

The RYERSON
P O E T R Y
C H A P - B O O K S



The Immigrants

By

MARIE ZIBETH COLMAN

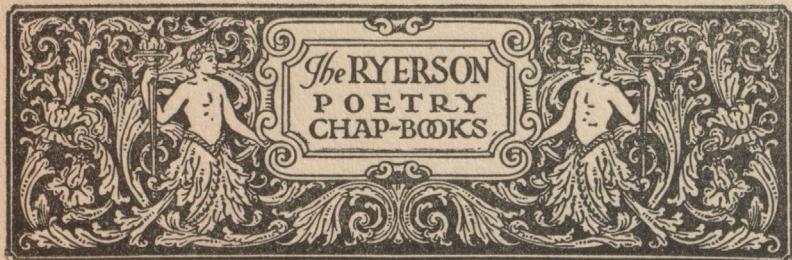
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Of these poems "Jehovah Shalom" was published in the *Canadian Bookman*, and "Tearless" was the 1929 winner of the MacDougall Prize.

Mary Elizabeth Colman was born in Victoria, B.C., of mingled English and French descent. She received her education at the Central Collegiate, Winnipeg, Man.; at the College de Rolle, Switzerland, and at the University of British Columbia. At present she is a teacher in the Vancouver schools, and a contributor of short stories, poems and articles to various periodicals. Her work, whether in fiction or in poetry, is marked throughout by an alert and broad sympathy, especially towards childhood, and towards those "strangers within our gates," of which this chap-book mainly treats.

—A. Ermatinger Fraser



To
All Canadians by choice,
and to the dearest of them all:
MY MOTHER

The Immigrants

By Marie Zibeth Colman



PIONEER HOME

O FRIENDLY land, where thy deep bosom swells
To meet the sea's embrace I build my home.

The coursing blood that throbs with rhythmic beat
Attuned to this hoarse wind and champing sea
Is English blood, and I am England's son—
But thou, fair land, art mine by choice, my bride;
Thy generous breast shall suckle all my sons;
And in thine arms at length I'll close my eyes,
Content to know my dust a part of thine.

O glorious land, where upflung hills have plucked
The evening star from heaven I build my home.

JEHOVAH SHALOM*

THE opal plumes of smoke from shop and mill
Are tinged with gold upon the rim of heaven;
The fecund smell from my small plot of earth
Speaks of returning spring. Where is my spade?
I must prepare the ground for Lena's peas
And lettuces. Hail, Mother Earth, to thee,
Thou fertile nurse! Bless now thy children's toil.
How still the air—there is no sound to break
The pregnant hush—I am oppressed with fear,
For I have lived this hour before . . .
A tramping in the streets—the soldiery!
Lena! Ivan! . . . 'Tis naught, nay, wife, 'tis naught . . .
The night shift going to the mill, canst hear
Them laugh and talk? 'Tis naught . . . see, I laugh too . . .
But for an instant I was far away;
Old terrors clutched at me with deathly hands . . .
Sing to me, wife, a song of this new land,
A merry song that dances on the lips,
For I would live new hours, forget the old . . .
Lena forgets. Only sometimes I see
A flame in her when she cuts bread and meat
Slice upon slice, and gives the children more
Than even their young bellies would demand,
And once I saw her clutch Ivan and hold
The startled lad to her with arms of steel
When a Salvation Army bugle call
Shattered the Sabbath calm . . .
This land is good,
It has fed me and mine, and here I find
Content—and peace—Ah, God! to fear no more,
To come and go, to sleep and wake, to laugh
(Dear God, to laugh, and hear my children laugh)
In all security!

Oh, blessed land,
Where children eat their fill and sleep in peace;
Twice blessed land where men may live as men,
Thrice blessed land where fearless laughter dwells!

Adonoy!† in thy mercy now erase
The tortured years—let me begin anew!

*The Lord give Peace.

†The spoken form of "Jaweh," to the Hebrew a word too sacred for utterance.

FUBUKI*

THEY laugh! they make a mock of me
Because I cannot speak their barbarous tongue—
My lips are used to gentler sounds.
The ancient language of my mother land
Is musical; the words are drops
Of summer rain upon a lily pool.
They laugh at me! Their ancestors
Were painted, shrieking savages when mine
Wrote verses to an opening bud
And carved love lyrics on an ivory fan!

I have found bread here, and to spare;
Who drew my coat about my hungry middle
As surely as the sun went down,
And tossed the cold night through, to wake again
And greet another hungry day.
Nor did aught ever stand 'twixt me and death
Save only that scant bowl of rice
That I might earn, or beg before the night
But friendly eyes met mine and smiled;
Life sparkled in the cup, a heady wine.

Above these towering, cloud-wreathed peaks
Is spread a leaden sky that melts away
Into a leaden foam-wracked sea;
The biting wind has torn away to death
The last remaining leaves, and now
The naked trees are cowering 'neath his lash.
Unfriendly faces hedge me in;
Cold looks and mocking stares, derisive taunts
And jeers—they scourge my frozen heart
And all my love for this new land is ice.

Oh Canada! Thou givest bread
With lavish hand—my body walks erect,
Well fed and sleek, for labour apt—
But my soul is a mendicant, kneeling for alms;
My heart is a leaf snatched by the wind,
Untimely done to death, and thou the tree.
But what is a leaf? Or why should the sound
Of a beggar's cry clutch at the heart and blanch
The cheek?

Oh, blind! The beggar's hands
Are heavy with the gifts he bears for thee!

*Literally, "The Snowstorm"; figuratively, the facing of adverse circumstances courageously, with love of home in the heart.

