

Classic Poetry Series

**James Brunton Stephens**  
**- poems -**

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# James Brunton Stephens(17 June 1835 – 29 June 1902)

James Brunton Stephens was a Scottish-born Australian poet, author of *Convict Once*.

## <B>Early life</B>

Stephens was born at Borrowstounness, on the Firth of Forth, Scotland; the son of John Stephens, the parish schoolmaster, and his wife Jane, née Brunton. J. B. Stephens was educated at his father's school, then at a free boarding school and at the University of Edinburgh from 1849 to 1854 without obtaining a degree. For three years he was a travelling tutor on the continent, and from 1859 became a school teacher in Scotland. While teaching at Greenock Academy in Greenock, Stephens wrote some minor verse and two short novels ('Rutson Morley' and 'Virtue Le Moyne') which were published in Sharpe's London Magazine in 1861-63.

## <B>Career in Australia</b>

Stephens migrated to Queensland, Australia, in 1866 possibly for health reasons. He was a tutor with the Barker family of squatters at Tamrookum station for some time and in 1870 entered the Queensland education department. He had experience as a teacher at Stanthorpe and was afterwards in charge of the school at Ashgrove, near Brisbane. Representations were then made to the premier, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, that a man of Stephens's ability was being wasted in a small school, and in 1883 a position was found for him as a correspondence clerk in the colonial secretary's department. He afterwards rose to be undersecretary to the chief secretary's department. Before coming to Australia Stephens had done a little writing for popular magazines, and in 1871 his first volume of poems, *Convict Once*, was published by Macmillan and Company, which immediately proclaimed him to be an Australian poet of importance. In 1873 a long poem, *The Godolphin Arabian*, was published. These were followed by *The Black Gin and other Poems*, 1873, and *Miscellaneous Poems*, 1880. The first collected edition of his poems was published in 1885, others followed in 1888, 1902 and 1912. Of these the 1902 edition is the most complete. After Stephens entered the colonial secretary's department in 1883 he was unable to do much literary work though he wrote occasionally for the press. He was suffering for some time from angina pectoris before his sudden death on 29 June 1902. He married on 10 November 1876, Rosalie Mary Donaldson, who

survived him with four daughters and one son.

### <b>Poetic critique</b>

Stephens was a man of medium height "with the face of a poet". Simple and natural in manner, he was modest about his own work. His over-sensitiveness to the sufferings of others made it difficult for him to resist appeals for charity to the extent of damaging his own fortunes. He was sometimes exuberant and full of humour, though occasionally the pendulum swung the other way. His sense of duty kept him working during his last illness to the end. No doubt his official papers exercised his literary talent, but it was not the best preparation for poetry of which he wrote little in later years. However, though new men were arising, he remained the representative man of letters in Australia until his death. His witty and humorous light verse is very good. Despite all changes of fashion, such poems as "The Power of Science" and "My other Chinese Cook", can still evoke laughter. The Godolphin Arabian in the metre and style of [Byron's](http://www.poemhunter.com/george-gordon-lord-byron/) Beppo goes on its pleasant rhyming way for about three thousand lines and is still readable, but as it is not included in any collected edition, will be forgotten. Convict Once, remains one of the few long Australian poems of merit, technically it is a lesson to those writers who think it is easy to write in a long metre. Much of his other verse is admirable in its simplicity and dignity. He remained a Briton and there is little trace of his adopted country in his poetry, but his poems on federation "The Dominion of Australia" and "The Dominion" have the restrained enthusiasm that belongs to true patriotism. Perhaps if there had been less restraint and more of the surge of emotion, Stephens might have been a better poet, but his place among nineteenth century Australian men of letters will always be an honoured one. Apart from his poetry, he published a short novel, A Hundred Pounds, the libretto of an opera, and a few poetry pamphlets not already mentioned are listed in Percival Serle's Bibliography of Australasian Poetry and Verse.

## “big Ben”

De mortuis nil ni-  
Si bonum: R.I.P.:—  
No more upbraid him:—  
Nay, rather plead his cause,  
For Ben exactly was  
What Nature made him.

Not radically bad,  
He naturally had  
No leaning sinwards;  
But Nature saw it good  
One life-long crave for food  
Should rack his inwards.

According to his lights,  
And to the appetites  
In him implanted,  
He did his level best  
To feed—and all the rest  
He took for granted.

Ere birth he was laid low,  
And yet no man I know  
For high birth matched him:  
Apollo was his sire,  
Who with life-giving fire  
Ab ovo hatched him.

Just over Capricorn  
This same Big Ben was born,  
A feeble lizard;  
But with the years came strength,  
And twenty feet of length—  
The most part gizzard.

By Fitzroy's rugged crags,  
Its “sawyers” and its snags,  
He roamed piscivorous;  
Or watching for his prey,

By Yaamba creek he lay,  
In mood carnivorous.

Unthinking little hogs,  
And careless puppy-dogs  
Fitzroy-ward straying,  
Were grist unto his mill. . . .  
His grinders now are still,  
Himself past preying.

Whether in self-defence,  
Or out of hate prepense,  
Or just for fun shot,  
Are things beyond my ken—  
I only know Big Ben  
Died of a gunshot.

It was a sorry case;  
For Ben loved all our race,  
Both saint and sinner;  
If he had had his way,  
He would have brought each day  
One home to dinner:—

Loved with that longing love,  
Such as is felt above  
The Southern Tropic:—  
Small chance was ever his,  
But his proclivities  
Were philanthropic.

There are who would insist  
He was misogynist—  
'Tis slander horrid;  
For every nymph he saw,  
He would have liked her— raw,  
From toe to forehead.

Then let his memory be;  
No misanthrope was he;  
No woman-hater;  
But just what you may call,

Take him for all in all,  
An alligator.

James Brunton Stephens

# A Brisbane Reverie

As I sit beside my little study window, looking down  
From the heights of contemplation (attic front) upon the town  
(Attic front, per week — with board, of course — a sov'reign and a crown);—

As I sit—(these sad digressions, though, are much to be deplored)—  
In my lonely little attic—(it is all I can afford;  
And I should have mentioned, washing not included in the board);—

As I sit—(these wild parentheses my very soul abhors)—  
High above the ills of life, its petty rumours, paltry wars—  
(The attic back is cheaper, but it wants a chest of drawers);—

In the purpling light of half-past six before the stars are met,  
While the stricken sun clings fondly to his royal mantle yet,  
Dying glorious on the hill-tops in reluctant violet,—  
Just the time that favours vision, blissful moments that unbar  
The inner sight (assisted by a very mild cigar),  
To behold the things that are not, side by side with those that are,—

Just the very light and very time that suit the bard's complaint,  
When through present, past, and future, roams his soul without restraint—  
When no clearer are the things that are than are the things that ain't;—

With a dual apperception, metaphysical, profound,  
Past and present running parallel, I scan the scene around—  
(Were there two of us the attic front would only be a pound).—

Beneath mine eyes the buried past arises from the tomb,  
Not cadaverous or ghostly, but in all its living bloom—  
(I would rather pay the odds than have a partner in my room).

How the complex now contrasteth with the elemental then!  
Tide of change outflowing flow of ink, outstripping stride of pen!  
(Unless it were . . . . but no . . . . they only take in single men).

Where trackless wilderness lay wide, a hundred ages through—  
I can see a man with papers, from my attic point of view,  
Who for gath'ring house assessments gets a very decent screw.

Where forest-contiguity assuaged the summer heats,  
It is now an argued question, when the City Council meets,  
If we mightn't buy a tree or two to shade the glaring streets.

Where no sound announced the flight of time, not even crow of cock,  
I can see the gun that stuns the town with monitory shock,

And a son of that same weapon hired to shoot at one o'clock.

Where the kangaroo gave hops, the "old man" fleetest of the fleet,  
Mrs. Pursy gives a "hop" to-night to all the town's élite,  
But her "old man" cannot hop because of bunions on his feet.

Where the emu, "at its own sweet will," went wandering all the day,  
And left its bill-prints on whate'er came handy in its way,  
There are printed bills that advertise "The Emu for the Bay."

Where of old, with awful mysteries and diabolic din,  
They "kippered" adolescents in the presence of their kin,  
There's a grocer selling herrings kippered, half-a-crown per tin.

Where the savage only used his club to supplement his fist,  
The white man uses his for friendly intercourse and whist,  
Not to mention sherry, port, bordeaux, et cetera—see list.

Where dress was at a discount, or at most a modest "fall,"  
Rise "Criterion," "Cosmopolitan," and "City Clothing Hall,"  
And neither men nor women count for much—the dress is all.

Where a bride's trousseau consisted of an extra coat of grease,  
And Nature gave the pair a suit of glossy black apiece,  
Now the matrimonial outfit is a perfect golden fleece.

Where lorn widows wore the knee-joints of the late lamented dead,  
We have dashing wives who wear their living husbands' joints instead—  
Yea, their vitals, for embellishment of bosom, neck, and head.

Where the blacks, ignoring livers, lived according to their wills,  
Nor knew that flesh is heir to quite a lexicon of ills,  
Five white chemists in one street grow rich through antibilious pills.

