

The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS



Litany Before the
Dawn of Fire

By

ERNEST FEWSTER

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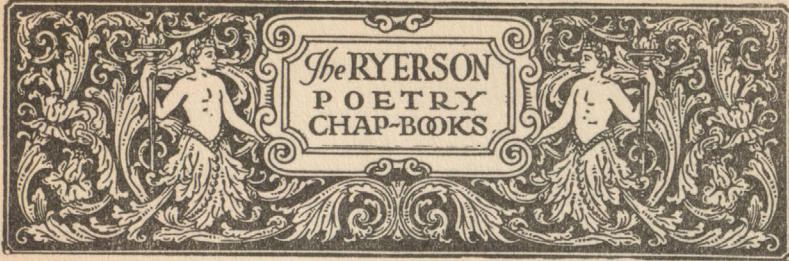
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BORN in Berks, England, Dr. Fewster came to Canada in 1887. He studied medicine in Chicago and Kansas before returning to Vancouver where he now lives. He is President of the Vancouver Poetry Society. Among his previous books of prose and poetry are *My Garden Dreams*, *White Desire* and *The Immortal Dweller*.

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Litany Before the Dawn of Fire

By Ernest Fewster

I

O HIDDEN DARK! The dawn is red with fire!
 There blows a warrior wind.
 I hear the great stars clash;
 They buffet me, they winnow through my soul.
 I fear, O Hidden Dark, I fear!
 The pillars of a broken æon crash;
 While thunders shake the nations, lightnings flash;
 The pale-faced multitudes
 Writhe and sink in fiery billows;
 The whole world staggers into flame,
 Her cities melt and desolations strew her plain,
 And on her winds are ashes and the tears of men.
 O Hidden Dark, foreshorten thy dread day,
 Lest men should perish from earth's face.
 Put out the smoking pits, thy winds recall,
 Close thou earth's scars, redeem her from her wars
 Lay thou thy hands of healing on man's many wounds,
 Give back to him his soul, new-dewed with love,
 That he may sin no more!

II

O Unknown Truth! My door is flung ajar
And through its space I see
Thy servant, dark like Death and crowned with brows of flame,
With dreadful knowledge in his eyes,
With thunders for his cloke, the lightning-flash for zone.
And yet his hands are fine.
But in the chalice that he holds aloft
Is thick and bitter wine.
It brimmeth o'er—
The wine is blood and night.

Blood and black night—
They foam upon the world
And men are broken with affright.
For pain is in that cup,
Darkness, judgment and thy consuming fire,
Shoutings of nations and relentless ire,
And gouting Death—
Death to run riot through the ranks of men.
Turn back thy wrath again!
Recall thy servant, O thou Unknown Truth, and give
A space for man to live in peace
Lest he should perish from before thy face.

III

O Holy Light! I sing thy wisdom that would wreck a world—
Blow out an age with all its vast accomplishments,
That man might grow to greater hunger for thy truth,
Might thirst with greater thirst for thy bright righteousness.
So I may see old orders pass,
Old signs decay with scarce a pang,
Knowing such splendid poverty
Shall be made rich with thee.

IV

O thou Unchanging One!
 Though some men cry that truth hath fled,
 That peace with ancient beauty passes hence,
 Yet do I sing, for I perceive
 Thou changest not.
 That promise of a lovelier morning waits,
 Her silver veil upon the hills,
 Her dawn flung low across the skies—
 That with its light shall come
 New knowledge to mankind,
 A new conception of the way of life,
 New beauty in the flesh,
 When thy unchanging love shall overthrow man's ignorance.
 For thou who changest not shalt give
 New revelations of thyself,
 Take on new garments for thy splendour.
 Now though wild shadows break upon the world
 I sing, knowing that all mankind is safe,
 Though they may fear the passing of thy Feet,
 Thou, the Unchanging One,
 The beauty and the heart of love!

V

O Holy One! Perchance I may not see thy promised day
 With eyes of flesh. Yet I behold the skies
 Resplendent with far dawn, brimmed with music,
 Filled to the stars with light.
 Though flame may burn the night and men cry out
 The ages are undone, the world dissolves
 And our attainments pass,
 Yet must I sing, knowing that to have lived
 Is more than all attainments; that to love
 Is more than to have lived, aye, more than years and worlds.
 For love hath all eternity in which to live,
 And all Infinity in which to build its splendid purposes.

