

The RYERSON  
POETRY  
CHAP-BOOKS



Sonnets for  
Youth

By  
FRANK OLIVER CALL

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FRANK OLIVER CALL, Professor of Modern Languages, University of Bishop's College, Lennoxville, P.Q., is the author of *In a Belgian Garden* (1916), *Acanthus and Wild Grape* (1924), *Blue Homespun* (1924), *The Spell of French Canada* (1926), *The Spell of Acadia* (1930) and others.

*The Ryerson Poetry*  
*Chapbooks*

Sonnets for Youth

*By Frank Oliver Call*

CREDO

WE WALKED together down a village street  
Of straggling white-washed houses. Gray and old  
The church tower rose against the copper gold  
Of a late autumn sunset. Beat on beat  
Across the darkening sky the angelus rolled  
Three strokes—Youth, Life, and Death. Austere, complete,  
The credo of the bells in triumph tolled  
Like a voice mocking,—Youth and Love are fleet.  
In the cold stillness as the bell's voice died,  
Triumphant, mocking still, your eyes were turned  
To mine for a brief moment. Something cried  
From that black silence, then a new star burned  
Far in the west and warmed the autumn chill,  
Like fires of home beyond the darkening hill.

## WILD SWAN

THE POOL lay black within the silent wood,  
Like polished onyx in an inlaid frame  
Of silver birches, mountain ash like flame,  
And dark green spruces. Strangely mute you stood,  
Slender and youthful, the swift-coursing blood  
Tinging your cheeks. Across the dark pool's breast  
A wild swan glided from its hidden nest  
And floated in the shadows. From that flood  
Of infinite beauty, like a soul parched and dry,  
I drank—woods mirrored in the pool, wild swan,  
And youth's brave, eager turning to the dawn  
Of beckoning life. Then came a startled cry  
Of sudden wonder from your lips, as on  
White flashing wings the swan rose to the sky.

## WHITE HYACINTH

WE PUT the dog-earned lesson-book away,  
Pondering the classic story. Pale and dead  
Before our eyes young Hyacinthus lay  
Upon the Spartan shore. From stains of red  
Beside the blue Ægean, star on star,  
White hyacinths sprang up to greet the dawn,  
Each leaf a cry of pain, re-echoing far  
A voice that mourned for beauty past and gone.  
You paused a moment as you left the room,  
Bending a slender form above a bowl  
Of white and blue where hyacinths were abloom.  
Once more the far Ægean seemed to roll  
On flower-clad shores, but brought no cry of pain,  
For Hyacinthus breathed in life again.

## OPTIMIST

YOU WATCH, your dark eyes wide in youthful wonder,  
Life's tragic comedy, and ponder why  
The lives and loves of men are torn asunder,  
And beauty only dawns to fade and die.  
For you the road is never steep or dreary  
That leads the tired wanderer to his rest;  
Old feet go journeying homeward slow and weary,  
But yours are set to climb the mountain's crest.  
Your smooth face fades: I see as in a glass,  
Weary and old and mumbling as they go,  
Faust, Omar Khayyam, Housman, Hardy pass.  
Then through the dark I see your young eyes glow,  
Reflecting all the glory yet to be,  
Like dawning stars above a storm-swept sea.

## AUTUMNAL

UPON the hills, the poplars, bending double,  
Become mad dancing partners of the wind;  
Down in the valley, fields of frost-browned stubble  
Grow white beneath the snow, and yellow and thinned,  
The dead leaves fall from boughs that creak and rattle  
To moulder on the frozen ground beneath;  
It is the clash and clang of the old battle  
Between the marshalled hosts of life and death.  
And through the storm that round us whirls and rushes,  
"Listen," I call—"a voice that stills the fear  
And fret of human hearts; a song that hushes  
Our age-old questionings." "I only hear,"  
Comes back your answer, "far-off chimes that ring  
The wild, mad music of eternal spring."

## PHILOSOPHY

WE FOLLOWED the trails of old philosophy,  
Worn trails half buried beneath ancient dust,  
We threaded paths of new psychology—  
Why men and women hate and love and lust.  
I, with the doggedness of middle age,  
Upheld the tottering fane of beauty and truth  
Where my old gods lay hidden. You, the sage  
Of twenty years, the golden scorn of youth  
Poured forth upon old creeds. At last you said,  
“They bring us no adventure, no high quest.”  
Each word was like a burning torch that shed  
Light in the dark. I saw youth climb the crest  
Of toppling crags, and strong in love and faith,  
Go blithely singing down the ways of death.