Where the only bell was the bell-bird's note, now many mingling bells



“Make Catholic the trembling air,” as famed George Eliot tells  
Of another town somewhere between more northern parallels.

(But in case the name of Catholic offend protesting ear,  
Let Wesleyan or Baptist be interpolated here,  
Or that bells make Presbyterian the trembling atmosphere.)  
Where the savage learned no love from earth, nor from the “shining frame,”  
And merely feared the devil under some outlandish name,  
There are heaps of Britishers whose creed is—very much the same!

Where the gin was black—(methinks'tis time the bard were shutting up:  
The bell is ringing for the non-inebriating cup,  
And even attic bards must have their little “bite and sup.”)

James Brunton Stephens

# A Coin Of Trajan In Australia

Through what strange winding ways of circumstance,  
Through what conspiracies of time and chance,  
By what long chain of hands, from his who pressed  
Upon thy disc the Imperial countenance,  
Then threw thee, one of many, with the rest—  
By what long chain of hands, a living line  
Of transfer hast thou come from his to mine?

Could I but trace thee back from mine to his,  
Through the long process of the centuries  
From touch to touch of hands that took or gave,  
And read as current things the destinies  
Writ on each palm—of master, matron, slave—  
Whereon a moment thou hast lain, I should  
Know all that life can hold of ill or good.

How strange to think, nigh two millenniums gone,  
While yet thy legend white from mintage shone,  
At such an hour of just such day divine,  
Some Roman maiden's hand thou layest upon,  
Whose living warmth became a moment thine—  
That into this thine actual substance stole  
The gentle tremors pulsing from her soul!

Nor yet less strange to think of what long space  
Thou layest forgot in some forgotten place  
While Empire fell, or passed to Pontiff-Kings,  
And while the gradual darkening of thy face  
Was all thy share in all the change of things,  
Till some chance hand thy secret touched at last  
And drew thee forth to witness of the past;—

To be, when after lapse of many days  
Thy vagrant fate through unrecorded ways  
At length had brought thee to this alien clime,  
A voice that, heedless all of blame or praise,  
Protests the spirit of a regal time  
Against a later dispensation, when  
No more doth glory sway the souls of men.

Sway me one instant with the glory gone,  
One dazzled moment let me gaze upon  
What is impossible again to be,  
This image and this superscription con  
As when in silver glow of novelty

They stood for present Empire, and designed  
A god incarnate throned amid mankind!—

\* \* \* \* \*

Oh, magic disc, responsive to my mood!  
I saw him on his dizzy altitude,  
Serene, august, the lord of all the world!  
Imperial in a space of light he stood,  
While round his feet in storm-lit turmoil whirled  
A cloud of striving Dignities, that hid  
From him all nether woes ill-augured.

Above distraction, and beyond dispute,  
The incommunicable attribute  
Of majesty made fiat of his breath;  
And when all fain of some imagined suit  
I lifted suppliant hands for life or death,  
And caught his glance of calm Olympian pride,  
I swooned, and, swooning, "Ave Caesar," cried!

\* \* \* \* \*

The glory-tissued vision, warp and woof,  
Dissolves before the sense of self-reproof.  
Ah, foolish-fain of pictured History!  
This in the only land beneath heav'n's roof  
Where never yet hath manhood bent the knee  
To man the one sole continent whose sod  
The foot of regnant kingdom ne'er hath trod!

And yet—and yet—though all around us lies  
The freest land beneath the o'er-arching skies,  
Rich in a polity of common weal,  
Is there among us aught that justifies

The scorn of ancient things? Can we repeal  
The union 'twixt the present and the past,  
And place ourselves as first, whom God made last

Because of that which was is that which is;  
We are the children of the centuries;  
And if our ancients in excess of awe  
To Caesar rendered even more than his,  
We reap their legacy in sense of law;  
Yea, Freedom conscious grew by stress of thrall  
The might of one revealed the strength of all.

James Brunton Stephens

## A Historical Problem

KING AHASUERUS in his palace at Shu-Shàn  
Gave a feast unto his princes, Tarshish, Meres, Memucàn,  
And some others whose outlandish names it boots not to rehearse—  
You will find them all in "Esther," chapter First, and fourteenth verse.

And when the feast was at its height, and jest and story flew,  
And reverberant laughter shook the hangings, white, and green, and blue,  
Ahasuerus hammered with his sceptre on the board,  
And at the royal signal silence promptly was restored.

"Great lords, our Privy Councillors," the mighty monarch said,  
"The chiefest of our provinces is now without a head;  
"Assyria is vacant; and we ask you, who is he  
"Who worthiest is to rule the roost in that great Satrapy?"

Then one named one; another, one; till all had said their say;  
But at each name the monarch shook his head and answered "Nay.  
"Ye only think," he cried, "of high degree and princely birth;  
"Hen-w&horbar;y-nor is the man for Us, whose claim is simply—worth."

Hen-w&horbar;y-nor! At the name there burst so joyful a hurroo  
That the palace-hangings swayed in curves of white and green and blue;  
And, waving golden goblets, Tarshish, Meres, Memucàn,  
Etcetera, shouted "Live the King! Hen-w&horbar;y-nor is the man!"

Now, Hen-w&horbar;y-nor was a modest chief, who ruled a scanty folk,  
And his soul was filled with wonder when the news upon him broke  
(Which proves, if proof is wanted, that a man may be alert  
And wideawake to everything except his own desert).

The war-worn hero fain had put the glittering prize aside,  
But Duty called with trumpet-tone and would not be denied,  
And at the old familiar sound his answering spirit leapt,  
And his posts were straightway flying with the message "I accept."

And his people—ah, his people!—they were glad and they were sad:  
They were proud and yet cast down: the news was good, the news was bad.  
Each felt higher by a cubit, and yet lower by a head,  
And they bragged of his promotion, mingling tears with what they said.

But where all sincerely sorrowed, Persian chroniclers agree  
That the saddest of the mourners were the Civil Scribery—  
A superior class of men, who, these same chroniclers declare,  
Were the best of all good fellows in that land—or anywhere.

Now the Scribery had a custom, quite peculiar to this folk,  
To give departing friends an apotheosis of smoke;  
So they waited on the Satrap, and besought him to submit  
To the process on such evening as His Altitude thought fit.

“ 'Tis small honour we can render,” said the scribe who spoke their views;  
“We are poor, Sir—devilish poor—with ten per centum off our screws;  
“But we'd fain give you a pleasure to remember when you're gone”—  
And the kindly Satrap bowed his honour'd head, and said “I'm on.”

But when the deputation had departed, there came near  
A stealthy-footed chamberlain who whispered in his ear,  
“There s a Farewell Ode included in the pleasure they prepare!”—  
And the hero of a hundred fights dropped back into his chair.

Yea, he whose eye had ever in fierce conflict brightest glowed—  
He who before had ne'er known fear—now quailed before the Ode!  
And he cried, “Is there no outlet from this horrible abyss?  
“Chillianwallah, Delhi, Gujerat, were not a patch on this!

“Yet stay!”—for now a happy thought took shape within his brain—  
“You cannot Farewell-Ode a man who chooses to remain!”  
Oh, blessed inspiration! the solution clear he saw!  
And out he rushed, and wired Ahasuerus, “I withdraw!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Exit Farewell Ode. But synchronously with its exit came  
A new problem into history that still preserves his fame,  
For historians still dispute the question, each with some fresh lie,  
Why Hen-w&horbar;y-nor slung Assyria—But we know the reason why.

James Brunton Stephens

## A Lost Chance

[It is stated that a shepherd, who had for many years grazed his flocks in a district in which a rich tin-mining town in Queensland now stands, went mad on learning of the great discoveries made there.]

Just to miss it by a hair's breadth! Nay, not miss it! To have held it  
In my hand, and oftentimes through my fingers run the swarthy ore!  
Minus only the poor trick of Art or Science that compelled it  
To unveil for others' good the hidden value, and to pour  
On a thousand hearts the light of Hope, that shines for me no more!

To have held it in my hand in vacant listlessness of wonder,  
Taken with its dusky lustre, all incurious of its worth—  
To have trod for years upon it, I above, and Fortune under—  
To have scattered it a thousand times like seed upon the earth!  
Who shall say I am not justified who curse my day of birth?

To have built my hovel o'er it—to have dreamed above it nightly—  
Pillowed on the weal of thousand lives, and dead unto my own!  
Planning paltry profits wrung from year-long toil, and holding lightly  
What lay acres wide around me, naked-bright, or grass-o'ergrown—  
Holding lightly—and for that I curse—no, not myself alone!

For a youth made vain with riot, for the golden graces squandered,  
Home forsaken, dear ones alienated, Love itself aggrieved,  
I had sworn a full atonement, to the ends of earth had wandered,  
Drunk the dregs of expiation, unbelauded, unperceived—  
Heav'n alone beheld, and—mocks me with what "might have been" achieved!

All the cold suspicion of the world I took for my demerit,  
Its deceit my retribution, its malignity my meed:  
When Misfortune smote, unmurmuring I bowed my head to bear it,  
Driven to minister to brutes in my extremity of need—  
Who shall say now it delights not Heaven to break the bruised reed?

