

BRET HARTE

EAST AND

WEST: POEMS

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Part I

A Greypoint Legend (1797.)

They ran through the streets of the seaport town;
They peered from the decks of the ships that lay:
The cold sea-fog that came whitening down
Was never as cold or white as they.
"Ho, Starbuck and Pinckney and Tenterden!
Run for your shallops, gather your men,
Scatter your boats on the lower bay."

Good cause for fear! In the thick midday
The hulk that lay by the rotting pier,
Filled with the children in happy play,
Parted its moorings, and drifted clear,—
 Drifted clear beyond the reach or call,—
 Thirteen children they were in all,—
 All adrift in the lower bay!

Said a hard-faced skipper, "God help us all!
She will not float till the turning tide!"
Said his wife, "My darling will hear *my* call,
Whether in sea or heaven she bide:"
 And she lifted a quavering voice and high,
 Wild and strange as a sea-bird's cry,
 Till they shuddered and wondered at her side.

The fog drove down on each laboring crew,
Veiled each from each and the sky and shore:
There was not a sound but the breath they drew,
And the lap of water and creak of oar;
 And they felt the breath of the downs, fresh blown
 O'er leagues of clover and cold gray stone,
 But not from the lips that had gone before.

They come no more. But they tell the tale,
That, when fogs are thick on the harbor reef,
The mackerel fishers shorten sail;
For the signal they know will bring relief:

For the voices of children, still at play
In a phantom hulk that drifts away
Through channels whose waters never fail.

It is but a foolish shipman's tale,
A theme for a poet's idle page;
But still, when the mists of doubt prevail,
And we lie becalmed by the shores of Age,
We hear from the misty troubled shore
The voice of the children gone before,
Drawing the soul to its anchorage.

A Newport Romance

They say that she died of a broken heart
 (I tell the tale as 'twas told to me);
But her spirit lives, and her soul is part
 Of this sad old house by the sea.

Her lover was fickle and fine and French:
 It was nearly a hundred years ago
When he sailed away from her arms—poor wench—
 With the Admiral Rochambeau.

I marvel much what periwigged phrase
 Won the heart of this sentimental Quaker,
At what golden-laced speech of those modish days
 She listened—the mischief take her!

But she kept the posies of mignonette
 That he gave; and ever as their bloom failed
And faded (though with her tears still wet)
 Her youth with their own exhaled.

Till one night, when the sea-fog wrapped a shroud
 Round spar and spire and tarn and tree,
Her soul went up on that lifted cloud
 From this sad old house by the sea.

And ever since then, when the clock strikes two,
 She walks unbidden from room to room,
And the air is filled that she passes through
 With a subtle, sad perfume.

The delicate odor of mignonette,
 The ghost of a dead and gone bouquet,
Is all that tells of her story; yet
 Could she think of a sweeter way?

* * *

I sit in the sad old house to-night,—
 Myself a ghost from a farther sea;
And I trust that this Quaker woman might,
 In courtesy, visit me.

For the laugh is fled from porch and lawn,

And the bugle died from the fort on the hill,
And the twitter of girls on the stairs is gone,
And the grand piano is still.

Somewhere in the darkness a clock strikes two;
And there is no sound in the sad old house,
But the long veranda dripping with dew,
And in the wainscot a mouse.

The light of my study-lamp streams out
From the library door, but has gone astray
In the depths of the darkened hall. Small doubt
But the Quakeress knows the way.

Was it the trick of a sense o'erwrought
With outward watching and inward fret?
But I swear that the air just now was fraught
With the odor of mignonette!

I open the window, and seem almost—
So still lies the ocean—to hear the beat
Of its Great Gulf artery off the coast,
And to bask in its tropic heat.

In my neighbor's windows the gas-lights flare,
As the dancers swing in a waltz of Strauss;
And I wonder now could I fit that air
To the song of this sad old house.

And no odor of mignonette there is
But the breath of morn on the dewy lawn;
And mayhap from causes as slight as this
The quaint old legend is born.

But the soul of that subtle, sad perfume,
As the spiced embalmings, they say, outlast
The mummy laid in his rocky tomb,
Awakens my buried past.

And I think of the passion that shook my youth,
Of its aimless loves and its idle pains,
And am thankful now for the certain truth
That only the sweet remains.

And I hear no rustle of stiff brocade,
And I see no face at my library door;
For now that the ghosts of my heart are laid,
She is viewless forevermore.

