

The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS



By Cobequid Bay

by

ALEXANDER LOUIS FRASER

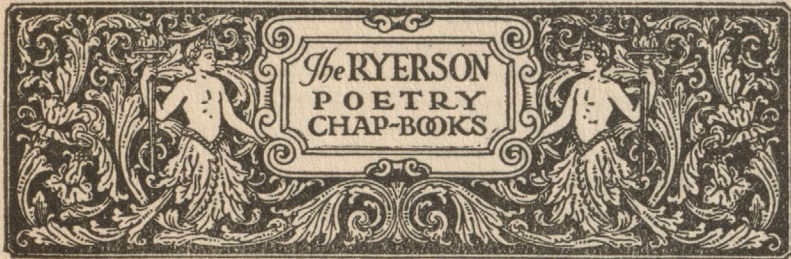
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By Cobequid Bay

By Alexander Louis Fraser



BY COBEQUID BAY, MASSTOWN, N.S.*

LIKE a forsaken theatre art thou,
 The lights extinguished and the actors gone,
 Where once Wit, Gaiety and Beauty shone.
 Twice fourscore years since their departing bow,
 Who to the Fleur-de-lis had kept their vow.
 From Plenty-laden field and velvet lawn,
 And garden of the dead all were withdrawn,
 As Fundy's tide swept round their Grief-draped prow.

Where once light-sandalled Happiness was glad,
 With Home and sylvan voices everywhere,
 Moved marshalled men, each visage passing sad,
 Leaving their humble cross-crowned house of prayer;
 And lingering by this strand to-day one hears
 A wail of sorrow down the time-washed years.

*Scene of part of the expulsion of the Acadians, 1755. The village takes its name from the site of the old French chapel.

CANADA

GREECE in Time's ancient portraiture can show
A brow of chasteness rare, while Rome is seen
Beside a spoil-heaped chariot, serene.
Assyria's sinewy arms discharge a bow,
Phoenicia's sails to alien moorings go,
Egypt against a pyramid will lean
And dream, while Palestine, her face aglow,
With light supernal, 'mong them sitteth queen.

And Canada, how will thy visage look
Far hence beside all these? Will soulful eyes
Thy brow adorn, and blameless hands the Book
Of books hold fast, and high-wrought mind despise
Mere Power and Pelf? Then in this ample West
The human family may reach its best.



IN DRYBURGH ABBEY

WHAT though fell Time leaves here and there a heap,
Where long ago stood a frequented fane;
As some exploit transforms a nameless plain,
Where Industry her waving fields did reap
Into a storied place where strong men weep,
So that dear mound within Saint Mary's aisle,
The fortune-favoured remnant of this pile
From dull forgetfulness this shrine shall keep.

And while the Eildon Hills their brows make bare,
And his loved Tweed its plaintive lay is singing;
While on this altar-site men breathe a prayer,
Or to these stones their hearts like vines are clinging;
Though its own voices have been silent long,
To God this roofless fane shall still belong.



THE WILLOW TREE, HALIFAX

ONCE 'mong a brotherhood of trees I stood,
And flocks in summer heat sought out my shade,
While in my arms birds hatched their little brood,
And round me children played.

But when the city past me pushed its way,
And left me like a sentinel alone,
The joys of country life the livelong day
To me were all unknown.

The robber years have spoiled me as they passed,
And of my sightly tresses I am shorn,
Till like a pensioned guard I stand—the last
Of a regime, forlorn.

Sometimes I speak to travellers of old trees
That by a long-forsaken doorway grew;
Or listening ears are wrought to ecstasies
By secrets no one knew.

I hear kind things as men pass up and down;
Last night two lingered, and this made me start:
"This tree is now the centre of the town,
And in the people's heart."



ANNIVERSARIES

FROM Now to Then my way I make
O'er Fancy's bridge, for thy sweet sake,
And see, with bosom heaving,
The place we met, the day we wed,
And where in life our tears were shed
Of deepest joy—or grieving.

It may be far from shore to shore,
Thick mists upon Time's piers may lower—
Oblivion's waves be tossing;
But Memory daily will repair
The spans that lie twixt Here and There,
And aid our feet when crossing.