In the round of conscious being, from the rising to the setting  
Of Thine imaged self, Thy merciless, unsympathizing Sun,  
Was there one from hard Disaster's hand so piteously shrinking  
Whom this boon had more advantaged? God, I ask Thee, was there one?  
In Thy passionless immunity, Thou knowest there was none!

To the wrongs the world hath wrought me, to its coldness and disfavour,  
To the wreck of every venture, to enduring unsuccess,  
To the sweat of cheerless toil, the bread made bitter with the savour  
Of the leaven of regret and tears of unforgetfulness,  
Hadst Thou need to add Thy mockery, to perfect my distress?

For I hold it cruel mockery in man, or God, or devil,  
To assign the poor his blindfold lot from weary day to day,  
In the very lap of Affluence, on Fortune's highest level,  
Then, upon the brink of revelation, trick his steps away,  
And flash the truth upon him when the chance is gone for aye!

I had soothed repulse with hope, matched disappointment with defiance,  
Or opposed a pliant meekness to the driving storms of Fate:  
But—the merely “coming short!” Oh, what remedial appliance,  
What demeanour of resistance shall have virtue to abate  
The nameless woe that trembles in the echo of Too Late!

Oh, the might have been! the might have been! the sting of it! the madness!  
What a wave of the Inexorable chokes my fitful breath!  
What a rush of olden echoes voiced with manysounding sadness!  
What a throng of new despairs that drive me down the path of death!  
Who is there in heaven who careth? Who on earth who comforteth?

They on earth but seek their own. In eager crowds they hasten thither  
Where I trod so late unconscious on futurities untold.  
And I! I, whose all is gone! The curse of desolation wither—  
Whom? - Myself, who, year-worn, turn again unto the sin of old?  
Or the fiends who sold me poison for my little all of gold?

Both! All men! Yea, Heaven! But chiefly those who prosper where I languished!  
Those who reap the ripe occasion, where in many a wandering line  
The old traces of my footsteps, worn in fevered moods and anguished,  
Now are paths of rich expectancy for other feet than mine!  
Can I breathe without upbraiding? Shall I die without a sign?

It was mine! Is mine, by Heaven! Consecrated to me only,  
By the sacred right of service, by the pledge of weary years!  
By the bond of silent witness, by communion dumb and lonely,  
By the seal of many sorrows, by the sacrament of tears!  
Mine!—The echoes laugh, and fiends of hell are answering with jeers.



\* \* \* \* \*

Where am I? and who are these?—Nay, nay. Unhand me! Let me go, sirs!  
I am very very rich! I've miles on miles of priceless ore!  
I will make your fortunes—all of you!—and I would have you know, sirs—  
There is not a single sheep amissing—Loose me, I implore!  
It is only sleep that ails me—let me sleep—for evermore!

James Brunton Stephens

# A Piccaninny

Lo by the "humpy" door a smockless Venus!  
Unblushing bronze, she shrinks not, having seen us,  
Though there is nought but short couch-grass between us.

She hath no polonaise, no Dolly Varden;  
Yet turns she not away, nor asketh pardon;  
Fact is, she doesn't care a copper "farden."

Ah yet, her age her reputation spareth;  
At three years old pert Venus little careth,  
She puts her hand upon her hip and stareth;

All unabashed, unhaberdashed, unheeding,  
No Medicean, charmingly receding,  
But quite unconscious of improper breeding.

'Tis well; it smacks of Eden ere came sin in,  
Or any rag of consciousness or linen,  
Or anything that one could stick a pin in.

Could boundaries be neater? posture meeter?  
Could bronze antique or terra cotta beat her?  
Saw ever artist any thing completer?

A shade protuberant, beyond contesting,  
Where this day's 'possum is just now digesting,  
But otherwise, all over interesting;

Trim without trimming, furbelow, or bow on;  
Was ever sable skin with such a glow on?  
So darkly soft, so softly sleek, and—so on?

Was ever known so dark, so bright an iris,  
Where sleep of light, but never play of fire is—  
Where not a soupçon of a wild desire is?

O swarthy statuette! hast thou no notion  
That life is fire and war and wild commotion?  
A burning bush, a chafed and raging ocean?

Hast thou no questioning of what's before thee?  
Of who shall envy thee, or who adore thee?  
Or whose the jealous weapon that shall score thee?

Hast thou no faint prevision of disaster—  
Of dark abduction from thy lord and master—  
Of aliens fleeing, kindred following faster?

No faint forehearing of the waddies banging,  
Of club and heelaman together clanging,  
War shouts, and universal boomeranging?

And thou the bone of all the fierce contention—  
The direful spring of broken-nosed dissension—  
A Helen in the nigger apprehension?

Nay, my black tulip, I congratulate thee,  
Thou canst not guess the troubles that await thee,  
Nor carest who shall love or who shall hate thee:

Recking as little of the human passions  
As of the very latest Paris fashions,  
And soaring not beyond thy daily rations!

Die young, for mercy's sake! If thou grow older,  
Thou shalt grow lean at calf and sharp at shoulder,  
And daily greedier and daily bolder;

A pipe between thy savage grinders thrusting,  
For rum and everlasting 'baccy lusting,  
And altogether filthy and disgusting;

Just such another as the dam that bore thee—  
That haggard Sycorax now bending o'er thee!  
Die young, my sable pippin, I implore thee!

Why shouldst thou live to know deterioration?  
To walk a spectre of emaciation?  
To grow, like that, all over corrugation?

A trifle miscellaneous like her, too,

An object not "de luxe" and not "de vertu"—  
A being odious even to refer to?

Her childhood, too, like thine, was soft and tender;  
Her womanhood hath nought to recommend her;  
At thirty she is not of any gender.

Oh, dusky fondling, let the warning teach thee!  
Through muddiest brain-pulp may the lesson reach thee.  
Oh, die of something fatal, I beseech thee!

While yet thou wear'st the crown of morning graces,  
While yet the touch of dawn upon thy face is—  
Back, little nigger, to the night's embraces!

Hope nought: each year some new defect discloses;  
As sure as o'er thy mouth thy little nose is,  
Thy only hope is in metempsychosis.

Who knows but after some few short gradations,  
After a brace or so of generations,  
We two may have exchanged our hues and stations?

Methinks I see thee suddenly grow bigger,  
White in the face and stately in the figure,  
And I a miserable little nigger!

Should this be thus—oh come not moralising!  
Approach not thou my humpy poetising!  
Spare thine Iambics and apostrophising!

Let subtle nature, if it suit her, black me,  
Let vesture lack me, bigger niggers whack me,  
Let hunger rack me, let disaster track me,  
And anguish hoist me to her highest acme—

Let me bear all thine incidental curses,  
Nor share the smallest of thy scanty mercies,  
But put me not—oh, put me not in verses!

She grins. She heedeth not advice or warning,  
Alike philosophy and triplets scorning.

Adieu, then. Fare thee well. Ta-ta. Good morning

James Brunton Stephens

# A Son Of The Soil

Said the Preacher "All is Vanity!"—appending as a reason  
That the things we find our pleasure in are bound to pass and pall;  
But it seems to me that whatso'er endureth for a season  
Isn't half as vain as whatso'er hath never been at all.

When you find that what you've hitherto been wont to make a boast of  
Must be numbered with the ejects that from muddled brains proceed—  
When you find that in respect thereof there isn't ev'n a ghost of  
Fact to back it up—ah, then, you may cry "Vanity," indeed.

From my tend'rest years I've plumed myself on being an Australian—  
An Australian pure and simple, of the most authentic brand;  
Scotchman, Englishman, and Irishman alike to me were alien;  
I was sibber to King Billy through our common mother-land.

To the pride of local genesis my being was surrendered,  
The worthiest of immigrants I looked upon with scorn  
As exotic interlopers under foreign skies engendered,  
Though transplanted to my country fifty years ere I was born.

What although they wove the fabric of Australia's starry banner  
From the fibre of their being till the tissue was complete,—  
'Twas for us, the young, to wave it in our own emphatic manner  
In the face of all things ancient, European and effete!

"Ours the fitter hand to hold the reins," I sedulously boasted;  
And whenever at the festal board occasion would allow,  
"Australia for the Australians!" with a hip-hooray I toasted . . . .  
And to-day I learn I'm no more an Australian than a Chow.

Would to heav'n I'd been content to play the "Native" single-handed,  
Nor sought to be enrolled in that accursèd A.N.A., \*  
But the vain ambition seized me to be registered and branded  
As an organised Australian—and I gave myself away.

Not long to crush my fondest pride the ruthless Council tarried;  
Yester eve I made my overtures, the answer came at morn—  
"Dear Sir, at last night's meeting 'twas unanimously carried  
"That a person born at Battersea is not Australian-born."

"At Battersea?" "At Battersea?"—Unwitting of objection  
I had hardly even looked at my certificate of birth,  
Which, now "Returned herewith," brought dimly back to recollection  
A tale of my nativity on t'other side the earth.

How my mother (rest her soul) by wayward appetences fretted  
Cried aloud for the Old Country and a breath of English air;

How my father, ripe for holiday, her last caprice abetted. . . . .  
And I, a mere expectancy, went them unaware.

