

Voltairine de Cleyre

Collected Poems

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And Thou Too

The moonlight rolls down like a river,
The silence streams out like a sea;
And far where the eastern winds quiver,
My farewell goes floating to thee.

Like night, when the sunset is fading
And starbeams troop up in the skies,
Through a cold, dark and lonely forever
Gleams the light of the poet eyes.

And sometimes when I am weary,
When the path is thorny and Wild,
I'll look back to the Eyes in the twilight,
Back to the eyes that smiled.

And pray that a wreath like a rainbow
May slip from the beautiful past,
And Crown me again with the sweet, strong love
And keep me, and hold me fast.

For the way is not strown with petal soft,
It is covered with hearts that weep,
And the wounds I tread touch a deeper source
Than you think it mine to keep.

Down the years I shall move without you,
Yet ever must feel the blow
That caused me a deeper pain to give
Than you will ever know.

For the tears that dropped on my hands that night
'Neath the mystical shining moon,
Were a sacred dew, consecrated there,
On the rose-altered heart of June.

And the heart that beat against mine like a bird
That is fluttering, wounded sore,
With it's nest all broken, deserted, torn,
Will beat there forevermore.

But the world moves on, and the piteous Earth
Still groans in the monster pain;
And the star that leads me points onward yet,
Though the red drops fall like rain!

Ah, not to a blaze of light I go,
Nor shouts of a triumph train;
I go down to kiss the dregs of woe,
And drink up the Cup of Pain.

And whether a scaffold or crucifix waits
'Neath the light of my silver star,
I know and I care not: I only know
I shall pause not though it be far.

Though a crucified life or an agonized death,
Though long, or quick and sharp,
I am firmly wrought in the endless thread
Of Destiny's woof and warp.

And I do not shrink, though a wave of pain
Sobs over me now and then,
As I think of those "saddest of all sad words,"
The pitiful "might have been."

"It might have been" — it is not to be;
And the tones of your "swan's farewell"
Ring sadly, solemnly deep to me
Like the voice of a sobbing bell.

Ay, gather your petals and take them back
To the dead heart under the dew;
And crown it again with the red love bloom,
For the dead are always true.

But go not "back to the sediment"
In the slime of the moaning sea,
For a better world belongs to you,
And a better friend to me.

— *St. Johns, Michigan, 1888*

The Hurricane

"We are the birds of the coming storm." — August Spies

The tide is out, the wind blows off the shore;
Bare burn the white sands in the scorching sun;
The sea complains, but its great voice is low.

Bitter thy woes, O People,
And the burden
Hardly to be borne!
Wearily grows, O People,
All the aching
Of thy pierced heart, bruised and torn!
But yet thy time is not,
And low thy moaning.
Desert thy sands!
Not yeat is thy breath hot, Vengefully blowing;
It wafts o'er lifted hands.

The tide has turned; the vane veers slowly round;
Slow clouds are sweeping o'er the blinding light;
White crests curl on the sea — its voice grows deep.

Angry thy heart, O People!
And its bleeding
Fire-tipped with rising hate!
Thy clasped hands part, O People,
For thy praying Warmed not the desolate!
God did not hear thy moan:
Now it is swelling
To a great drowning cry;
A dark wind-cloud, a groan, Now backward veering
From that deaf sky!

The tide flows in, the wind roars from the depths,
The whirled-White sand heaps with the foam-white waves;
Thundering the sea rolls o'er its shell-crunched wall!

Strong is thy rage, O People,
In its fury

Hurling thy tyrants down!
Thow metest wage, O People.
Very swiftly,
Now that thy hate is grown:
Thy time at last is come;
Thou heapest anguish,
Where thou thyself wert bare!
No longer to thy dumb.
God clasped and kneeling.
Thou answerest thine own prayer.

— *Sea Isle City, New Jersey, August 1889*

At the Grave in Waldheim

Quiet they lie in their shrouds of rest,
Their lids kissed close 'neath the lips of peace;
Over each pulseless and painless breast
The hands lie folded and softly pressed,
As a dead dove presses a broken nest;
Ah, broken hearts were the price of these!

The lips of their anguish are cold and still,
For them are the clouds and the gloms al past;
No longer the woe of the world can thrill
The chords of those tender hearts, or fill
The silent dead- house! The "people's will"
Has snapped asunder the strings at last.