ALIEN

I AM afraid. This land is strange to me,
So new, so fierce, so large, with noisy folk
Who speak with strange, harsh tongue, and move so fast
In unexpected ways that my head whirls,
So I can only stand and gaze at them
In a bewildered maze—as stared our cow
The day we sold her on the market place.
How long ago that was . . . how far away . . .
Dear hills of home, why did I leave your arms?
How can I love this vast, this clamorous land
Whose noisy people hold me in contempt?
Oh, hills of home, in all this clattering haste
My feet are weary for your cool brown soil,
My ears athirst to hear your gentle streams . . .
Ah, would to God I were at home again!



LAVRAN'S WIFE

I FEAR night least . . .
When all the raucous voices of the day
Retreat before the cohorts of the stars—
When all the strangeness of this land is hid,
And every landmark (raw and newly set)
Is blotted out by friendly darkness, old
As time—
 When that old kindly mistress, sleep,
Has gathered to her bosom all my sons,
Wiping from each young face the toil and fret,
The eager commerce of the day, and I,
The lamp held high and shaded by my hand,
Go softly in to draw their blankets up—
When cold as snow I creep into the bed
And Lavran's arms are a warm nest again—
When this great city lies forgotten, drowned
In deep forgetfulness—
 Then I am glad.
I take against the coming clamorous day
A firmer hold on love—lest all too soon
My wearied hands let fall the precious grail . . .
Ah yes, I fear night least.

TEARLESS

I WEEP no more. Why should I weep?
This house is his, these fertile fields that stretch
In molten glory to the west;
I wear a silken dress, a hat and shoes
On Sunday morning to the church . . .
Last night when there were none but friendly stars
To see my unbound hair, barefoot
I stole away to feel the honest coolth
Of soil beneath my tired feet.
A piping wind sang canticles of home
And all the earth lay still to hear . . .
The pool is deep beyond the meadow gate.

I weep no more—the blazing sun
That drinks up every pool—save only one—
Hath ravished me of all my tears.
Dimly I see my children come and go,
They are no longer mine. They live
Remote as though a sea divided us;
And when I speak the gentle words
Of my loved motherland they laugh at me
And answer with a rush of words
Of this new tongue that I can never learn—
I am bereft—but all my babes
Sleep sound and safe beneath the meadow pool.

I weep no more. I have folded my tears
With my wedding gown, and none but the stars know where.
For love is false, and love is dead,
And this new land has stolen my man from me.
When we were poor he kissed my breast
As hand in hand we came to build our home
In faith of this new land where none
Need hunger any more—

My love was lured
By wanton fields away from me;
But I shall wear my wedding dress to-night
And go to darkness as a bride—
And he shall kiss my breast in the meadow pool.

BEWILDERMENT

WHEN all the cherry blossoms fell
Like perfumed snow upon the grass,
Barefoot among the hills
I watched our herd of goats.
I carried little bleating kids
And drank their mothers' creamy milk,
I shared their bed upon the golden straw,
As free and wild as they.
And, oh! 'twas heavenly quiet there; I heard
No sound at all save lilt of brook or bird.

And now the first chill flakes of snow,
Like frozen cherry blossoms, fall
Upon a noisy street . . .
And I must sit in school
All day, with shoes upon my feet;
I must not walk about the room,
Nor speak at all but when I'm spoken to.
And thus all children do.
It is the custom here, in this new land,
And far too strange a thing to understand.



ROSITA

TEACHER, please,
Rosita comes no more
To school. She keel himself
Last night. Above her fader store
She keel her with a gun.

She love dat Pedro: say
She want to marry heem;
Her fader say, mebbe, some day,
But now she ees too young.

So now she lie in bed
In 'ospital. She say
Nex' time for sure she keel her dead
If no geeve her dat boy.

And so her fader say,
"All ri', you take dat boy
An' only say you weel not die."
So now Rosita smile.

* * * *

Ticher, please,
Rosita say to geeve
To you her kind regar'.
She's very happy where she leeve;
She's marry now one year.

Her man he's work at night
And make good money, too.
Rosita's love dat boy all right,
And Pedro he love her.

Rosita, now she's fat
An' laughing all de time;
She's live in pretty little flat
An' keep it very clean.

She's got one baby girl
So leetle an' so pink!
So sof' and warm weeth de black curl
Like feathers on hee's head.

An' when Rosita look
Upon dat babe an' smile
She's like Madonna in de book
Of saints that's read in church.

❖ ❖ ❖

KAZUKO SINGS

GENTLE child of an alien race,
What strange words are these,
And whence this yearning melody
You sing?
The music pours from your brown young throat
Like the cry of a mateless lark
That pleads at the very throne of God.

Little one, how can you know
Such depths of loneliness?
What dim remembrances
Of bluer skies and rosier dawns
Haunt you in this land of mist,
Painting upon your childish face
That age-old smile of grief?

Has all the loneliness and grief
Of every aching heart
That in far lands has longed for home,
Like crystal beads ablaze,
Been strung, a rosary of tears
For your young soul to wear,
O wistful daughter of the Sun?



SLAVES

YE DO not dream, who only know
The surface rhythm of speeding days—
Their little loss and lesser gain—
Of life that hidden lies, ablaze,
With crimson splendour and with pain
In common folk who come and go
All meek and dumb, in common ways.

Oh, we are slaves, for that we see,
But ye—ye blind—perforce go free.

Yea, slaves are we, forever bound
To suffer for their pain, and moan
For all their woe—cry it abroad
Until it reach the very throne
And heart of an all-pitying God—
Yea, slaves of sorrow are we crowned—
Of common folk who grieve alone.

For ever slaves because we see—
Yet I would not, if I might, go free.

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