And though the self-same year in shining dells of myrtle found me,  
Where the wattle shed its perfume and the lories flashed their gems,  
And the white acacia blossoms flaked the verdure allaround me—  
I had been born in London, on the Surrey side of Thames.

Oh, vanity of vanities, the birth I made a boast of!  
Oh, unsubstantial eject of an inadvertent brain!  
And the self-confounding sentiment I made so brave a toast of  
Gr-r. I danced on my certificate—and even that was vain.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have slept upon the question. I have faced the problem squarely  
At the favoured hour of wisdom when the darkness turns to grey.  
I have reckoned up "nativity" impartially and fairly,  
And I've come to the conclusion they are fools, the A.N.A.

If begotten of and from the soil, what lack I to be native?  
What matters where my skin first felt the chill of mundane airs,  
If my origin was here, in this alluvium procreative  
Whose substance reached me through two generations of forbears?

That an accidental deviousness in time of incubation  
Should make my whence irrelevant, and pin me to Whereat—  
Do they really mean to play on me with calm deliberation  
A pyramidal, orbicular absurdity like that!

But no matter. Let them hug their narrow canons of admission:  
The A.N.A. are not the only natives in the land.  
There is yet another outlet for my dominant ambition;  
I will hie me to King Billy; he will take me by the hand.

He will lead me to his tribe, on slight preliminary payment;  
As a resurrected ancestor my status shall be fixed;  
As a native of the natives I will rid me of my raiment;  
I will rub me with goanna grease and charcoal intermixed.

I'll adorn my head with feathers, and to decorate my body  
I will grave it o'er with diagrams, and fill the grooves with clay.  
I will capture me a lubra by the suasion of a waddy—  
And who'll be native, then, my high and mighty A.N.A.?

\* Australian Natives' Association.

James Brunton Stephens



## A Visit From Abroad

A speck went blowing up against the sky  
As little as a leaf: then it drew near  
And broadened. -- ' It's a bird,' said I,  
And fetched my bow and arrows. It was queer!  
It grew up from a speck into a blot,  
And squattered past a cloud; then it flew down  
All crumply, and waggled such a lot  
I thought the thing would fall. -- It was a brown  
Old carpet, where the man was sitting snug,  
Who, when he reached the ground, began to sew  
A big hole in the middle of the rug,  
And kept on peeping everywhere to know  
Who might be coming -- then he gave a twist  
And flew away . . . . I fired at him but missed.

James Brunton Stephens

# Adelaide Ironside

Knowest thou now, O Love! Oh pure from the death of thy summer of sweetness!

Seest thou now, O new-born Delight of the Ransomed and Free!

We have gathered the flower for the fruit; we have hastened the hour of thy meetness;

For thou wert sealed unto us, and thine Angel hath waited for thee.

Not in disdain, O Love! O Sweet! of desires that are earthly and mortal,  
Not in the scorn of thine Art, whose beginning and end is Divine,  
So soon have we borne thee asleep through the glow of the uttermost portal,  
But in the ruth of high souls that have travelled with longings like thine.

Nothing is lost, O Love! O mine! and thy seemingly broken endeavour  
Here re-appeareth, transfigured as thou; yet the Art of thy youth;  
And the light of the Spirit of Beauty is on it for ever and ever;  
For Art is the garment of Praise, and the broidered apparel of Truth.

Seest thou now, O Love! how Art, in a way to mortality nameless,  
Liveth again, soul-informed, love-sustained, self-completing, for aye?  
How thy heart's purpose was good, and the dream of thy maidenhood blameless,—  
How thy fair dawn is fulfilled in the light of ineffable day?

Seest thou now, O Love! O Fair! how the high spiritlife is Art regnant—  
Art become bliss, and harmonious response to the Infinite Will?  
Fused and transfused into Love, with the germs of eternity pregnant—  
Crowned as the law of the beauty of Holiness; throned, yet Art still?

Not then in vain, O Love! thy dawn, nor the dream of thy holy ambition;  
Never a trace of thy finger hath witnessed for Beauty in vain;  
In the bloom of the noon of thine ardour thy soul became fair for fruition;  
We have smitten the green into gold but to spare thee the harvest of pain.

Nothing that came from thy hand, O Love, made void, cut off, evanescent,—  
From the infantile essay that strove with the weapon of outline alone,  
To the Angels thou lovedst to portray with luminous plumes iridescent,  
Till thy soul drew so near unto us that we took thee for one of our own.

Now may'st thou trace, O Heart! Sweet Heart! from on high all the way I have

led  
thee,  
From the youth of a world in the Seas of the South to unperishing Rome;  
For the lure of thy following soul was the sheen of my wings that o'erspread  
thee,  
Flushing with reflex of glory the path of thy pilgrimage—home.

By the way of the age of the world I have chosen to lead thee to glory;  
Of the wine of the might of the world have I given thee to drink ere thou slept;  
Where the Masters have walked I have laid thee, ensphered with the darlings of  
story;  
I have waked thee a perfected spirit; matured, yet thine innocence kept.

There, too, I led thee to feed thee with prescience and keen imitation  
Of the art-adjuvant Grace that hath given thee, a love-gift, to me;  
By the work of my hands did I wake in thee foretaste of Transfiguration,—  
For thine Angel once wrought upon earth as thou; and his work thou didst see.

Now is thy spirit, O Love, in mine. In thy heart I behold thou dost know me.  
I looked for thy glad recognition; no converse of aliens is this;  
Oft when thy longings went upward, thy soul, like a mirror below me,  
Caught my own loveliest visions in shapes of Elysian bliss.

Name me not now, O Love! O mine! for the name of my days of wayfaring  
Still hath the note of a fevered desire, and an echo of pain.  
Come thou, O Gift of long hope, to the home of thine Angel's preparing!  
There I shall show thee the mercy of God, and the things that remain.

James Brunton Stephens

# Australian Anthem

Maker of earth and sea,  
What shall we render Thee?  
All things are Thine!  
Ours but from day to day  
Still with one heart to pray,  
"God bless our land always,"  
This land of Thine.

Mighty in brotherhood,  
Mighty for God and good,  
Let us be Thine.  
Here let the nations see  
Toil from the curse set free,  
Labour and Liberty  
One cause—and Thine.

Here let glad Plenty reign;  
Here let none seek in vain  
Our help and Thine—  
No heart for want of friend  
Fail ere the timely end,  
But love for ever blend  
Man's cause and Thine

Here let Thy peace abide;  
Never may strife divide  
This land of Thine.  
Let us united stand,  
One great Australian band,  
Heart to heart, hand in hand,  
Heart and hand Thine

Strong to defend our right,  
Proud in all nations' sight,  
Lowly in Thine—  
One in all noble fame,  
Still be our path the same,  
Onward in Freedom's name,  
Upward in Thine

James Brunton Stephens

## Born Before His Time

Brown was weeping; likewise cursing; and with amplitude of reason;  
For a letter had been handed him that very afternoon  
Which proved he had been cruelly begotten out of season,  
That, in fact, he had been born a hundred centuries too soon.

From the day a friendly hint had told of coal on his selection,  
In the house, the street, the office Brown had revelled in a dream,  
Wherein himself and family and all the Brown connection  
Figured floating in a golden barge adown a silver stream.

Now he wept; and little wonder; all his gorgeous hopes had faded  
With the letter of the expert, lying crumpled at his feet,  
Which reported, with a wealth of scientific terms paraded,  
That the "coal" was hardly lignite, though a little more than peat.

"But some day," so ran the missive, "it is bound to prove a treasure."  
(Here a moment's re-awakened hope had cheered the reader's soul)  
"What with gas elimination and accumulated pressure,  
"In ten thousand years or so it will be marketable coal."

Such the wherefore of the change from exultation to lamenting—  
And he lifted up his voice and cursed the author of his birth,  
Through whose rash precipitation, unconsulted, unconsenting,  
He had thus been dumped ten thousand years too soon upon the earth.

Not alone his sire and mother he denounced and execrated,  
On their parents and fore-parents his anathemas he hurled,  
As one and all, in series, or in concert, implicated  
In his premature appearance on this carboniferous world.

For a change he cursed himself, as the untimely culmination  
Of the whole precocious family that bore the name of Brown;  
Till, exhausted of ferocity, the rage of imprecation  
Into unavailing optatives broke impotently down.

"Oh that things," he raved, "had always been as in the early ages,  
"Before the human race had lost the art of going slow,  
"When the life of man proceeded at such very easy stages  
That the proper age for wedlock was a hundred years or so!

"Would that each of my forefathers, like Methusalem, had waited,  
"Who till nigh upon two hundred shirked the matrimonial rôle!  
"Then I had not been ten thousand years unduly antedated,  
"But would doubtless in the future be co-eval with my coal.

"Now not for me shall this potential wealth be resurrected;  
"This bottled sunshine immature shall mellow not for me!

"Now another hand shall reap where I have—where I have selected,  
"And another lap receive the fruit that ripens on my tree!

"Oh that I had been consulted ere the world was set in movement,  
"When Providence was mapping out the future course of time,  
"I had certainly suggested as a manifest improvement  
"That a coal-seam and its owner should together reach their prime.