But whether she came as a faint perfume,
Or whether a spirit in stole of white,
I feel, as I pass from the darkened room,
She has been with my soul to-night!

The Hawk's Nest (Sierras.)

We checked our pace,—the red road sharply rounding;
We heard the troubled flow
Of the dark olive depths of pines, resounding
A thousand feet below.

Above the tumult of the cañon lifted,
The gray hawk breathless hung;
Or on the hill a wingèd shadow drifted
Where furze and thorn-bush clung;

Or where half-way the mountain side was furrowed
With many a seam and scar;
Or some abandoned tunnel dimly burrowed,—
A mole-hill seen so far.

We looked in silence down across the distant
Unfathomable reach:
A silence broken by the guide's consistent
And realistic speech.

"Walker of Murphy's blew a hole through Peters
For telling him he lied;
Then up and dusted out of South Hornitos
Across the long Divide.

"We ran him out of Strong's, and up through Eden,
And 'cross the ford below;
And up this cañon (Peters' brother leadin'),
And me and Clark and Joe.

"He fou't us game: somehow, I disremember
Jest how the thing kem round;
Some say 'twas wadding, some a scattered ember
From fires on the ground.

"But in one minute all the hill below him
Was just one sheet of flame;
Guardin' the crest, Sam Clark and I called to him.
And,—well, the dog was game!

"He made no sign: the fires of hell were round him,
The pit of hell below.
We sat and waited, but never found him;
And then we turned to go.

"And then—you see that rock that's grown so bristly
With chaparral and tan—
Suthin' crep' out: it might hev been a grizzly,
It might hev been a man;

"Suthin' that howled, and gnashed its teeth, and shouted
In smoke and dust and flame;
Suthin' that sprang into the depths about it,
Grizzly or man,—but game!

"That's all. Well, yes, it does look rather risky,
And kinder makes one queer
And dizzy looking down. A drop of whiskey
Ain't a bad thing right here!"

In the Mission Garden (1865.)

Father Felipe

I speak not the English well, but Pachita
She speak for me; is it not so, my Pancha?
Eh, little rogue? Come, salute me the stranger
Americano.

Sir, in my country we say, "Where the heart is,
There live the speech." Ah! you not understand? So!
Pardon an old man,—what you call "ol foggy,"—
Padre Felipe!

Old, Señor, old! just so old as the Mission.
You see that pear-tree? How old you think, Señor?
Fifteen year? Twenty? Ah, Señor, just *Fifty*
Gone since I plant him!

You like the wine? It is some at the Mission,
Made from the grape of the year Eighteen Hundred;
All the same time when the earthquake he come to
San Juan Bautista.

But Pancha is twelve, and she is the rose-tree;
And I am the olive, and this is the garden:
And Pancha we say; but her name is Francisca,
Same like her mother.

Eh, you knew *her*? No? Ah! it is a story;
But I speak not, like Pachita, the English:
So? If I try, you will sit here beside me,
And shall not laugh, eh?

When the American come to the Mission,
Many arrive at the house of Francisca:
One,—he was fine man,—he buy the cattle
Of José Castro.

So! he came much, and Francisca she saw him:
And it was Love,—and a very dry season;
And the pears bake on the tree,—and the rain come,
But not Francisca;

Not for one year; and one night I have walk much
Under the olive-tree, when comes Francisca:
Comes to me here, with her child, this Francisca,—
Under the olive-tree.

Sir, it was sad; ... but I speak not the English;
So! ... she stay here, and she wait for her husband
He come no more, and she sleep on the hillside;
There stands Pachita.

Ah! there's the Angelus. Will you not enter?
Or shall you walk in the garden with Pancha?
Go, little rogue—stt—attend to the stranger.
Adios, Señor.

Pachita (*briskly*)

So, he's been telling that yarn about mother!
Bless you, he tells it to every stranger:
Folks about yer say the old man's my father;
What's your opinion?

The Old Major Explains (Re-Union Army of the Potomac, 12th May, 1871.)

"Well, you see, the fact is, Colonel, I don't know as I can come:
For the farm is not half planted, and there's work to do at home;
And my leg is getting troublesome,—it laid me up last fall,
And the doctors, they have cut and hacked, and never found the ball.

"And then, for an old man like me, it's not exactly right,
This kind o' playing soldier with no enemy in sight.
'The Union,'—that was well enough way up to '66;
But this 'Re-Union,'—maybe now it's mixed with politics?

