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The Emigrants' Stone

By

CLARA HOPPER

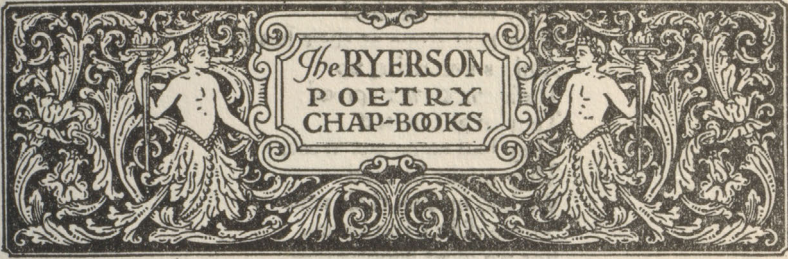


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The Emigrants' Stone and Other Poems

By Clara Hopper



THE EMIGRANTS' STONE

WHEN I was a child
 (With no sins to confess),
 My hair in two plaits,
 And a seersucker dress,
 'Mid the cornflowers blue,
 In a zigzag zone
 We all ran round
 The "Emigrant Stone."

We ran round once,
 We ran round twice,
 We clasped hands close
 And we ran round thrice,
 We ran round three
 And four and five
 And thanked our stars
 We were still alive!
 We ran round six
 And shivered in our shoes!
 We wondered what tricks
 An emigrant do-es
 When he comes to ha'nt
 A pig-tailed girl
 Who runs like an ant,
 In a seersucker swirl,
 And leaves his poor dead head
 In a whirl.

They might be tired
With that stone at their head
And us a-mussing up
Their cornflower spread;
They might be sad
They had come out West;
They might be mad
We had broken their rest,
So, we didn't run seven,
For we liked Montreal—
We didn't want to go
To Heaven
At all !

II

The sweet fleet years
Have slipped away,
Though it seems 'twas only
Yesterday,
While St. Lawrence sang
By its high dyked marls
And the shad flies swarmed
On Point St. Charles,
That I saw men lie
'Neath a careless sky,
And the cornflowers neat
Nid-nodding at their feet.

Oh, it's now I'm knowing
(As, all alone,
I dream and dream
Of that Emigrants' Stone,
Of the weary men,
Sick, dying alone
And never a soul
To cry "Ochone!
Ochochancee!
Aw, the sad salt sea!")
Well I'm knowing each sighed
For a well-loved scene—
His mother . . .
Puffing on her old dudeen—
Now I know they thought long
For a sweet colleen
With her creel a-dripping
With the carrageen.

Ah, yes! they dreamed
Just like me,
Of vanished blisses;
In their misery
By the unspanned river
With the stars above,
Of old-time days . . .
And ways . . .
And love . . .

Ah, Memory!
Oh, Life's fleet joys!
Oh, the young dear days
Of my girls and boys! . . .
Oh, dear Peter,
You've got the key!
You've let them in
Don't lock out me
Now that I'm old
And worn and thin
(A whiff might bear me
Over the whin),
With a quavery voice
With a crack in the middle
Like the resinless tones
Of an old brown fiddle.
Old!—and weary!—
Peter, deary,
Mete me a measure
Of leisure
In Heaven—
I'm tired of pleasure,
Tired of sin,
I've run round seven—
Let me in!

Many years ago, in Point St. Charles, Montreal, between the canal and the railway tracks leading to Victoria Bridge, there stood a large boulder. It marked the grave of numbers of Irish emigrants, victims of ship's fever, and was a never-ending source of interest and superstitious awe to the children who played around it. They called it The Emigrant Stone, and firmly believed that to run round it seven times would result in some dire calamity—even death—to the daring.

MEMORIES

LITTLE I thought in the long ago
When we swung 'neath the hawthorn tree
(Tom was brother to Marion Flo,
John was brother to me)
That they would grow up and she would grow up
And all go over the sea,
And naught would be left of the long ago
But the old haw-tree—and me.

The pies we baked of the scarlet haws!
And the mansions made with stones!
Taunting the rook with his raucous caws,
Our missiles were pine-tree cones . . .
But they grew up, and she grew up,
And all sailed over the sea,
And nothing is left of the long ago
But the old haw-tree—and me.

The tales we told of our ventures bold
With a valorous mien and tense!
(Our daring moods soon took to the woods
When Bess moomed over the fence.)
But John grew up—and Tom grew up—
A nurse was Marion Flo,
And nothing is left but the old haw-tree—
And me—of the long ago.