"I shall be a blessed fossil when the land shall yield its treasure,  
"I who registered the area and paid the money down—  
"Paid the money, little recking of another's gain and pleasure—  
"Oh that I could sleep ten thousand years and wake again John Brown!"

## PART II.

And the gods whom he had railed at in his petulant misprision  
Heard the prayer and sent such answer as appeared to meet the case:  
Heavy slumber fell upon him, and 'twas given him in a vision  
At the date himself had named to re-awake to time and space.

On his treasure-ground he stood; for though his data were deficient,  
The old land-marks being down, and every feature new and strange,  
Yet, as dreamers are at moments unaccountably omniscient,  
He was 'ware of his selection in despite of time and change.

And, behold, a crowd of workers, working leisurely and coolly,  
Who with marvellous machinery were scooping up his coal,  
Which an aeronautic vehicle received, and, freighted fully,  
Soared away with at the touch of some invisible control.

Then within the soul of Brown did grievous sense of wrong awaken,  
And on one who made to pass him he imposed a sudden hand—  
"Tell me, tell me," he demanded, "where my coal is being taken.  
"At whose order has this trespass been committed on my land?"

To whom in turn, the other, when a moment he had pondered,  
As if dubious how to grapple with an ignorance so great,  
"From what planet in formation have you innocently wandered?  
"My coal.' 'My land.' . . . Poor waif, you've come ten thousand years too late.

"In this world where every man an altruistic democrat is,  
"We avoid as much as possible the use of my's and thy's:  
"Up in Saturn or in Neptune or where'er your habitat is  
"I presume you still are wallowing in the stage of merchandise.

"You should have timed your visit for that earlier dispensation  
"When the individual flourished, reaping where he did not sow,  
"When he was counted wisest in his day and generation  
"Who made the largest profit with the smallest quid pro quo.

"Now a man reaps what he sows, and when his measure overfloweth  
"He who lacks may freely take, as each for each and all doth live,  
"Here are neither rich nor poor, no man exacteth, no man oweth,  
"And the zest of labour groweth with the vital need to give.

"And as touching this same mineral, whose multifarious uses  
"By our prodigal progenitors were only half divined,  
"Wheresoever to man's comfort or his pleasure it conduces,  
"There—his want his only title—there the owner you will find."

\* \* \* \* \*

Brown awoke another man, the situation now surveying  
In the light of such new knowledge as prophetic vision brings;  
'Twas a chastened Brown who mopped his forehead, tremulously saying,  
"By the Lord, I must anticipate that frightful state of things!"

So he went and squared the expert, who indited a voluminous  
Report upon the merits of the hypothetical coal,  
While relays of goodly samples most seductively bituminous,  
Judiciously distributed, beguiled the public soul.

Then a Company was floated and . . . the rest needs no relating,  
Brown, of course, sold out in time, nor have his riches taken wings.  
Brown is happy and respected; and he doesn't mind narrating  
How he managed to anticipate "that frightful state of things."





# Brunton Stephens

Dedicated by special permission to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria.

We cried, "How long!" We sighed, "Not yet;"  
And still with faces downward set  
"Prepare the way," said each to each,  
And yet again, "Prepare," we said;  
And toil, re-born of resolute speech,  
Made straight the path her feet should tread:—  
Now triumph, faithful hands and steadfast wills,  
For, lo! whose pomp the bannered Orient fills?  
Whose feet are these upon the morning hills?

Farewell, Sweet Faith! thy silver ray  
Now dies into the golden day.  
Farewell, Bright Dream, by minstrels sung!  
For She whom all our dreams foreran  
Has leaped to life, a Pallas sprung  
Consummate from the brain of man,  
Whom now we hail in mortal guise and gait,  
Thought clothed with flesh, partaker of our state,  
Made corporal in us now corporate!

Ah, now we know the long delay  
But served to assure a prouder day,  
For while we waited came the call  
To prove and make our title good—  
To face the fiery ordeal  
That tries the claim to Nationhood—  
And now in pride of challenge we unroll,  
For all the world to read, the record-scroll  
Whose bloody script attests a Nation's soul.

O ye, our Dead, who at the call  
Fared forth to fall as heroes fall,  
Whose consecrated souls we failed  
To note beneath the common guise  
Till all-revealing Death unveiled  
The splendour of your sacrifice,  
Now, crowned with more than perishable bays,

Immortal in your country's love and praise,  
Ye, too, have portion in this day of days!

And ye who sowed where now we reap,  
Whose waiting eyes, now sealed in sleep,  
Beheld far off with prescient sight  
This triumph of rejoicing lands—  
Yours, too, the day! for though its light  
Can pierce not to your folded hands,  
These shining hours of advent but fulfil  
The cherished purpose of your constant will,  
Whose onward impulse liveth in us still.

Still lead thou vanward of our line,  
Who, shaggy, massive, leonine,  
Could'st yet most finely phrase the event—  
For if a Pisgah view was all  
Vouchsafed to thine uncrowned intent,  
The echoes of thy herald-call  
Not faintlier strive with our saluting guns,  
And at thy words through all Australia's sons  
The "crimson thread of kinship" redder runs.

But not the memory of the dead,  
How loved so'er each sacred head,  
To-day can change from glad to grave  
The chords that quire a Nation born—  
Twin offspring of the birth that gave,  
When yester-midnight chimed to morn,  
Another age to the Redeemer's reign,  
Another cycle to the widening gain  
Of Good o'er Ill and Remedy o'er Pain.

Our sundering lines with love o'ergrown,  
Our bounds the girdling seas alone—  
Be this the burden of the psalm  
That every resonant hour repeats,  
Till day-fall dusk the fern and palm  
That forest our transfigured streets,  
And night still vibrant with the note of praise  
Thrill brother-hearts to song in woodland ways,  
When gum-leaves whisper o'er the camp-fire's blaze.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Charter's read: the rites are o'er;  
The trumpet's blare and cannon's roar  
Are silent, and the flags are furled;  
But so not ends the task to build  
Into the fabric of the world  
The substance of our hope fulfilled—

To work as those who greatly have divined  
The lordship of a continent assigned  
As God's own gift for service of mankind.

O People of the onward will,  
Unit of Union greater still  
Than that to-day hath made you great,  
Your true Fulfilment waiteth there,  
Embraced within the larger fate  
Of Empire ye are born to share—  
No vassal progeny of subject brood,  
No satellite shed from Britain's plenitude,  
But orb'd with her in one wide sphere of good!

\* \* \* \* \*

O Lady, in whose sovereign name  
The crowning word of Union came  
That sheds upon thine honoured age  
The glory of a rising light,  
Across our record's earliest page,  
Its earliest word, thy name we write . . .  
Symbol, Embodiment, and Guarantee  
Of all that makes us and maintains us free,  
Woman and Queen, God's grace abide with thee.

James Brunton Stephens

# Cape Byron

Upon the orient utmost of the land,  
Enfranchised of the world, alone, and free,  
I stood; before me, and on either hand,  
The interminable solace of the sea.

A white-winged hour of heaven, a fugitive  
Of which the angels wist not, hither fled,  
Whose plummy, rustling whispers bid me live  
Its length of moments as if grief were dead.

Oh memorable hour of beauteous things!  
The heaving azure melting into light;  
The chequered sport of fleet o'ershadowings;  
The nearer emerald curling into white;

The shoreward billows merging each in each,  
To sunder yet again, fold, and unfold;  
The shining curve of far-receptive beach;  
The silvery wave-kiss on the gladdened gold;

The grandeur of the lone old promontory;  
The distant bourne of hills in purple guise,  
Athrob with soft enchantment; high in glory  
The peak of Warning bosomed in the skies!

Oh all too fair to be so seldom seen,  
This shadowy purple on the mountains sleeping—  
This sapphire of unutterable sheen—  
This beauty-harvest ever ripe for reaping!

For what high end is all this daily boon,  
Unseen of man, in sightless silence spent?  
Doth lavish Nature vainly importune  
The unconscious witness of the firmament?

Or is it that the influent God, whose breath  
Informs with glory sea and shore and hill,  
His infinite lone rejoicing nourisheth  
Upon the beauteous outcome of His will?

Or is it but a patient waiting-while  
Against a day when many an eye shall bless,  
From lowly cottage and imperial pile,  
This wide tranquillity of loveliness;—

Against a day of many-thronging feet,  
Of virtues, valours, all that builds and saves—

Of human loves responsive to the sweet  
Melodious importunity of waves?

I only know that this empurpled range,  
This golden shore, this great transcendent sea,  
Are now a memory that will not change  
Till I become as they—a memory.

James Brunton Stephens

# Check

The night was creeping on the ground;  
She crept and did not make a sound  
Until she reached the tree, and then  
She covered it, and stole again  
Along the grass beside the wall.

I heard the rustle of her shawl  
As she threw blackness everywhere  
Upon the sky and ground and air,  
And in the room where I was hid:  
But no matter what she did  
To everything that was without,  
She could not put my candle out.

So I stared at the night, and she  
Stared back solemnly at me.