## A ROMAN BOWL

YOU LIFTED from its shelf a Roman bowl  
And held it to the firelight. “Strange,” you said,  
“The hands that formed it twenty centuries dead,  
And still the work lives on. Is life the whole,  
Or is it but a slowly-opening door?”  
Youth looked on life with clear, unflinching eyes  
And flung the eternal challenge to the skies  
That made no answer. Then you turned once more  
Towards the fragile bowl of pale, green glass  
To which the buried years had lent those gleams  
Of opalescent light—a craftsman’s dreams  
Of beauty after ages come to pass.  
The firelight cast a halo round your head,  
The bowl gleamed brighter, purple, gold and red.

## SCEPTIC

### I

"IS THERE a God that rules this tiny world,  
Or cares what men may do with their little lives?"  
The challenge of the ages thus you hurled  
At truth's dark door. An eagerness that strives  
To plumb the ultimate deep spoke in each word.  
"We stumble down the ways where others fell,  
Mumbling old prayers and think a god has heard  
If we, by chance, find heaven instead of hell.  
And war lives on while youth grows stark and cold,  
Or maimed and broken crawls away to die,  
Amid the praises of the wise and old—  
The chosen of a god that sits on high,  
Watching the hideous pageant as it creeps  
Down the great chasm where the darkness sleeps."

### II

Youth does not change though ages pass away;  
A threadbare creed is but its broken toy.  
Upon the table where your school-books lay  
Stood the white statue of a Grecian boy  
Whose body, scarcely lovelier than your own,  
Summoned its strength to hurl a spear afar,  
While you with javelin words assailed the throne  
Of a dead god upon a burnt-out star.  
The sunlight floated through the silent room  
Tense and almost tangible; its beams  
Hung golden chains between that perfect bloom  
Of ancient beauty and youth's burning dreams;  
You held the young Greek warrior in the light.  
"Beauty is truth," you murmured, "Keats was right."

## FAITH

**A**WAYSIDE shrine where three gaunt human forms,  
Broken and bleeding on three crosses sung,  
Rose from the drifted snow. The western storm's  
Black veil was rent in twain, and boldly flung  
Across white level fields, a long trail glowed  
Crimson and gold beneath the wintry sky;  
A habitant came down the snow-bound road;  
He bowed before the calvary and passed by.  
From that stark picture of the dying Christ  
I looked to where the warm red sunset burned;  
But youth beside me, brave to keep the tryst  
Even with death and darkness, slowly turned  
Away from friendly fires of western skies  
And faced the dark to see the new dawn rise.

## FROZEN GARDEN

**H**ER GARDEN stands today as once it stood  
Frozen in memory within her brain;—  
Green terraces invaded by a flood  
Of drifted scilla stars like sapphire rain,  
Frail hyacinths as blue as southern seas,  
Bold perfumes smiting like a trumpet's blare,  
White icy trilliums beneath dark trees,  
A static bird song hanging in the air.  
Frozen and deathly still as flowers of glass  
Red passionate tulips stand, as on that day  
She lifted sorrowing eyes to see him pass,  
And heard the sound of marching die away;  
Only one word, one voice, one quickening breath  
Can wake this garden from its dream of death.



## IMMORTAL

THOUGH now your strong young body, where our eyes  
Once looked on beauty for a fleeting hour,  
Upon some far-off field forsaken lies,  
Vanquished and beaten down beneath the power  
Of conquering Death, and though in vain we seek  
Across the ultimate dark to grasp your hand,  
Or touch your silent lips and pallid cheek,  
Still Faith's embattled towers firmly stand.  
Yes, let Death have his hour to work his will,  
And change your strong lithe body into mould,  
The breath you breathed will somewhere linger still,  
The eternal universe your clay enfold;  
For Life is victor over mould and rust,  
And Love at least as strong a thing as dust.

## PRAYER

SAVE ME from easy beauty, god that watches  
Over the artist who, with groping hand,  
Reaches out into the void and snatches  
Some shred of loveliness—a gleaming brand  
Plucked from the dark. Away from flower-starred meadows  
And sunlit waters let me turn my eyes,  
To seek the austere beauty of blue shadows  
Drifting across the red of sunset skies.

Let me find beauty in bare boughs that shiver  
On wind-swept hilltops where no bird may hide,  
In hard green ice beside a silent river  
With hungry waters gnawing at its side,  
Till strong as love of life shall grow my faith  
That burning beauty lights the face of Death.

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*Lorne Pierce—Editor*

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