"No? Well, you understand it best; but then, you see, my lad,
I'm deacon now, and some might think that the example's bad.
And week from next is Conference.... You said the 12th of May?
Why, that's the day we broke their line at Spottsylvania-i-a!

"Hot work; eh, Colonel, wasn't it? Ye mind that narrow front:
They called it the 'Death-Angle!' Well, well, my lad, we won't
Fight that old battle over now: I only meant to say
I really can't engage to come upon the 12th of May.

"How's Thompson? What! will he be there? Well, now, I want to know!
The first man in the rebel works! they called him 'Swearing Joe:'
A wild young fellow, sir, I fear the rascal was; but then—
Well, short of heaven, there wa'n't a place he dursn't lead his men.

"And Dick, you say, is coming too. And Billy? ah! it's true
We buried him at Gettysburg: I mind the spot; do you?
A little field below the hill,—it must be green this May;
Perhaps that's why the fields about bring him to me to-day.

"Well, well, excuse me, Colonel! but there are some things that drop
The tail-board out one's feelings; and the only way's to stop.
So they want to see the old man; ah, the rascals! do they, eh?
Well, I've business down in Boston about the 12th of May."

"Seventy-Nine" Mr. Interviewer Interviewed

Know me next time when you see me, won't you, old smarty?
Oh, I mean you, old figger-head,—just the same party!
Take out your pensivil, d—n you; sharpen it, do!
Any complaints to make? Lots of 'em—one of 'em's *you*.

You! who are you, anyhow, goin' round in that sneakin' way?
Never in jail before, was you, old blatherskite, say?
Look at it; don't it look pooty? Oh, grin, and be d—d to you, do!
But, if I had you this side o' that gratin', I'd just make it lively for you.

How did I get in here? Well, what 'ud you give to know?
'Twasn't by sneakin' round where I hadn't no call to go.
'Twasn't by hangin' round a spyin' unfortnet men.
Grin! but I'll stop your jaw if ever you do that agen.

Why don't you say suthin', blast you? Speak your mind if you dare.
Ain't I a bad lot, sonny? Say it, and call it square.
Hain't got no tongue, hey, hev ye. O guard! here's a little swell,
A cussin' and swearin' and yellin', and bribin' me not to tell.

There, I thought that 'ud fetch ye. And you want to know my name?
"Seventy-Nine" they call me; but that is their little game.
For I'm werry highly connected, as a gent, sir, can understand;
And my family hold their heads up with the very furst in the land.

For 'twas all, sir, a put-up job on a pore young man like me;
And the jury was bribed a puppos, and aftdrst they couldn't agree.
And I sed to the judge, sez I,—Oh, grin! it's all right my son!
But you're a werry lively young pup, and you ain't to be played upon!

Wot's that you got—tobacco? I'm cussed but I thought 'twas a tract.
Thank ye. A chap t'other day—now, look'ee, this is a fact,
Slings me a tract on the evils o' keepin' bad company,
As if all the saints was howlin' to stay here along's we.

No: I hain't no complaints. Stop, yes; do you see that chap,—
Him standin' over there,—a hidin' his eves in his cap?
Well, that man's stumick is weak, and he can't stand the pris'n fare;
For the coffee is just half beans, and the sugar ain't no where.

Perhaps it's his bringin' up; but he sickens day by day,
And he doesn't take no food, and I'm seein' him waste away.
And it isn't the thing to see; for, whatever he's been and done,
Starvation isn't the plan as he's to be saved upon.

For he cannot rough it like me; and he hasn't the stamps, I guess,
To buy him his extry grub outside o' the pris'n mess.
And perhaps if a gent like you, with whom I've been sorter free,
Would—thank you! But, say, look here! Oh, blast it, don't give it to
ME!

Don't you give it to me; now, don't ye, don't ye, don't!
You think it's a put-up job; so I'll thank ye, sir, if you won't.
But hand him the stamps yourself: why, he isn't even my pal;
And if it's a comfort to you, why, I don't intend that he shall.

His Answer to "Her Letter" Reported by Truthful James

Being asked by an intimate party,—
Which the same I would term as a friend,—
Which his health it were vain to call hearty,
Since the mind to deceit it might lend;
For his arm it was broken quite recent,
And has something gone wrong with his lung,—
Which is why it is proper and decent
I should write what he runs off his tongue:

First, he says, Miss, he's read through your letter
To the end,—and the end came too soon;
That a slight illness kept him your debtor
(Which for weeks he was wild as a loon);
That his spirits are buoyant as yours is;
That with you, Miss, he challenges Fate
(Which the language that invalid uses
At times it were vain to relate).