James Brunton Stephens





# Drought And Doctrine

Come, take the tenner, doctor . . . yes, I know the bill says "five,"  
But it ain't as if you'd merely kep' our little 'un alive;  
Man, you saved the mother's reason when you saved that babby's life,  
An' it's thanks to you I ha'n't a ravin' idiot for a wife.

Let me tell you all the story, an' if then you think it strange  
That I'd like to fee ye extry—why, I'll take the bloomin' change.  
If yer bill had said a hundred . . . I'm a poor man, doc, an' yet  
I'd 'a' slaved till I had squared it; ay, an' still been in yer debt.

Well, you see the wife's got notions on a heap o' things that ain't  
To be handled by a man as don't pretend to be a saint;  
So I minds "the cultivation," smokes my pipe, an' makes no stir,  
An' religion an' such p'int's I lays entirely on to her.

Now, she's got it fixed within her that, if children die afore  
They've been sprinkled by the parson, they've no show for evermore;  
An' though they're spared the pitchforks, an' the brim-stun', an' the smoke,  
They ain't allowed to mix up there with other little folk.

So when our last began to pine, an' lost his pretty smile,  
An' not a parson to be had within a hunder mile—  
(For though there is a chapel down at Bluegrass Creek, you know,  
The clargy's there on dooty only thrice a year or so)—

Well, when our yet unchristen'd mite grew limp an' thin an' pale,  
It would 'a' cut you to the heart to hear the mother wail  
About her "unregenerate babe," an' how, if it should go,  
'Twould have no chance with them as had their registers to show.

Then awful quiet she grew, an' hadn't spoken for a week,  
When in came brother Bill one day with news from Bluegrass Creek.  
"I seen," says he, "a notice on the chapel railin' tied;  
They'll have service there this evenin'—can the youngster stand the ride?"

"For we can't have parson here, if it be true, as I've heard say,  
There's a dyin' man as wants him more'n twenty mile away;  
So —He hadn't time to finish ere the child was out of bed  
With a shawl about its body an' a hood upon its head.

“Saddle up,” the missus said. I did her biddin' like a bird.  
Perhaps I thought it foolish, but I never said a word;  
For though I have a vote in what the kids eat, drink, or wear,  
Their sperritual requirements are entirely her affair.

We started on our two hours' ride beneath a burnin' sun,  
With Aunt Sal and Bill for sureties to renounce the Evil One;

An' a bottle in Sal's basket that was labelled “Fine Old Tom”  
Held the water that regeneration was to follow from.

For Bluegrass Creek was dry, as Bill that very day had found,  
An' not a sup o' water to be had for miles around;  
So, to make salvation sartin for the babby's little soul,  
We had filled a dead marine, sir, at the fam'ly waterhole.

Which every forty rods or so Sal raised it to her head,  
An' took a snifter, “just enough to wet her lips,” she said;  
Whereby it came to pass that when we reached the chapel door  
There was only what would serve the job, an' deuce a dribble more.

The service had begun—we didn't like to carry in  
A vessel with so evident a carritur for gin;  
So we left it in the porch, an,' havin' done our level best,  
Went an' owned to bein' “mis'rabable offenders” with the rest.

An' nigh upon the finish, when the parson had been told  
That a lamb was waitin' there to be admitted to the fold,  
Rememberin' the needful, I gets up an' quietly slips  
To the porch to see—a swagsman—with our bottle at his lips!

Such a faintness came all over me, you might have then an' there  
Knocked me down, sir, with a feather, or tied me with a hair.  
Doc, I couldn't speak nor move; an' though I caught the beggar's eye,  
With a wink he turned the bottle bottom up an' drank it dry.

An' then he flung it from him, bein' suddintly aware  
That the label on't was merely a deloosion an' a snare;  
An' the crash cut short the people in the middle of “A-men,”  
An' all the congregation heard him holler “Sold again!”

So that christ'nin' was a failure; every water-flask was drained;

Ev'n the monkey in the vestry not a blessed drop contained;  
An' the parson in a hurry cantered off upon his mare,  
Leaving baby unregenerate, an' missus in despair.

That night the child grew worse, but all my care was for the wife;  
I feared more for her reason than for that wee spark o' life. . . .  
But you know the rest—how Providence contrived that very night  
That a doctor should come cadgin' at our shanty for a light. . . .

Baby? Oh, he's chirpy, thank ye—been baptized—his name is Bill.  
It's weeks an' weeks since parson came an' put him through the mill;  
An' his mother's mighty vain upon the subjick of his weight,  
An' reg'lar cook-a-hoop about his sperritual state

So now you'll take the tenner. Oh, confound the bloomin' change!  
Lord, had Billy died!—but, doctor, don't you think it summut strange  
That them as keeps the Gate would have refused to let him in

Because a fool mistook a drop of Adam's ale for gin?

James Brunton Stephens

# For My Sake

(Written in aid of the Children's Hospital.)

MATTHEW XXV. 40.

"Inasmuch as ye gave ear unto the sighing  
Of the least of these the children of my care,—  
Of your love from death redeemed them, or in dying  
Stood between them and the shadow of despair;—

"Inasmuch as when the little ones did languish,  
Ye put forth the hand to make their burdens light;—  
Inasmuch as when they lay on beds of anguish,  
Ye were with them in the watches of the night;—

"All the joy ye brought to light when sorrow hid it  
Now awaits you, an exceeding great reward.  
As ye did it unto these, to ME ye did it;  
Enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

"Lord, when sought we out the children that did languish?  
When put forth the hand to make their burdens light?  
Lord, we wist not when they lay on beds of anguish,  
And we slept throughout the watches of the night.

"For our lives were full of trouble and of labour,  
And the night followed hard upon the day:  
Had we lingered with the children of our neighbour,  
Our own little ones had perished by the way."

"Inasmuch as though ye might not touch or tend them,  
Ye were with them in your love to heal and save,  
And were hands and feet to those who did befriend them,  
By the gold and by the silver that ye gave.

"Find your treasure where your ransomed ones have hid it;  
Take it back a thousandfold for your reward.  
As you did it unto these, to ME ye did it;  
Enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

James Brunton Stephens

# From An Upper Verandah

What happier haunt could the gods allot  
For loftiest musing to sage or bard?—  
Yet I would that this upper verandah did not  
Look down on my beautiful Neighbour's Back-yard!

I stir the afflatus: Descend, O ye Nine!  
Let the crystalline gates of the soul be unbarred!  
No. My thoughts will keep running in one fixed line—  
The clothes-line that hangs in my Neighbour's Back-yard!

Let me gaze on the hills; let me think of the sea;  
Of the dawn rosy-fingered—the night silver-starred:—  
(What dear little feet must the owner's be  
Of those stockings that hang in my Neighbour's Back-yard!)

Let me tune my soul to a measure devout:—  
Ah, the musical mood is all jangled and jarred,  
While things with borders, and things without,  
Keep flutt'ring down there in my Neighbour's Back-yard!

Are the True and the Good and the Beautiful dead,  
That I win not one gleam of Pierian regard?  
(Does she suffer, I wonder, from cold in the head?—  
Such a lot of mouchoirs in my Neighbour's Back-yard!)

Comes the fit. While it sways me, high themes would I sing!  
Prometheus! Achilles! Have at you! En grade!  
Alexander the Great—(oh that I were a string  
On that apron hung out in my Neighbour's Back-yard!)

I will shut my eyes fast—I have hit it at last,  
Now my purest Ideals flit by me unmarred;  
And odours of memory rise from the past,  
(And an odour of suds from my Neighbour's Back-yard!)

Ah, yes! when the eyelids together are prest,  
Every vestige of earth we throw off and discard.  
(These are flannels, I think. Is she weak in the chest?—  
There! I'm looking again at my Neighbour's Back-yard!)

Since the Muses back out, let Philosophy in:  
Let me ponder its problems cold and hard.  
Ah! Philosophy dies in a celibate grin  
At that bolster-case down in my Neighbour's Back-yard!

Oh shame on my rapidly silvering hairs!  
Oh shame on this veteran battered and scarred!

I to be witted with these frilled—affairs!  
Confound my neighbour! Confound her Back-yard!

Why seek for the blossoms of Auld Lang Syne,  
When the boughs where they budded are blasted and charred?—  
Faugh! the whole concern's too alkaline—  
It's washing day in my Neighbour's Back-yard!

James Brunton Stephens

## Had I But Known

I loved thee! Ah, those vows of love,  
So fondly made, so soon unmade!  
I trusted thee all men above—  
Ah, fatal trust, so soon betrayed.  
A dream that wore the face of truth  
Was what I loved. The dream has flown.  
All, all I've lost, faith, hope and love,  
Had I but known! Had I but known!

Thou weapest. Would that I could shed  
A tear for either joy or grief!  
But from the heart grown cold and dead  
There springs no fountain of relief.  
Now all my life is tearless pain,  
My hope forgetfulness alone,  
And all my speech the one refrain—  
Had I but known! Had I but known!

James Brunton Stephens



# Hate

My enemy came nigh,  
And I  
Stared fiercely in his face.  
My lips went writhing back in a grimace,  
And stern I watched him with a narrow eye.  
Then, as I turned away, my enemy,  
That bitter heart and savage, said to me:  
'Some day, when this is past,  
When all the arrows that we have are cast,  
We may ask one another why we hate,  
And fail to find a story to relate.  
It may seem then to us a mystery  
That we should hate each other.'

