I called aloud until
I shuddered as the gloom of night increased,
And(like a pallid spectre wan and chill,
The moon arose in silence from the east.

I dare not linger on the moment when
My boat I beached beside her tepee door;
I heard the wail of women and of men,—
I saw the death fires lighted on the shore.
No language tells the torture or the pain,
The bitterness that flooded all my life,—
When I was led to look on her again,
That queen of women pledged to be my wife.

To look upon the beauty of her face,
The still closed eyes, the lips that knew no breath;
To look, to learn,—to realize my place
Had been usurped by my one rival—Death.
A storm of wrecking sorrow beat and broke
About my heart, and life shut out its light
Till through my anguish some one gently spoke,
And said, "Twice did she call for thee last night."
I started up—and bending o'er my dead,
Asked when did her sweet lips in silence close.
"She called thy name—then passed away," they said,
"Just on the hour whereat the moon arose."

Among the lonely lakes I go no more,
For she who made their beauty is not there;
The paleface rears his tepee on the shore
And says the vale is fairest of the fair.
Full many years have vanished since, but still
The voyageurs beside the campfire tell
How, when the moonrise tips the distant hill,
They hear strange voices through the silence swell.
The paleface loves the haunted lakes they say,
And journeys far to watch their beauty spread
Before his vision; but to me the day,
The night, the hour, the seasons all are dead.
I listen heartsick, while the hunters tell
Why white men named the valley The Qu'Appelle.

The Train Dogs

Out of the night and the north;
Savage of breed and of bone,
Shaggy and swift comes the yelping band,
Freighters of fur from the voiceless land,
That sleeps in the Arctic zone.

Laden with skins from the north,
Beaver and bear and raccoon,
Marten and mink from the polar belts,
Otter and ermine and sable pelts —
The spoils of the hunter's moon.

Out of the night and the north,
Sinevy, fearless and fleet
Urging the pack through the pathless snow,
The Indian driver, calling low,
Follows with moccasined feet.

Ships of the night and the north,
Freighters on prairies and plains,
Carrying cargoes from field and flood
They scent the trail through their wild red blood,
The wolfish blood in their veins.

The Quill Worker

Plains, plains, and the prairie land which the sunlight
floods and fills,
To the north the open country, southward the Cypress
Hills;
Never a bit of woodland, never a rill that flows,
Only a stretch of cactus beds, and the wild, sweet prairie
rose;
Never a habitation, save where in the far southwest
A solitary tepee lifts its solitary crest,
Where Neykia in the doorway, crouched in the red
sunshine,
Brolders her buckskin mantle with the quills of the
porcupine.

Neykia, the Sioux chief's daughter, she with the foot that
flies,
She with the hair of midnight and the wondrous midnight
eyes,
She with the deft brown fingers, she with the soft slow
smile,
She with the voice of velvet and the thoughts that dream
the while,—
"Whence come the vague to-morrows? Where do the
yesters fly?
What is beyond the border of the prairie and the sky?
Does the maid in the Land of Morning sit in the red
sunshine,
Broldering her buckskin mantle with the quills of the
porcupine?"

So Neykia, in the westland, wonders and works away,
Far from the fret and folly of the "Land of Waking Day."
And many the pale-face trader who stops at the tepee door
For a smile from the sweet, shy worker, and a sigh when
the hour is o'er.
For they know of a young red hunter who oftentimes has
stayed
To rest and smoke with her father, tho' his eyes were on
the maid;
And the moons will not be many ere she in the red sun-
shine
Will broider his buckskin mantle with the quills of the
porcupine.

The Cattle Country

Up the dusk-enfolded prairie,
Foot-falls, soft and sly,
Velvet cushioned, wild and wary,
Then—the coyote's cry.

Rush of hoofs, and roar and rattle,
Beasts of blood and breed,
Twenty thousand frightened cattle,
Then—the wild stampede.

Pliant lasso circling wider
In the frenzied flight—
Loping horse and cursing rider,
Plunging through the night.

Rim of dawn the darkness losing
Trail of blackened soil,
Perfume of the sage brush oozing
On the air like oil.

Foothills to the Rockies lifting
Brown, and blue, and green,
Warm Alberta sunlight drifting
Over leagues between.

That's the country of the ranges
Plain and prairie land,
And the God who never changes
Holds it in His hand.

Canadian Born

We first saw light in Canada, the land beloved of God;
We are the pulse of Canada, its marrow and its blood ;
And we, the men of Canada, can face the world and brag
That we were born in Canada beneath the British flag.

Few of us have the blood of kings, few are of courtly
birth,
But few are vagbonds or rogues of doubtful name and
worth ;
And all have one credential that entitles us to brag—
That we were born in Canada beneath the British flag.

We've yet to make our money, we've yet to make our
fame,
But we have gold and glory in our clean Colonial name ;
And every man's a millionaire if only he can brag
That he was born in Canada beneath the British flag.

No title and no coronet is half so proudly worn
As that which we inherited as men Canadian born.
We count no man so noble as the one who makes the
brag
That he was born in Canada beneath the British flag.

The Dutch may have their Holland, the Spaniard have his
Spain,
The Yankee to the south of us must south of us remain ;
For not a man dare lift a hand against the men who brag
That they were born in Canada beneath the British flag.