"The people's will!" Ah, in years to come,
Dearly ye'll weep that ye did not save!
Do you not hear now the muffled drum,
The trampling feet and the ceaseless hum,
Of the million marchers – trembling, dumb,
In their tread to a yawning, giant grave?

And yet, ah! yet there's a rift of white!
'Tis breaking over the martyrs' shrine!
Halt there, ye dommed ones – it scates the night,
As lightning darts from its scabbard bright
And sweeps the face of the sky with light!
"No more shall be spilled out the blood-red wine!"

These are the words it has written there,
Keen as the lance of the northern mourn;
The sword of Justice gleams in its glare,
And the arm of Justice, upraised and bare,
Is true to strike, aye, 'tis strong to dare;
It will fall where the curse of our land is born.

No more shall the necks of the nations be crused,
No more to dark Tyranny's throne bend the knee;

No more in abjection to ground to the dust!
By the brave heart-beats stilled, by the brave voices hushed,
We swear that humanity yet shall be free!

— *Pittsburg, 1889*

Ut Sementem Feceris, Ita Metes

(To the Czar, on a woman it political prisoner, being flogged to death in Siberia.)

How many drops must gather to the skies
Before the cloud-burst comes, we may not know;
How hot the fires ill under hells must glow
Ere the volcano's scalding lavas rise,
Can none say; but all wot the hour is sure!
Who dreams of vengeance has but to endure
He may not say how many blows must fall,
How many lives be broken on the wheel,
How many corpses stiffen 'neath the pall,
How many martyrs fix the blood-red seal;
But certain is the harvest time of Hate!
And when weak moans by an indignant world
Re-echoed, to a throne are backward hurled,
Who listens hears the mutterings of Fate!

Philadelphia, February, 1890.

The Dirge of the Sea

Come! Come! I have waited long!
My love is old,
My arms are strong;
I would woo thee, now,
With the wave-kiss cold
On they pallid brow;

Thou art mine, thou art mine! My very own!
Thine ears shall hear
My eternal moan;
Always near
Thou'lt feel my lips,
And the bathing tear
Where my sorrow drips.

Thou, my king forever, behold thy throne!
Reign in thy majesty, all alone.

None! None wept for thee,
Nearing the verge
Of eternity!
I, thy solemn dirge Will chant for eye
Wide as the wave-merge
Into sky.

I love thee! Thou art my chosen own!
Thy heart, like mine,
Was cold as stone,
Thine eyes could shine
Like my blue waves fair;
Thy lips, like wine,
Curved to kisses rare!!

Hard as my waves were the eyes that shone,
And the wine as deadly! Come, love, alone!
Float! Float, on the swelling wave!
Long is the hearse,
Wide the grave;
Thy pall is a curse

From the fading shore
A broken verse
From a heart wrung sore!

“Live’s stream’s wreck-strown!” Ah, like my own!

The words are low
As a dying groan;
The voice thrills so,
It might rouse thy breast
With pity’s glow,
Wert thou like the rest!
But thou, my hero, wert never known
To feel as a human; thou stoodst, alone.

Down! Down! Behold the wrecks!
I strew the deep
With these human specks!
No faith I keep With their moral trust;
See how I heap
Their crumbling dust!

I sneered in their faces, my own, my own,
As they knelt to pray
When the ships went down;
I flung my spray
In their dying eyes,
And laughed at the way
It drowned their cries!

On the shore they heard the exultant tone,
And said: “The Sea laughs.” Ah, I laughed alone.

Now! Now, we twain shall go,
Love-locked,
Laughing so! The fools ye mocked
With your tender eyes,
The trusts ye rocked With your cradling lies,
E’en like these wretches, my own, my own,
Shall rot in clay
Or crumbled bone,
Thou shalt hold thy way,

Day-kissed and fair,
Where the wild waves play
In the sun-thick air!

My arms, my kiss, my tears, my moan,
Ye shall know for aye, where we wander lone.
Love! Love! Thou wert like to me!
Thy luring gaze
Rolled relentlessly!
The marsh-light blaze
To some human soul,
Down the darkn'ing maze
To Ruin's goal.

Ah, how ye crushed them, my beautiful own!
Like whistled leaves
Around thee stown,
Whirled the dead beliefs
Of each long-mourned life!
Here, no one grieves:
Neither tears nor strife

Appeal to the Sea, where its wrecks are thrown!
Thou shalt stand in their midst, and smile, alone!