Thus said he,  
And did not turn away,  
Waiting to hear what I might have to say,  
But I fled quickly, fearing had I stayed  
I might have kissed him as I would a maid.

James Brunton Stephens

## In A 'Bus

(A SPRING CONTRAST.)

A quarter of a century ago,  
Just such a face as this upon me shone,  
And in a 'bus too;  
And then, as now, it was the warm springtide;  
And then, as now, there was no soul inside  
Excepting us two.

There are the same blue eyes, the delicate nose.  
Same rosebud mouth, and cheeks of blushful rose,  
Same chin bewitching;  
Same throat of sheeny white and perfect mould,  
Same light-brown hair, with scattered threads of gold  
The brown enriching.  
Ah! how this present beauty's counterpart  
Woke instant tumult in my fluttering heart—  
Pain, pleasure, blended!  
Yet this one is as beautiful as that . . .  
Dear me! why don't my heart go pit-a-pat  
Now, as it then did?

One glance of those bright eyes, and all was o'er:  
I wished to die; at least I cared no more  
For life without her:—  
These, glancing on me now, are quite as fair;  
Yet, strange to say, I do not seem to care  
One bit about her.

I wished I were a glove upon that hand—  
The eardrop in her ear, the zone that spanned  
Her waist so trimly;  
And now, in view of equal charms, the bliss  
Of such astounding metamorphosis  
I see but dimly.

Well I recall the mad desire to hear  
Her name who turned the common atmosphere  
To heavenly ether:—  
Why is it that I do not now, as then,

Care twopence if the name be M. or N.,  
Or both, or neither?

Well I remember how I longed to pay  
Her fare, or in some other lordly way

Impress her duly:—

Why is it, then, though not less generous grown,  
I'm better pleased this nymph should pay her own  
Than mulct "yours truly"?

And how quick-soaring hope as quickly fell  
When I descried a military swell  
Her brooch portrayed in;  
Why is it, then, 'twould leave me undistressed  
If a whole regiment adorned the breast  
Of this fair maiden?

And how my anguish, when she drew her glove,  
And showed the plain gold sign of wedded love,  
Refused assuagement:—  
Why is it that I do not care a jot  
If this one wears such fateful ring, or not—  
Plain, or engagement?

Is it because my taste hath changed its style,  
And now prefers, in place of Venus' smile,  
The frown of Pallas?  
Ah no: Minerva, too, has lost her sway;  
I met her antitype this very day,  
And felt quite callous.

Is it the climate? Ah, if vernal airs  
Incline the heart to amorous affairs,  
This Austral season  
Should stir in every vein, when beauty's by,  
The throb of lusty youth! Oh no; the cli-  
mate's not the reason.

Is it the place! Still, no; this threepenny 'bus  
Is much the same as rolled the twain of us  
Through Piccadilly;

And fitter place, when all is said and done,  
There could not be for "bussing." (Pass the pun;  
I know it's silly.)

Is it that I have learned their sweetest smiles  
And airs and graces are but "wanton wiles,"  
And mere pretences?  
Or is it that the naked eye of youth  
Sees all through glamour, while I see the truth  
Through convex lenses?

But wherefore beat about the bush, old man?  
You know that you can give, if any can,  
Reasons in plenty.

Must I, then, own it?.. 'Tis—because—because—  
I am not quite—not quite—the man I was  
At five-and-twenty!

An empty socket shows where passion burned;  
My sense of beauty now, alas, has turned  
Pure intellectual,  
And to arouse a tumult in the brain,  
Or thrill the system with delicious pain,  
Quite ineffectual.

So, I may gaze on her, and gaze my fill. . . .  
D'ye know, I think I'm somewhat human still;  
I like her, rather;  
But oh, how things are changed from what they were!  
For all she is so fair, I feel to her  
Just like a father.

She dowers me with a smile from lip and eye,  
And while I wonder what she meaneth by  
The sweet bestowment,  
"Please pass my fare," comes from her beauteous lips,  
And, as I take the coin, our finger tips  
Meet for a moment.

A thrill! A thrill! I do declare, a thrill!  
Upon my honour, I believe I'm still

Intensely human!  
I pause and ponder what I mean to do.  
Methinks I'd better scuttle home unto  
My own old woman.

James Brunton Stephens

# Johnsonian Address

.“Let observation with extensive view  
“Survey mankind from China to Peru”—  
(And whence—permit me in parenthesis  
To ask—on such historic night as this  
Could one more fitly, seasonably, quote  
Than from some page that Samuel Johnson wrote,  
Our Godsire, in the honoured name of whom  
This feast we spread, this temple we illumine,  
These long church wardens we)—but to resume—  
“Let observation with extensive view  
“Survey mankind from China to Peru,”  
And judgment following observation try  
Those countless multitudes to classify.  
Camper, and Blumenbach, and Cuvier too,  
Surveyed mankind from China to Peru,  
And many a savant of more modern fame  
With the same end in view has done the same  
Seeking some formula that should embrace  
The thousandfold divisions of the race—  
And yet the theme grows more and more occult,  
For each presents a different result.

Let us essay the task.—Imprimis, quit  
Their uncouth jargon that but darkens wit.  
What least pretence of light can mortal see  
In “Dioscurian Mongolidae?”  
What help in “Xanthochroic” can be found?  
Is “Hyperborean Samoeid” aught but sound?  
“Dolichocephalic” ’s a wild guffaw,  
“Orthognathous” and “Prognathous”—mere jaw.  
Not ours to come to grief upon the rocks  
Of groups and families and unplaced stocks,  
Branches, varieties and sub-varieties  
That only swell their total of dubieties—  
But, as of old the Gentile and the Jew  
Made up the whole world in the Hebrew view,  
So we (to-night at least) will hold it true  
That all mankind divides itself in two—  
Two classes only form the race of man—

JOHN-SO-NI-AN and NON-JOHN-SO-NI-AN.

And we, the Hebrews of this later day—  
“The Chosen People,” one might fitlier say—  
We, too, have wandered in the wilderness  
For many a year without a fixed address—  
(I do not say “the Wilderness of Sin;”  
The cases are sufficiently akin  
Without that detail being counted in)—  
We, too, from shifting stage to shifting stage  
Have plodded through our thirsty pilgrimage,  
A tabernacular existence led  
(As our sonorous godsire would have said);  
From well to well—at least from pub. to pub.—  
We've humped the sacred Lares of the Club,  
Still keeping, like the Jew, a hopeful eye  
Upon the Promised Land of by-and-by.

And now, when twenty homeless years have passed,  
Behold us in that Promised Land at last,  
Vagrants no more, but making jubilee  
Under our own vine and our own figtree.  
But here the parallel fails.—Unlike the Jew,  
We have not played the privative cuckoo;  
We've turned no Gentile fledgling from its nest,  
No Non-Johnsonian fowl have dispossessed;  
We have ourselves the twigs and mosses laid—  
In point of fact, our home is pure home-made.

But “twigs and mosses!” What a sorry trope  
For this grand culmination of our hope—  
This lordly pleasure-house that we have built—  
This brave o'erhanging wonderment of gilt—  
This spacious hall, where festival is graced  
With all the garniture of art and taste,  
Rich with pictorial treasures that display  
Whatever portraiture can well portray,  
From grisly Johnson in his suit of snuff  
To simpering Chloe in her native buff—  
Those cloisters, in whose tessellated aisles  
Sits Nicotina wreathed in vaporous smiles—

This billiard-chamber where our privileged ears  
May hear all night the music of the spheres—  
This salle de lecture, this ideal bar,  
Where shipwreck lurks not, where no sirens are—  
This whole substantial fabric of no dream  
But solid brick and perdurable beam!

But what if, sloughing off the things that were,  
We shed the old Johnsonian character?  
If this migration to a home delectable  
Should land us in the groove of the Respectable?  
Oh, never may we shame our godsire thus!  
Still let his golden words appeal to us,  
"I'm with you, boys," when in the midnight dark  
His roystering comrades roused him for a lark;  
"I'm with you, boys," he answered with delight,  
And Heaven alone knows what they did that night!  
Still may these royal words define the true  
Johnsonian temperament and point of view;  
Still walk we in the old Johnsonian road,  
"I'm with you, boys," our motto and our code;  
Still be our virtues in this order reckoned—  
Fellowship first, Decorum a bad second.

Nor fear that moral poison lurks herein—  
Desipere in loco isn't Sin;  
Take him for type who, Wisdom's hierarch,  
Retained the relish of the midnight lark;  
Take this for counsel, keep it to the letter—  
Be good as Johnson—but, oh, don't be better!

So walking in the light his spirit sheds,  
This gilded splendour will not turn our heads;  
So to the Gentile scorner who would say  
That luxury is the herald of decay,  
Our answer, framed in fashion old and famous,  
Shall be "Domum, non animum, mutamus!"