SONGS OF THE WARRIOR

I

O HOLY ONE, the world says I have sinned!
I laugh, for well I know 'tis better to have sinned
Than not to know temptation.
I fought great fights and won far victories.
Yet many a fight I lost or fought in vain.
I sorrow not; it may chance I am glad.
At least I have been silent of my pain
For pride of will and thee.
For I am proud with an immortal pride,
Knowing that I am greater in defeat
Than those who never fought.
I spoke great thoughts, taught high ideals
Of love, of beauty, truth and fighting strength,
I proudly lived—not for attainment was I proud,
But only for thy immanence.
For when victorious or when most defeated I rejoiced,
Remembering thy white comradeship.

II

O Glorious One! How good a thing it is to live and grow,
To hold the privilege of seeking thee;
To help inweave the fabric of the universe with thee;
To be forever growing into beauty, truth and love.
To fight with thee, aye, at times to fight against thee,
And yet if need arise to suffer and to bleed for thee,
To carry thy great word with sword or heart,
To fail as well as conquer, yet to struggle on,
To spend life's wealth or meet death's rage for thee.

III

O Perfect One! My heart is glad it is not perfected,
And that my friends are frail of thy perfection.
For it doth suit my being best;
These imperfections grant me such great heights to climb.
And now I think on them, it seems
My sins were good, aye, strong and fine because
Through them I grew to love my fellow men:
Because of them I touch men's hearts with living hands,
And when men failed and wept, then have I comforted
And I was glad so many failures marked my ways.
Again I sang with them for their brave victories—
I have been proudly victor and rejoiced.
So I am glad for failure as for victory,
For virtue and for sin. I would not have it otherwise.
My soul has grown by all.
Through these things I have learned to help my fellow man,
And through them found the sweet and secret chamber of thy
love.

IV

O Glorious One! I worship thee, I sing for praise of thee,
Though day has seen my failures, night my tears.
Yet I rejoice
For I am proud of soul and high of heart.
Heaven shakes alway to man's triumphant feet
And mine are with that host.
Great banners burn adown eternity
And mine is proudly there.
For I am of thy people; I am proud with truth,
Superb with beauty, invincible with joy,
For thou hast kissed me
And my lips are sweet with thee.

HYMN BEFORE DAWN

I

I HUNGER for thee, glorious one, and dream
Of starry roads to splendor,
Swept by wings, not feet:
Of shining lands and hills beneath the dawn,
Sky-breathed and sowed with light where thou dost dwell.
Lo, dawn is resonant with thy great wings,
Day transillumed with brightness of thine eyes.
Now am I poor with that glad penury of soul
Which is forever poor for wealth of thee:
And yet my poverty is such a joy that I must sing,
How every dawn doth come with fresh surprise
Of some new need of thee.
How dark-browed night doth brood and wake
New hunger in my soul and day doth cry to thee for food.
I am athirst for thee—
My soul is parched for the water of thy truth:
O Holy Guest, come thou, a heavenly spring of righteousness,
Rise in my spirit's dusty field
That it shall bloom for thee.

II

O Holy One! the night is rich with prophecy!
I sing thy day to be!
Thy feet are sounding on the distant hills,
I hear the music of them in my heart;
The dawn is far but filled with light for man.
My spirit wings have borne me toward that day.
Aye, they have beaten through the surf of that new light,
And far within its dawn I glimpsed
The splendor of thy coming gifts for man—
Profounder deeps of joy
Than last night's prayers had asked,
More soaring heights to win
Than yesterday's great dreams had dreamed,
Ideals of breathless beauty that unveiled
From thy abiding places in eternity.