Laugh! Laugh! O form of light!
Death hides
Thy faithless sight!
The flowing tides
Of thy heart are still;
Yet are wrecks thy brides,
For it is my will

That that which on earth made thy heaven,
my own,
May strew around
Thy eternal throne!
The gurgling sound
Of the dying cry,
The gushing wound
Of heart-agony,

Were thy joy in life! Now the Sea makes known
Thy realm in death! Thy heaven, alone!

Years! Years, ye shall mix with me!
Ye shall grow a part
Of the laughing Sea;
Of the moaning heart
Of the glittered wave
Of the sun-gleam's dart
In the ocean-grave.

Fair, cold, and faithless wert thou, my own!
For that I love
Thy heart of stone!
From the heights above
To the depths below,
Where dread things move,

There is naught can show
A life so trustless! Proud be thy crown!
Ruthless, like none, save the Sea, alone!

April 1891

I Am

I am! The ages on the ages roll:
And what I am, I was, and I shall be:
by slow growth filling higher Destiny,
And Widening, ever, to the widening Goal.
I am the Stone that slept; down deep in me
That old, old sleep has left its centurine trace;
I am the plant that dreamed; and lo! still see
That dream-life dwelling on the Human Face.
I slept, I dreamed, I wakened: I am Man!
The hut grows Palaces; the depths breed light;
Still *on!* *Forms* pass; but *Form* yields kinglier
Might!
The singer, dying where his song began,
In Me yet lives; and yet again shall he
Unseal the lips of greater songs To Be;
For mine the thousand tongues of *Immortality*.

January 1892

Love's Ghost

Among the leaves and the rolls of moonlight,
The moon, which weaves lace on the road-white
Among the winds, and among the flowers,
Our blithe feet wander — life is ours!

Life is ours, and life is loving;
All our powers are locked in loving;
Hearts, and eyeys, and lips are moving
With the ecstasy of loving.

Ah! the roses! they are blooming;
And the June air, throbbing, tuning,
Sings of Love's eternal summer —
Chants of Joy, life's only Comer;
And we clsp our hands together,
Singing in the war, sweet weather;
Kissing, thrilling with caressing,
All the sweet from Love's rose pressing.

Ah, so easy! — Earth is Heaven, —
Darkness, shadows, do not live;
Like the rose our hearts are given,
Like the rose whos blom is given,
To the sun-gold, and the heaven.
Not because it wills or wishes,
But because 'tis life to give.

Dreary, dreary, snow-filled darkness!
Heavy, weary, voiceless darkness!

We have drifted, drifted, drifted, you and I,
Far apart as snows and roses, sea and sky.
We have drifted, drifted, drifted, far asunder,
Any my lonely voice uplifted in sad wonder,
Heavy with its own sad calls.

All your love was of the summer;
Born to die among the roses,
Wither, scatter, like the roses,
Leaving me the gray-browed Comer,

With the ashes on his forehead,
And the winter in his hair,
With the footsteps slow and solemn
Going down the endless stair,
Joy is gone and you, my Lover,
Gone in other ways to hover;
gone among the summer places,
Gone to seek for summer faces.

Bright-faced Joy was not for me;
Born among the snows and pines,
Gray-faced Sorrow was to be
Imaged in my mournful lines.

Love, not born for cold and sorrow,
Only for the sweet sunshine,
I shall keep your face forever
Hidden in this heart of mine.
In its light, one spot will brighten,
Keeping fair the sacred tomb;
Like old moonlight it will whiten
The inviolable room;
Like the moonlight it will whiten,
Softly, all the darkened room;
And the broken stalk may put forth
Memory's ghost of Love's old bloom.

March 1892

Life or Death

A Soul, half through the Gate, said unto Life:
“What dost thou offer me?” And Life replied:
“Sorrow, unceasing struggle, disappointment;
after these
Darkness and silence.” The Soul said unto Death:
“What dost thou offer me?” And Death replied:
“In the beginning what Life gives at last.”
Turning to Life: “And if I live and struggle?”
“Others shall live and struggle after thee
Counting it easier where thou hast passed.”
“And by their struggles?” “Easier place shall be
For others, still to rise to keener pain
Of conquering Agony!” “and what have I
To do with all these others? Who are they?”
“Yourself!” “And all who went before?” “Yourself.”
“The darkness and the silence, too, have end?”
“They end in light and sound; peace ends in pain,
Death ends in Me, and thou must glide from
Self
To Self, as light to shade and shade to light again.
Choose!” The Soul, sighing, answered: “I will live.”