AN ECHO

HE DEEMED it dead,—the sound of that which flew
From his once careless hand, when morning dew
So softly lay upon his verdant field;
But, ah! that missile struck Convention's shield,
It whizzed and sang above dead years, so when
He stood on life's sere slopes,—they met again.

THE PIONEERS OF PICTOU

OUR SIREs—brave hearts that crossed estranging seas,
And broke the hush of the primeval wood,
Who lit their candles in the solitude,
And met the saffron morn upon their knees—
What though their homes were void of luxuries,
Learning ne'er begged, nor altars smokeless stood,
Nor Cheer nor Friendship lacked the joys their rude,
Kind, log-heaped hearths could give. It is to these
I bare my head! They wrought without the aid
Invention brings, ere smoke of Industry
Hung o'er these hills and vales; with care they made
This place a garden of the mind; and we,
Cradled in comfort, now bid Mem'ry hold
The fragrance of their lives in jars of gold.



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY CENTENARY 1818—1918

HERE where the mighty pulse of Empire beats,
Here where the iron gates of Commerce swing
That room be made for sinewy Trade to bring
To anchor, or to send abroad her fleets,
Rose modest, thorough, one of Learning's seats,
Whence for a hundred years Thought showed the way
To realms where Beauty, Truth and Wisdom lay,
Like to some trusted guide a traveller meets
'Mid storied scenes. Here came they, young, keen-eyed—
Those thousands now upon her sacred roll;
Here taught to see, to think, to do, to bide,
Here taught their kinship with the mighty Whole
Of things, they, going world-wide did their part
In war, or peace, at council, altar, mart.



SUNDOWN

THE PILGRIM of the sky has pitched his tent
Beneath the hills that slope to yonder west;
He could no farther fare, his light was spent,
And Darkness hard upon his pathway pressed.

On either side his track the fire-flakes fell,
As sparks that blow from off a passing train;
And on the skyey fields his course they'll tell,
Till with relighted torch he comes again.



THE EXILE

THE CEASELESS car, the tramp of horses' feet,
The restless, human paces to and fro,
The many faces that I do not know,
The aching impact of the flinty street,
The tired night-watchman on his lonely beat,
The blaring bugles Labour loves to blow,
The city's glance that everywhere must go,
The winds, dust-laden, leagued with winking heat—

All make me pant for grassy lanes, dew-wet,
For clover-fields, ahum with plundering bees,
For knolls where I mild-mannered Twilight met,
For pools that mirror scudding clouds, for trees
Athrill with flutes. My soul can ne'er forget
That it for long was nursed on Nature's knees.



NOSTALGIA

NOW, THAT the spring has come, I'd like to go
And follow her across Acadian fields
To well-known haunts where first the Mayflowers blow,
And drink the fragrance that the forest yields.
To go and sit where old Atlantic beats
His endless music—walk beside the bays,
Upon whose bosom Fancy saw strange fleets
Set seaward 'neath the skies of yesterdays.

I'd like to go straight to that dell of green
Where Spring's first cup of colour overflowed;
To walk till sunset, where Surprise is seen
At every turn, upon a country road;
Then, ere I left, once more to view the spot
Where Time has laid our friends—dear, unforgot.

AN OLD NURSE

WITHIN the cradle of her arm
To-day I had a peep;
A madcap child, so snug and warm,
Therein was fast asleep.

I gazed upon her furrowed face,
Set with kind eyes of grey,
And thought how in that safe embrace
Two generations lay.

What wonder if her weary head
Should think of resting now?
Come back then, all her brood, far-spced,
And crown her queenly brow.

But after-years too oft beget
Ingratitude, alas!
As those on star-decked heights forget
The hidden Alpine pass.



TO AN INKWELL, FOUND AT ETON COLLEGE, 1916

THOU humble servant unto noble Thought
Which lived at Eton once—ah, couldst thou tell
With what rich legends thy sealed lips are fraught,
How would I listen to thee, little well!

Perhaps some poet fed from thee his pen—
Impulsive Shelley, clad in robes of flame,
Or shy and studious Gray, for high-souled men
Like these gave Eton its immortal fame.