III

O Glorious One! How proud a thing it is to be a man;
To walk the earth, to suffer and to overcome;
To feel the living heart of all the universe
Thrilling within my soul, beating within my pulse;
To be compelled to strive for thy vast kingdom
Within me and without.
To know divine unrest and heavenly hunger,
To be thy deathless heir;
To know—O strange inheritance—
That though forever I may grow like thee,
And more and more thy presence realize,
Yet never shall I know myself complete,
Behold thy unveiled face or comprehend
In all thy fullness thy most glorious self.
Yet thou dost give enough to keep me eager, sweet:
For often in swift vision or a dream
Ere night is lost in dawn, half drowsing, I perceive
Between the dusk and day, thy glory, like a star,
One instant ere it vanish with the instant's gift;
And I awake content, to know
Thy holy light shining within my heart,
Thy glory in the sky-lands of my soul.

IV

I thirsted! On my lips there fell
One drop of thy rich blood;
And terrible it was and bitter to my taste.
Yet with it came thy wisdom: I perceived,
Beyond the darkness which had blotted out the light,
A better day was breaking, and I heard thy voice
Like to a glorious bird's
Singing within the surge of that Æonian dawn.
O glorious bird, like unto thee I sing:
Thy blood hath given new vision to my soul.
Now I behold, rising behind the thunder of the broken night,
A radiant form, whose shining wings
Shall bear to golden ends the spirit of mankind.

LITANY AT DAWN

I

O DIVINEST ONE,
I feel the dawn-wind shaken with new wings!
New voices sing new ecstasies of day!
I fear not that new day though many cry
Darkness hath swallowed us because, forsooth,
They tried to light eternity
With the guttering candle of their little creeds
And failed. Thou dost not fail!
I feel the darkness broken with those wings,
I hear new voices singing lovelier songs—
Songs of a resurrected earth, new truths,
New beauties, new hopes of thine for man,
And love's new wisdom for the training of mankind.

II

How may I sing thy splendor, O Divine one,—
Thy splendor that doth meet
Man's growing need with ever finer truth,
Filling his eyes with greater light,
And with a greater strength his heart;
Till like a bird that on some summer dawn
Finding within his dreams a golden song,
Doth sing that song with heaven-taught ecstasy:
So sings the holy bird within my heart
A golden song of dawn
Of light and beauty, love and strength,
Courage and new hope, joy and new desires,
Aye, new roads to travel through thy universe to thee.

III

O Mighty One, whose chariot of the sun
Sweeps up the waking sky and makes new day,
Pour need of thee into my soul
And in my heart awake the three-fold light!
I listen through the hush of later night and hear
A voice that calls, so sweet and clear
With revelation of the dawn—
So pure with beauty that my ravished ear
Cries to my still lips to rejoice;
Cries to my doubting mind that it's thy voice
Calling within the wilderness,
Thy word of hope for man and beast.
Then at that call my heart's desire doth wake
In holier hunger for thy comradeship.