Philadelphia, May 1892

The Toast of Despair

We have cried — and the gods are silent;
We have trusted — and been betrayed;
We have loved — and the fruit was ashes;
We have given — the gift was weighed.

We know that the heavens are empty,
That friendship and love are names;
That truth is an ashen cinder,
The end of life's burnt-out flames.

Vainly and long we have waited,
Through the night of the human roar,
For a single song on the harp of Hope,
Or a ray from a day-lit shore.

Songs are come floating, marvelous sweet,
And bow-dyed flashes gleam;
But the sweets are Lies, and the weary feet
Run after a marsh-light beam.

In the hour of our need the song departs,
And the sea-moans of sorrow swell;
The siren mocks with a gurgling laugh
That is drowned in the deep death-knell.

The light we chased with our stumbling feet
As the goals of happier years,
Swings high and low and vanishes —
The bow-dyes were of our tears.

God is a lie, and Faith is a lie,
And a tenfold lie is Love;
Life is a problem without a why,
And never a thing to prove.

It adds, and subtracts, and multiplies,
And divides without aim or end;
Its answers all false, though false-named true —
Wife, husband, lover, friend.

We know it now, and we care no more;
What matters life or death?
We tiny insects emerge from earth,
Suffer, and yield our breath.

Like ants we crawl on our brief sand-hill,
Dreaming of "mighty things" —
Lo, they crunch, like shells in the ocean's wrath,
In the rush of Time's awful wings.

The sun smiles gold, and the plants white,
And a billion stars smile, still;
Yet, fierce as we, each wheels toward eath,
And cannot stay his will.

The build, ye fools, your mighty things,
That time shall set at naught;
Grow warm with the song the sweet Lie sings,
And the false bow your tears have wrought.

For us, a truce to Gods, loves, and hopes,
And a pledge to fire and wave;
A swifter whirl to the dance of death,
And a loud huzza for the Grave!

Philadelphia, 1892

Mary Wollstone Craft

The dust of a hundred years
Is on thy breast,
And thy day and thy night of tears
Are centurine rest.
Thou to whom joy was dumb,
Life a broken rhyme,
Lo, thy smiling time is come,
And our weeping time.
Thou who hadst sponge and myrrh
And a bitter cross,
Smile, for the day is here
That we know our loss; —
Loss of thine undone deed,
Thy unfinished song,
Th' unspoken word for our need,
Th' unrighted wrong;
Smile, for we weep, we weep,
For the unsoothed pain,
The unbound wound burned deep,
That we might gain.
Mother of sorrowful eyes
In the dead old days,
Mother of many sighs,
Of pain-shod ways;
Mother of resolute feet
Through all the thorns,
Mother soul-strong, soul-sweet, —
Lo, after storms
Have broken and beat thy dust
For a hundred years,
Thy memory is made just,
And the just man hears.
Thy children kneel and repeat:
“Though dust be dust,
Though sod and coffin and sheet
And moth and rust

Have folded and molded and pressed,
Yet they cannot kill;
In the heart of the world at rest
She liveth still."

Philadelphia, 27th April 1893

John P. Altgeld

(After an incarceration for six long years in Joliet state prison for an act of which they were entirely innocent, namely, the throwing of the Hyamarket bomb, in Chicago, May 4th, 1886, Oscar Neebe, Michael Scwab, and Samuel Fielden, were liberated by Gov. Altgeld, who thus sacrificed his political career to an act of justice.)

There was a tableau! Liberty's clear light
Shone never on a braver scene than that,
Here was a prison, there a Man, who sat
High in the halls of State! Beyond, the might
Of Ignorance and mobs whose hireling Press
Yells at their bidding like the slaver's hounds,
Ready with coarse caprice to curse or bless,
To make or unmake rulers! — Lo, there sounds
A grating of the doors! And three poor men
Helpless and hated, having nought to give,
Come from their long-sealed tomb, look up, and
live,
And thank this Man that they are free again.
And He — to all the world this Man dares say:
“Curse as you will! I have been just this day.”