Or did rare Gladstone call thee once his own,
Or Wellington touch thee with iron hand?
O, tantalizing silence!—thou hast known,
I ween, such gifted lads, a happy band,

Who left the Berkshire fields, and went afar
To arts of Peace, or agonies of War.

ON THE DEDICATION OF THE MEMORIAL
TOWER, HALIFAX, BY H.R.H. THE DUKE
OF CONNAUGHT, AUG. 14, 1912.

(The park was given to the city by Sir Sandford Fleming.)

OLD FREEDOM greets this Royal throng to-day
In these Elysian haunts—largess of one
Whom Time has amply proved Britannia's son,
And when or Age or Love or Ease may stay,
In years unborn, this pillar to survey,
Its walls will tell not of War's stunning shock;
But how long since kind Liberty did rock
Her cradle by this old Atlantic bay.

And if far-scattered children turn their feet
To where their father's earliest hearth did blaze,
And bathe the very stones in tears, 'tis meet
That we of British blood this pile should raise
Where first a daughter of our ancient throne
Sat down beside a fireside of her own.



THE HAWTHORN TREE

THERE'S a hawthorn tree that I'm sure will be
All covered with blooms in May,
To which long ago, from a school I know
The children found their way.

Though the school is out, and they've wandered about
The world,—ah! well I ween
Past the old grey mill, to the foot of the hill,
The pilgrims go, unseen.

Then their wealth or fame, their praise or blame,
And their years, or grave or gay,—
The sight is so much like a fairy's touch—
From their shoulders slip away.

And the lost is found, and out of the ground
Life from the dead they see,
The noon is morn, and they are re-born
Under the hawthorn tree.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DELAY

"**M**INE hour is not yet come"—thus often He
Met Haste's insistent challenge with that word.
Thus often He, whose inmost soul was stirred
At what He saw: slaves thinking they were free,
Devotion wedded to Formality,
Lives in a spacious ocean islanded,
While thirty summers blossomed and were dead,
And He toiled on in deep obscurity.

Yet morn by morn to His dim shop He went,
And heard the humble villagers recall
The little happenings of their narrow round,
While His hand plied Toil's rude-made implement.
What wonder that in Pilate's judgment hall
Mere Power was met by Silence so profound?



THE LONGEST DAY

THERE is a sadness in the longest day.
We feel somehow the year has seen his best;
He seems to look around, then make his way,
With shortening breath, down to his snow-wrapt rest.
But 'tis not so—his best is yet to be,
When his child, Autumn, shall with gifts abound,
And when, at happy Yuletide, we shall see
His snow-white head with wreaths of holly crowned.

Then tell me not that life's best part is gone,
Because the high noon of the day is here;
There is a beauty in the twilight deep
One has not felt at any hour since dawn;
And what is there for tired man to fear
When night comes in with stars and dreams and sleep?



ABSENCE

BY A COTTAGE with ivy o'ergrowing
Where opens a garden gate,
For me, or coming or going,
An angel face would wait.

To-day the same brook gleameth
Beneath our old willow tree,
But, ah! how strange it seemeth
That no one welcometh me.

Blithe bird, sing there in thy gladness,
So happy in thine estate,
Thou canst not know my sadness—
Beside thee swingeth thy mate.



IN THE GRAVEYARD AT FORT MONCKTON, N.B.

(Graves marked 1755 and 1756.)

THIS lonely garden more than half-way round
Hath a sea-wall, and then a Time-filled moat—
The Fort's sole remnant now—to else denote
How 'tis marked off from all the common ground;
And here and there in knee-deep grass are found
Prone slabs that speak of prowess in the past,
O'er which unheeding feet do trample fast,
Deaf to the message of each mouldering mound.

I sit, and varied voices make me start:
Glad lovers listening to the lapping tide,
The team-song of the swain on yonder lea,
Children at play who are their parents' pride,
And that sweet bell—echoes of Liberty
From out these graves in this old garden's heart.



THE CHOICE OF MOSES

GRAVE and thought-burdened, ere his noon of day,
His stairs he climbed, and in the distance viewed
The countless tents where o'er-wrought Slavery lay,
And wondered if the stream of Promise would
End like a river in the fruitless sand.
Self bade him close his eyes; but Jochebed,
Pale, thin, and worn, before him seemed to stand,
And all his early dreams rose from the dead.