And he says that the mountains are fairer
For once being held in your thought;
That each rock holds a wealth that is rarer
Than ever by gold-seeker sought
(Which are words he would put in these pages,
By a party not given to guile;
Which the same not, at date, paying wages,
Might produce in the sinful a smile).

He remembers the ball at the Ferry,
And the ride, and the gate, and the vow,
And the rose that you gave him,—that very
Same rose he is treasuring now
(Which his blanket he's kicked on his trunk, Miss,
And insists on his legs being free;
And his language to me from his bunk, Miss,
Is frequent and painful and free);

He hopes you are wearing no willows,
But are happy and gay all the while;
That he knows (which this dodging of pillows
Imparts but small ease to the style,
And the same you will pardon),—he knows, Miss,
That, though parted by many a mile,
Yet were he lying under the snows, Miss,
They'd melt into tears at your smile.

And you'll still think of him in your pleasures,
In your brief twilight dreams of the past;
In this green laurel-spray that he treasures,
It was plucked where your parting was last;
In this specimen,—but a small trifle,—
It will do for a pin for your shawl
(Which the truth not to wickedly stifle
Was his last week's "clean up,"—and *his all*).

He's asleep, which the same might seem strange, Miss,
Were it not that I scorn to deny
That I raised his last dose, for a change, Miss,
In view that his fever was high;
But he lies there quite peaceful and pensive.
And now, my respects, Miss, to you;
Which my language, although comprehensive,
Might seem to be freedom,—it's true.

Which I have a small favor to ask you,
As concerns a bull-pup, which the same,—
If the duty would not overtask you,—
You would please to procure for me, *game*;
And send per express to the Flat, Miss,
Which they say York is famed for the breed,
Which though words of deceit may be that, Miss,
I'll trust to your taste, Miss, indeed.

P.S.—Which this same interfering
Into other folks' way I despise;
Yet if it so be I was hearing
That it's just empty pockets as lies
Betwixt you and Joseph, it follers,
That, having no family claims,
Here's my pile; which it's six hundred dollars,
As is yours, with respects,

Truthful James.

**Further Language from Truthful James
(Nye's Ford, Stanislaus)
(1870.)**

Do I sleep? do I dream?
Do I wonder and doubt?
Are things what they seem?
Or is visions about?
Is our civilization a failure?
Or is the Caucasian played out?

Which expressions are strong;
Yet would feebly imply
Some account of a wrong—
Not to call it a lie—
As was worked off on William, my pardner,
And the same being W. Nye.

He came down to the Ford
On the very same day
Of that lottery drawn
By those sharps at the Bay;
And he says to me, "Truthful, how goes it?"
I replied, "It is far, far from gay;

"For the camp has gone wild
On this lottery game,
And has even beguiled
'Injin Dick' by the same."
Which said Nye to me, "Injins is pizen:
Do you know what his number is, James?"

I replied "7,2,
9,8,4, is his hand;"
When he started, and drew
Out a list, which he scanned;
Then he softly went for his revolver
With language I cannot command.

Then I said, "William Nye!"
But he turned upon me,
And the look in his eye
Was quite painful to see;
And he says, "You mistake: this poor Injin
I protects from such sharps as you be!"

I was shocked and withdrew;
But I grieve to relate,
When he next met my view
Injin Dick was his mate,
And the two around town was a-lying
In a frightfully dissolute state.

Which the war-dance they had
Round a tree at the Bend
Was a sight that was sad;
And it seemed that the end
Would not justify the proceedings,
As I quiet remarked to a friend.

For that Injin he fled
The next day to his band;
And we found William spread
Very loose on the strand,
With a peaceful-like smile on his features,
And a dollar greenback in his hand;

Which, the same when rolled out,
We observed with surprise,
That that Injin, no doubt,
Had believed was the prize,—
Them figures in red in the corner,
Which the number of notes specifies.

Was it guile, or a dream?
Is it Nye that I doubt?
Are things what they seem?
Or is visions about?
Is our civilization a failure?
Or is the Caucasian played out?

The Wonderful Spring of San Joaquin

Of all the fountains that poets sing,—
Crystal, thermal, or mineral spring;
Ponce de Leon's Fount of Youth;
Wells with bottoms of doubtful truth;
In short, of all the springs of Time
That ever were flowing in fact or rhyme,
That ever were tasted, felt, or seen,—

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