Philadelphia, June 1893

In Memoriam

To General M. M. Trumbull

(No man better than General Trumbull defended my lead comrades in Chicago.)

Back to thy breast, O Mother, turns thy child,
He whom thou garmentedst in steel of truth,
And sent forth, strong in the glad heart of youth,
To sing the wakening song in ears beguiled
By tyrants' promises and flatterers' smiles;
These searched his eyes, and knew nor threats nor
wiles,
Might shake the steady stars within their blue,
Nor win one truckling word from off those lips,-
No-not for gold nor praise, nor aught men do
To dash the Sun of Honor with eclipse.
O, Mother Liberty, those eyes are dark,
And the brave lips are white and cold and dumb;
But fair in other Souls, through time to come,
Fanned by thy breath glows the Immortal Spark.

Philadelphia, May, 1894.

The Feast of Vultures

(As the three atarchists, Vaillant, Henry and Caserio, were led to their several executions, a voice from the prison cried loudly, "Vive l'anarchie!" Through watch and ward the cry escaped, and no man owned the voice, but the cry is still resounding through the world.)

A moan in the gloam in the air-peaks heard —
The Bird of Omen — the wild, fierce Bird,
Aflight
In the night,
Like a whizz of light,
Arrowy winging before the storm,
Far away flinging
The whistling, singing,
White-curdled drops, wind-blown and warm,
From its beating, flapping,
Thunderous wings;
Crashing and clapping
The split night swings,
And rocks and totters,
Bled of its levin,
Atd reels and mutters
A curse to Heaven!
Reels and mutters and rolls and dies,
With a wild light streaking its black, blind eyes.

Far, Far, Farw
Through the red, mad morn,
Like a hurtling star,
Through the air upborne,
The Herald-Singer,
The Terror-Bringer,
Speeds — and behind, through the cloud-rags torn,
Gather and wheel a million wings,
Clanging as iron where the hammer rings;
The whipped sky shivers,
The White Gate shakes,
The ripped throne quivers,

The dumb God wakes,
 And feels in his heart the talon-stings.
 "Ruin,!Ruin!" the Whirlwind cries,
 And it leaps at his throat and tears his eyes;
 "Death for death, as ye long have dealt;
 The heads of your victims your heads shall pelt;
 The blood ye wrung to get drunk upon,
 Drink, and be poisoned! On, Herald, on!"

Behold, behold,
 How a moan is grown!
 A cry hurled high 'gainst a scaffold's joist!
 The Voice of Defiance — the roud, wild Voice!
 Whirled
 Through the world,
 A smoke-wreath curled
 (Breath 'round hot kisses) around a fire!
 See! the ground hisses
 With red-streaming blood-clots of long-frozen ire,
 Waked by the flying
 Wild voice as it passes;
 Groaning and crying,
 The surge of the masses
 Rolls and flashes
 With thunderous roar —
 Seams and lashes
 The livid shore —
 Seams and lashes and crunches abe beats,
 And drags a ragged wall to its howling retreats!

Swift, swift, swift,
 'Thwart the blood-rain's fall,
 Through the fire-shot rig
 Of the broken wall,
 The prophet-crying
 The storm-song sighing,
 Flies — and grom under Night's lifted pall,
 Swarming, menace ten million darts,
 Uplifting fragments of human shards!

Ah, white teeth chatter,
 And dumb jaws fall,

While winged fires scatter
Till gloom gulfs all
Save the boom of the cannon that storm the forts
That the people bombard with their comrades'
hearts;
"Vengeance! Vengeance!" the voices scream,
And the vulture pinions whirl and stream!
"Knife for knife, as ye long have dealt;
The edge ye whetted for us be felt,
Ye chopper o necks, on your own, on your own!
Bare it, Coward! On, Prophet, on!"
Behold how high
Rolls a prison cry!

Philadelphia, August 1894

*Anarchist martyrs Auguste Vaillant, Emile Henry and Sante Geronimo Caserio
were European exemplars of "propaganda by the deed."*

The Suicide's Defense

(Of all the stupidities wherewith the law-making power has oigned its own incapacity for dealing with the disorders of society, none appears so utterly stupid as the law which punishes an attempted suicide. To the question "What have you to say in your defense?" I conceive the poor wretch might reply as follows.)