Then as he left, bidding the place good-bye,
He crossed Fame's doorway, though he knew it not,
Life could not be—to eat, play, sleep, and die;
So, while those jewelled courtiers are forgot,
To him the centuries have gone to school,
Where priests have learned to worship, kings to rule.



AT GOLDSMITH'S GRAVE

TO WHERE he sleeps,—not near the honoured dead
In the dim aisle of some cathedral grand,
But in behind old London's noisy Strand,
Where late or soon you hear a hurrying tread,
One spring-like day my tired feet were led
By fond desire, his sacred shrine to view;
Finding thereon a bunch of violets blue,
I stood a while with an uncovered head,
And heard their message sweet: "He was not laid
Beside his brothers in poetic art;
He sleeps alone in his loved Temple's shade,
But is embalmed within the human heart"—
Happy all they who like asylum find
Within the warm affections of mankind.



WESTMINSTER ABBEY'S WELCOME TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

I AM THE shrine of universal things,
So fitting 'tis that no one knows your name;
'Tis only those who honour win, or fame,
Who shelter find beneath my holy wings.
Here you are one with poets, statesmen, kings;
And while none knows under what skies you grew,
An empire's mothers will be claiming you,
And Love from far will here lay offerings.

So rest, assured that Glory's beams are shed
In fadeless splendour where your comrades lie,
And that Affection's hands will tend each bed,
And God will keep above them His calm sky—
While I will tell forever with what pride
Brave, common, happy men for England died.

THE SLEEPING CHILDREN

THE HOUSE is quiet now, but all the day
The sound of patt'ring feet was in the hall.
How tired they grew ere night began to fall;
Come view them as they lie,—no cares have they.
If dreams do cause them in their sleep dismay,
Perhaps the reason is to-day a doll
Was broken, or some mishap did befall
A toy. That these are trifles none will say
Who knows a child. Let them sleep sweetly on;
The time will come when they will all be gone,
And no to-morrow will bring back the din
Which only dies with sundown now, and yet
A truth this is which we too soon forget.
Before we leave we'll snugly tuck them in.



THE ARBITER

FIT AUDIENCE let me find, though few"—I read
In one who sang his song because he must;
Now all those listless ears are filled with dust,
And all that brood of Jealousy is dead.
All honour to the heedful few who said:
"Sing on; undaunted be, for you may trust
That Time's wise jury to you will be just,"
And now that noble brow is garlanded.

So blinded Prejudice shall pass away,
And Time shall clear his court of all the throng
That fills the air as with a Babel voice;
Then as some lyre, which long-forgotten lay,
And on whose strings there slept Orphean song,
Thrills to the touch, so Beauty shall rejoice.



A SCHOOLHOUSE OF LONG AGO

FOUR grey walls and a door.
Six windows, dim and small,
A desk, map, seats, plain floor,—
Again I see it all.

Remote, side-tracked it rose;
But who can estimate
Where Learning's pathway goes,
Whence world-roads radiate?

For boys by whom those trees
Where climbed, or that pool stirred,
Have captained argosies,
Or been in senates heard.

So, plain old place, on you,
And on your solitude,
Oft will a retinue
Of yesterdays intrude.



UNDER THE BRIDGE

SHRUNK to a rivulet in Summer time,
In Winter on through crystal walls it flows,
Glad Spring and burdened Autumn hear its rhyme
As, year by year, beneath the bridge it goes.

Here played I oft, here built my mill—and here,
After a lapse of years, I stand again
With you; and think of all the water, dear,
That seaward passed beneath the bridge since then.

The echoes of this bridge woke me at morn—
Big country waggons to the city bound;
One passed but now; 'twas like a hunter's horn,
For troops of memories started at the sound.

Those days were long, long days, and at night-fall,
Oft by this bridge my mother found me when
The dark began—but ah! to think of all
The water that has passed this bridge since then.

I'll wait at dusk and watch the stars come out,
And count the lights around the circling hill
For the sake of those who once played hereabout,
And heard the water turn my little mill.

THE RYERSON POETRY CHAP-BOOKS

Lorne Pierce—Editor

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