Little we thought swinging high and low
In the flowery boughs of the haws,
Three would fall to a foreign foe,
And one would weep because
My brother grew up—and Tom . . . grew up . . .
And all sailed over the sea.
Oh, if they all were children still,
With the hawthorn tree—and me!

IT WAS THE TIME WHEN LILACS
BLOOMED

DEER live in the wildwood
Beyond the carp of care;
Eagles in an eyrie
High in the fending air.

Larks live in the wilderness;
Light lives in the dawn;
Ennui dwells at even
In a weary woman's yawn.

Color dwells in sunsets;
Sadness with the dove;
Beauty lives forever
In faces that we love.

Love lives in the child's heart;
Sound lives in the sea
Since chaos—but memory
Lives in the lilac tree.



THEN AND NOW

SANS mistletoe they scarce did kiss
In days more circumspect than this;
The maids demure were so sedate,
For chaperons enthroned in state
Blocked every road to bliss:

But, here's the lucid emphasis—
'Twas just a charming artifice
Lest bashful pairs go celibate
Sans mistletoe!

Romance must surely weep at this
(But oh, 'tis sweet if 'tis remiss!):
Today's maid meets him at the gate,
She takes the flowers and chocolate,
And proffers the expected kiss!—
Sans mistletoe.

TREE-SONGS

TO laugh, to frolic, and to sing sweet songs
Is but the nature of the fetterless:
Earth cannot silence, like some stern abdess,
Her wild cascades, nor bind in grim duress—
Song, like the sunshine, to the free belongs.

More sweet than notes of tinkling waterfalls
Are the soft tones of wind-stirred aspen trees
That swish and rustle when some faint, pale breeze
Silters their garments; all their melodies
Soothe us to slumber as the poppy calls:

Aspens all anchored to the fett'ring clay,
Wedded to matter, yearning for the heights
Ethereal—distant as the Dolomites—
Still croon their tree-songs 'neath the stars o' nights,
Loosing cramped souls from out the gyves of day.



FIELDS

WISE and potent,
Quiet lie,
Gazing at
The moody sky;
Like an ancient
Artisan,
Waiting there
Since time began,
At the whim
Of Master Man.

Lend a bushel
Or a grain
To a hillock
Or a plain,
They will take
Your measured gold
And pay you back
A hundred fold.

Give them barley,
Give them corn,
Hips or haws
Of rose or thorn,
Fluff of thistle
Zephyr borne,
Anything,
From anyone
Underneath
The shining sun,
They will mother
Any waif,
Cover it
And keep it safe.

Fields are generous!
Fields are sweet:
If you dress
And keep them neat
They will bring you
Rye and wheat.
Though you harrow
Till you tire
They will heap you
"Coals of fire."
Though you plough them
Till they're sore
They will only
Bring you more!
Overlook them—
Leave them fallow—
They will bring you
Mint and mallow.

Fields are honest,
Fields are human,
Fields are patient
As a woman;
Sweet with blossoms
Children find,
Fields are generous
And kind.
By their deeds
They stand revealed;
What is better
Than a field?

THE SHEEP

WHENE'ER the breath of March is redolent
Of garden loam and sodden woodsy mould,
Like wintered sheep aweary of the fold,
Fretting for freedom as in prison pent,
Sniffing adventure on the telltale breeze,
My thoughts rush out—not pell-mell, all together,
But singly, one by one, when the bell-wether
Has cleared the gap within the hedging fence
That marks to-day from past experience.

Then one goes gambolling down a cinder walk
Scoring a greensward in the memoried east
Where tall white jonquils stare, sway daffodils—
Food for the soul and for the eyes a feast!

And one goes skipping in that garden old
Where pansies blossom with a heart of gold;
Wide-eyed innocents, marvellous in hue:
Saucy yellow, amber, amethyst, and blue.

One frisks nimbly where are tender tips
Of peeping peonies that will riot presently
And drug the dazzled air with their sweet, sweet lips,
As giant roses, or a fair lady
More ravishing than—anything you please!

So all day long my browsing sheep go free, fed
Now on swelling cones of the purple lilac,
Or flowering currant rich in gold as any Shylock,
Till night's chill shade creeps down on the old homestead.

Though sweet the day that tempts to truant flight,
My stragglng flock come herded home at night,
Content, to wonted rest and sleep within the fold—
The fending fold of fireside, love, and candle-light.

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