To say in my defense? Defense of what?
Defense to whom? And why defense at all?
Have I wronged anY? Let that one accuse!
Some priest there mutters I "have outraged God"!
Let God then try me, and let none dare judge
Himself as fit to put Heaven's ermine on!
Again I say, let the wronged one accuse.
Aye, silence! There is none to answer me.
And whom could I, a homeness, friendless tramp,
To whom all doors are shut, all hearts are locked,
All hands withheld — whom could I wrong, indeed
By taking that which benefited none
And menaced all?
Aye, since ye will it so,
Know then your risk. But mark, 'tis not defense,
'Tis accusation that I hurl at you.
See to't that ye prepare your own defense.
My life, I say, Is an eternal thleat
To you and yours; and therefore it were well
To have foreborne your unasked services.
And why? Because I hate you! Every drop
of blood that circles in your plethoric veins
Was wrung from out the gaunt and sapless trunks
Of men like me. who in your cursed mills
Were crushed like grapes within the wine-press
ground.
To us ye leave the empty skin of life;
The heart of it, the sweet of it, ye pour
To fete your dogs and mistresses withal!
Your mistresses! Our daughters! Bought, for bread,
To grace the flesh that once was father's arms!

Yes, I accuse you that ye murdered me!
Ye killed the Man — and this that speaks to you
Is but the beast that ye have made of me!
What! Is it life to creep and crawl an beg,
And slink for shelter where rats congregate?
And for one's ideal dream of a fat meal?
Is it, then, life, to group like pigs in sties,
And bury decency in common filth,
Because, forsooth, your income must be made,
Though human flesh rot in your plague-rid dens?
Is it, then, life, to wait another's nod,
For leave to turn yourself to gold for him?
Would it me life to you? And was I less
Than you? Was I not born with hopes and dreams
Ane pains and passions even as were you?

But these ye have denied. Ye seized the ealth,
Though it was none of yours, and said: "Hereon
Shall none rest, walk or work, till first to me
Ye render tribute!" Every art of man,
Born to make light of the burdens of the world,
Ye also seized, and made a tenfold curse
To crush the man beneath the thinb he made.
Houses, machines, and lands — all, all are yours;
And us you do not need. When we ask work
Ye sdake your heads. Homes? — Ye .vict us. Bread? —

"Here, officer, this fellow's begging. Jail's
the place for him!" After the stripes, what next?
Poison! — I took it! — Now you say 'twas sin
To take this life which troubled you lo much.
Sin to escale insult, starvation, brands
Of felony, inflicted for the crime
Of asking food! Ye hypocrites! Within
Your secret hearts the sin is that I failed!
Because I failed ye judge me to the stripes.
And the hard tail denied when I was free.
So be it. But beware! — a Prison cell,s
An evil bed to grow morality!
Black swamps breed black miasms; sickly soils
Yield poison fruit; snakes warmed to life will sting.

This time I was content to go alone;
Perchance the next I shall not be so kind.

Philadelphia, September 1894

Germinal

(The last word of Angiolillo)

Germinal! — The Field of Mars is plowing,
And hard the steel that cuts, and hot the breath
Of the great Oxen, straining flanks and bowing
Beneath his goad, who guides the share of Death.

Germinal! — The Dragon's teeth are sowing,
And stern and white the sower flings the seed
He shall not gather, though full swift the growing;
Straight down Death's furrow treads, and does not
heed.

Germinal! — The Helmet Heads are springing
Far up the Field of Mars in gleaming files;
With wild war notes the bursting earth is ringing.

Within his grave the sower sleeps, and smiles.

London, October 1897

Emile Zola's novel *Germinal* (1885) was an important influence on anarchists in the nineteenth century. Michele Angiolillo was a young Italian anarchist who, as a protest against the Spanish government's practice of torturing its political opponents' shot and killed Spain's Prime Minister in August 1897.

Santa Agueda

(Where the torturer Canovas breathed his last.)

Santa Agueda, thou that wast accursed
With presence of a demon dressed in Man,
Blessed art thou, for on thy stones there ran
The vampire blood from bitter torture nursed;
Along thy streets there flashed the lightning-burst,
“Delivered!” flaming on from eye to eye,
Though lips said “killed,” and all thy gateways
hearsed
In lying black, made mourning mockery.
Blessed art thou! From thee went forth the cry,
“Vengeance yet loves, Renunciation hates,
And justice smites: *the torturer shall die;*”
Across his path the steel-nerved slayer waits
“And both shall burn together,” – one in light
Of unconsuming hell and reddened night;
And one with feet on hell and brow dawn-rayed, *pure
white.*

Philadelphia, August, 1898.