IV

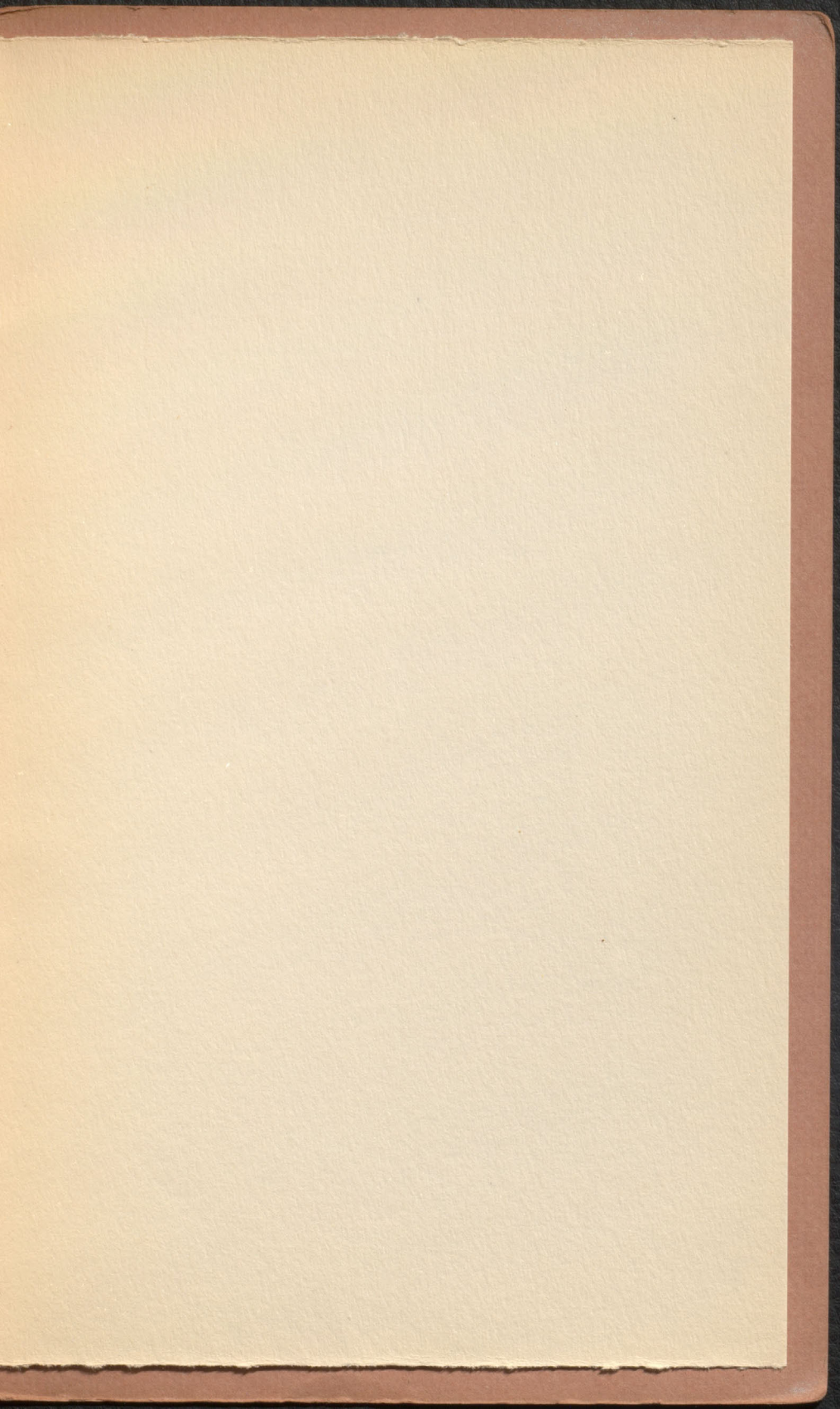
O Ever-present Light! Today I would not sing the past,
Nor yet the future, but the present and its joy—
Today so rich with promise and with hope;
So splendidly divine with prophecy—
Today with new glimpses of the truth,
New dreams of beauty, new ideals of love,
New strength of purpose, aye, new will
To climb the far eternal hills to thee.

DAWN

O HOLY LIGHT! Thou who art strength!
The morning yet is far, sullen with doom.
This is the hour of fear, the night of storm.
Man's ancient refuges are wrecked,
His mercies fled.
The ways of peace are hidden from his eyes.
Grant now the vision that he sense
Thy glorious dawn beyond the battle-smoke.
Mankind, aye, thy mankind
Is sorely sieged by hate's black hordes
Armoured by cruelty,
And sworded by bleak Death.
Bitter the night that now assaults his will,
Yet holds he fast.
Calmly, remembering thy holiness,
He fronts his foe unwavering.
Though weary from the desperate fight;
Lit by the flickering guns, he stands
A rock of safety to his friends,
While hate's mad legions rave about his feet.

O Holy One, thine own mankind is he!
I who have glimpsed the coming dawn,
And seen the victory
Shining beyond the battle-fog,
Would call to him the vision thou hast given.
O be thou proud of him! his will
So like thine own. Open his spirit-sight,
Grant him swift flashes of the coming joy.
Thine are the gates of triumph and of day
That ope with shout of jubilation and song!

O Holy One, here in the battle ruck
Ere comes thy light, stand thou by him,
Place on his shoulder thy strong hand,
And when the new day breaks across the world
The foe shall see his banners crush their hate
With triumph, and the splendid dawn shall shew
The star-gemmed crown of victory on his brow,
The God-lit heavens thundering hymns of joy.



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