The Road Builders

(“Who built the beautiful roads?” queried a friend of the present order, as we walked one day along the macadamized driveway of Fairmount Park.)

I saw them toiling in the blistering sun,
Their dull, dark faces leaning toward the stone, Their knotted fingers grasping
the rude tools,
Their rounded shoulders narrowing in their chest,
The sweat dro’s dripping in great painful beads.
I saw one fall, his forehead on the rock,
The helpless hand still cluthcing at the spade,
The slack mouth full of earth.

And he was dead.
His comrades getnly turned his face, until
The fierce sun glittered hard upon his eyes,
Wide open, staring at the cruel sky.
The blood yet ran upon the jagged stone;
But it was ended. He was quite, quite dead:
Driven to death beneath the burning sun,
Driven to death upon the road he built.

He was no “hero”, he; a poor, black man,
Taking “the will of God” and asking naught;
Think of him thus, when next your horse’s feet
Strike out the flint spark from the gleaming road;
Think that for this, this common thing, The Road,
A human creature died; ‘tis a blood gift,
To an o’erreaching world that does not thank.
Ignorant, mean and soulless was he? Well —
Still human; and you drive upon his corpse.

Philadelphia, 24 July 1900

Ave Et Vale

Comrades, what matter the watch-night tells
That a New Year comes or goes?
What to us are the crashing bells
That clang out the Century's close?

What to us is the gala dress?
The whirl of the dancing feet?
The glitter and blare in the laughing press,
And din of the merry street?

Do we not know that our brothers die
In the cold and the dark tonight?
Shelterless faces turned toward the sky
Will not see the New Year's light?

Wandering children, lonely, lost,
Drift away on the human sea,
While the price of their lives in a glass is tossed
And drunk in a revelry!

Ah, know we not in their feasting halls
Where the loud laugh echoes again,
That brick and stone in the mortared walls
Are bones of murdered men?

Slowly murdered! By day and day,
The beauty and strength are reft,
Till the Man is sapped and sucked away,
And a Human Rind is left!

A Human Rind, with old, thin hair,
And old thin voice to pray
For alms in the bitter winter air —
A knife at his heart always.

And the pure in heart are impure in flesh
For the cost of a little food:
Lo, when the Gleaner of Time shall thresh,
Let these be accounted good.

For these are they who in bitter blame
Eat the bread whose salt is sin;
Whose bosoms are burned with the scarlet shame,
Till their hearts are seared within.

The cowardly jests of a hundred years
Will be thrown where they pass tonight,
Too callous for hate, and too dry for tears,
The saddest of human blight.

Do we forget them, these broken ones,
That our watch tonight is set?
Nay, we smile in the face of the year that comes
Because we do not forget.

We do not forget the tramp on the track,
Thrust out in the wind-swept waste,
The curses of Man upon his back,
And the curse of God in his face.

The stare in the eyes of the buried man
Face down in the fallen mine;
The despair of the child whose bare feet ran
To tread out the rich man's wine;

The solemn light in the dying gaze
Of the babe at the empty breast,
The wax accusation, the somber glaze
Of its frozen and rigid rest;

They are all in the smile that we turn to the east
To welcome the Century's dawn;
They are all in our greeting to Night's high priest,
As we bid the Old Year begone.

Begone and have done, and go down and be dead
Deep drowned in your sea of tears!
We smile as you die, for we wait the red
Morn-gleam of a hundred-years

That shall see the end of the age-old wrong —
The reapers that have not sown —
The reapers of men with their sickles strong
Who gather, but have not strown.

For the earth shall be his and the fruits thereof
And to him the corn and wine,
Who labors the hills with an even love
And knows not "thine and mine.

And the silk shall be to the hand that weaves.
The pearl to him who dives,
The home to the builder; and all life's sheaves
To the builder of human lives.

And none go blind that another see.
Or die that another live;
And none insult with a charity
That is not theirs to give.

For each of his plenty shall freely share
And take at another's hand:
Equals breathing the Common Air
And toiling the Common Land.

A dream? A vision? Aye, what you will;
Let it be to you as it seems:
Of this Nightmare Real we have our fill;
Tonight is for "pleasant dreams."

Dreams that shall waken the hope that sleeps
And knock at each torpid Heart
Till it beat drum taps, and the blood that creeps
Mith a lion's spring upstart!

For who are we to be bound and drowned
In this river of human blood?
Who are we to lie in a swoon,
Half sunk in the river mud?

Are we not they who delve and blast
And hammer and build and burn/
Without us not a nail made fast!
Not a wheel in the world should turn!

Must we, the Giant, await the grace
That is dealt by the puny hand
Of him who sits in the feasting place,
While we, his Blind Jest, stand

Between the pillars? Nay, not so:
Aye, if such things were true,
Better were Ga;a again, to show
What the giant's rage may do!

Bet yet not this: it were wiser far
To enter the feasting hall
And say to the Masters, "These things are
Not for you alone, but all."

And this shall be in the Century
that opes on our efes tonight;
So here's to the struggle, if it must be,
And to him who fights the fight.

And here's to the dauntless, jubilant throat
That loud to its Comrade sings,
Till over the earth shrills the mustering note,
And the World Strike's signal rings.

Philadelphia, 1st January 1901

Marsh-Bloom

To Gaetano Bresci

Requiem, requiem, requiem,
Blood-red blossom of poison stem
Broken for Man,
Swamp-sunk leafage and dungeon-bloom,
Seeded bearer of royal doom,
What now is the ban?

What to thee is the island grave?
With desert wind and desolate wave
Will they silence Death?
Can they weight thee now with the heaviest stone?
Can they lay aught on thee with "Be alone,"
That hast conquered breath?

Lo, "it is finished" — a man for a king!
Mark you well who have done this thing:
The flower has roots;
Bitter and rank grow the things of the sea;
Ye shall know what sap ran thick in the tree
When ye pluck its fruits.

Requiem, requiem, requiem,
Sleep on, sleep on, accused of them
Who work our pain;
A wild Marsh-bloom shall blow again
From a buried root in the slime of men,
On the day of the Great Red Rain.

Philadelphia, July 1901

Italian anarchist Gaetano Bresci assassinated King Umberto in 1900

“Light Upon Waldheim”

(The figure on the monument over the grave of the Chicago martyrs in Waldheim Cemetery is a warrior woman, dropping with her left hand a crown upon the forehead of a fallen man just past his agony, and with her right drawing a dagger from her bosom.)

Light upon Waldheim! The earth is gray;
A bitter wind is driving from the north;
The stone is cold, and strange cold whispers say;
“What do ye here with Death? Go forth! Go forth!”

Is this thy word, o Mother, with stern eyes,
Crowning thy dead with stone-caressing touch?
May we not weep o’er him that martyred lies,
Slain in our name, for that he loved us much?

May we not linger till the day is broad?
Nay, none are stirring in this stinging dawn —
None but poor wretches that make no moan to
God:

What use are these, O thou with dagger drawn?

“Go forth, go forth! Stang not to weep for these,
Till, weakened with your weeping, like the snow
Ye melt, dissolving in a coward peace!”
Light upon Waldheim! Brother, let us go!

London, October 1897

Written — in — Red

*To Our Living Dead
in Mexico's Struggle*

Written in red their protest stands,
For the gods of the World to see;
On the dooming wall their bodiless hands
have blazoned "Upharsin," and flaring brands
Illumine the message: "Seize the lands!
Open the prisons and make men free!"
Flame out the living words of the dead
Written — in — red.

gods of the World! Their mouths are dumb!
Your guns have spoken and they are dust.
But the shrouded Living, whose hearts were numb,
have felt the beat of a wakening drum
Within them sounding—the Dead men's tongue —
Calling: "Smite off the ancient rust!"
Have beheld "Resurrexit," the word of the Dead,
Written — in — red.

Bear it aloft, O roaring, flame!
Skyward aloft, where all may see.
Slaves of the World! Our cause is the same;
One is the immemorial shame;
One is the struggle, and in One name —
Manhood — we battle to set men free.
"Uncurse us the Land!" burn the words of the
Dead,
Written — in — red.

Voltairine deCleyre's last poem.

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Voltairine de Cleyre
Collected Poems

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