James Brunton Stephens



# King Billy's Skull.

THE scene is the Southern Hemisphere;  
The time — oh, any time of the year  
Will do as well as another; say June,  
Put it down likewise as the full of the moon,  
And midnight to boot, when churchyards, they say,  
Yawn in a most unmannerly way;  
And restless ghosts in winding-sheets  
Go forth and gibber about the streets,  
And rehearse old crimes that were better hid  
In the darkness beneath the coffin-lid.  
Observe, that I merely say, on dit;  
But though it never happened to me  
To encounter, either in-doors or out,  
A posthumous gentleman walking about,  
In regulation sepulchral guise,  
Or in shirt, Crimean or otherwise,  
Or in hat and boots and usual wear,  
Or, save for a cloud, unbecomingly bare,  
Or in gaseous form, with the stars shining through him,  
Beckoning me to interview him —  
On mission of solemnest import bound,  
Or merely a constitutional round,  
Beginning at twelve as books declare,  
And ending at first sniff of morning air; —  
Though all such things, you will understand,  
Have reached me only at second-hand,  
Or third, or fourth, as the case may be,  
Yet there really did occur to me  
Something which I perforce must call  
Ultra-super-natural; —  
In fact trans-ultra-super-preter-  
Natural suits both truth and metre.  
There is an Island, I won't say where,  
For some yet live who mightn't care  
To have the address too widely known;  
Suffice it to say: South Temperate Zone.  
In that same Isle, thus precisely set down,  
There's a certain township, and also a town —  
(For, to ears colonial, I need not state

That the two do not always homologate). —  
And in that same town there's a certain street;  
And in that same street, the locals to complete,  
There's a certain Surgery, trim and neat,  
Kept by —— well, perhaps it were rash  
To call him other than Doctor Dash.  
At midnight, then, in the month of June  
(And don't forget the full of the moon),  
I sat in that Surgery, writhing with pain,  
Having waited fully two hours in vain  
For Doctor Dash, who, I understood,  
Was engaged in the questionable good  
Of adding one to the sum of woe  
That includes all creatures here below, —  
Especially those whose particular dolour,  
As mine was then, is a rotten molar!  
Have you noted that midnight's final stroke  
Has a way of solemnizing folk?  
Though, goodness knows, in my special case,  
With a cheek that was quite a three-quarter face,  
There needed no solemnizing power,  
No eerie vibration of midnight hour,  
Chilling through heart, and thrilling through limb,  
To put me en rapport with all things grim,  
With all things dreary and dismal and dim,  
The whole Night side of Nature (see Crow — not Jim).  
Hardly was tolled the day's decease  
From the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece,  
When a running fire of perplexing knocks  
Seemed to proceed from a rosewood box,  
That stood on a table whereon were laid  
The horrible tools of the surgical trade.  
Somewhat slowly the notes began  
With minims, and then into crotchets ran, —  
From crotchets to quavers, then faster they grew,  
Gallop, gallop, gallop, thirty-two  
Beats to the semibreve — doubling once more  
To a semibreve split into sixty-four,  
Till failing to follow so rapid a rate,  
I gave in at a hundred and twenty-eight.  
I was scared, I confess, but the wish to know  
Was stronger than terror of ghostly foe;

And stealthily, stealthily nearing the knocks,  
I pressed my ear on the rosewood box,  
And fancied I could discern beneath  
The peculiar rattle of chattering teeth;  
Which, as need hardly be said or penned,  
Set each particular hair on end,  
Froze all my young blood in a moment of time,  
And curdled my bile, and my chyle, and my chyme!  
But though terror undoubtedly gained the day,  
Yet curiosity too had its way,  
And the first had no sooner sung out Avaunt!  
When the second cried Stay! what the deuce do you want?  
Often as I have told the tale,  
This particular part is so 'like a whale,'  
That I always feel an apology due  
For insisting upon it as perfectly true,  
This is what followed, — a grinding noise,  
A friction of bones that grew to a voice;  
And I heard these words (on my honour, I did),  
'Hi! . . . Cooney! . . . You fella . . . Open 'm lid!'  
Trembling all over from foot to head,  
'How shall I open it, Spirit?' I said;  
'Lies there, oh lies there no key about?  
For how can I open the coffer without?'  
A kind of an audible ossified grin,  
A gnashing of laughter, came from within,  
And little by little I understood,  
'You fella. . . . new chum. . . . You no good;  
White fella. . . . crawler. . . . you no go,  
Key in 'm lock. . . . my word. . . . 'tis so.'  
It was so indeed. I opened, and lo!  
An afrit? A goblin? A bottle-imp?. . . . No;  
Simply a Human Skull, enshrined  
In rosewood, padded and velvet-lined, —  
A low type of skull, as one could see  
From the brutish depression where forehead should be;  
Yet surely precious in some degree  
To judge from the case, not to mention the key  
And the lock by a well-known patentee.  
All was still for three minutes at least;  
Knocks and voices alike had ceased;  
There lay the skull as silent and dumb

As Lot's wife's salted cranium.  
Had it been all a gross mistake  
In the frenzy begotten of molar-ache?  
Was the whole affair but a fancy freak,  
Forged in the heat of a throbbing cheek?  
Was it all — but rather than wait the event,  
I determined to make the experiment.  
So summoning courage a query to frame,  
I boldly inquired, 'You there, what name?'  
Which, to supply explanation due,  
Is the Lingua-Nigra for 'Who are you?'  
This is what followed — a grinding noise,  
A friction of bones that grew to a voice;  
And a slight elevation I certainly saw  
Of the skull as if raised on the under jaw;  
And this time beyond the chance of mistake,  
My senses about me, and wide-awake,  
No victim of frenzy, no fancy's gull,  
I heard the words — 'Me King Billy's Skull!'  
Alas, poor Billy, I knew him well,  
In his full corporeal personnel,  
But a man might give his own father the go-by,  
Were there only his brain-pan left to know by.  
And this was Billy! the last of his race!  
That sightless mask was his regal face!  
How oft from the cavity within  
Those fangs now set in ghastly grin,  
Had I seen the curling smoke proceed  
Of the eleemosynary weed —  
A cavity even now displayed  
Through a gap for his pipe expressly made!  
Here, where the Kingly glance shot through,  
Two eyeless sockets appal the view;  
And where flourished the fibre of Cocoa-nut  
Is an utterly towless occiput! —  
But scant was the time to moralize,  
For soon a light in the place of the eyes,  
A wild-looking, diabolical spark,  
Like the eye of an angry cat in the dark,  
Came and went, and went and came —  
The spirit of Billy, perhaps, aflame:  
And deeming it such, 'What would you, pray?'

I asked in a stammering, tremulous way;  
 'What is your will, oh, William, say?  
 William, rex dei gratia!  
 This is what followed, — a grinding noise,  
 A friction of bones that grew to a voice;  
 'You take me out. . . . go long o'street. . . .  
 You come place where three road meet. . . .  
 S'pos'n keep middle till come to bridge. . . .  
 Cross over creek, an' go up ridge. . . .  
 Up on 'im top lie down hollow tree. . . .  
 Lift up big sheet o' bark. . . . you see  
 Bones of brother belongin' to me. . . .  
 Take 'im up head. . . . put mine fella down. . . .  
 You fetch 'im brother head back to town. . . .  
 Put 'im in box. . . . lock 'im up like o' here. . . .  
 Dash no do me!. . . . my oath!. . . . No fear!  
 What COULD it all mean? — Three days ago  
 I had seen this monarch in earth laid low:  
 How had his fleshless skull returned  
 From the grave where I saw him so 'quietly inurned?'  
 And what upon earth was the drift of the dark  
 Allusion to Dash in his closing remark?  
 And what could import a mission so strange —  
 This visit to death, this mysterious exchange?  
 And wherefore of all men should I be selected  
 To. . . . pending an answer I did as directed,  
 And in less than an hour the exchange was effected.  
 King Billy supplanted, the box closed once more,  
 And myself fleeing forth from the surgery door!  
 Time and the hour, as Shakespeare says,  
 Run through the very roughest of days: —  
 (Forgive misquotation — the letter kills;  
 The spirit, at all events, is Will's)  
 Time and the hour having run their race,  
 I found myself back in the self-same place,  
 Dash standing by with a smiling face,  
 Wiping his weapon with dainty grace,  
 Myself no longer a surgical case,  
 But relieved (to the tune of twenty bo,  
 With the molar transferred to my trouser fob.  
 I could now look around me; the box was there,  
 Done up in canvas, and labelled 'with care;'

And Dash, beholding my steadfast stare,  
 Said with Mephistophelian grin,  
 That looked like the very triumph of Sin,  
 'Bet you twenty to one in gold,  
 You never will guess what that box doth hold . . .  
 Not bet? . . . Well, listen while I unfold  
 A neat little tale of a neat little prank,  
 Played by myself upon Doctor Blank,  
 The Hospital Surgeon, who, as you know,  
 Is my open friend, but my secret foe,  
 Well, to begin ab initio,  
 King Billy, whom we saw laid low  
 In his mother earth some days ago,  
 The last of the Aborigines,  
 Had long been dying of lung disease.  
 The melancholy fact was known  
 To Doctor Blank and myself alone,  
 And each of us watched with wary eye,  
 Patiently waiting till Billy should die.'  
 (Here I ventured to ask him the reason why.)  
 'Why? Don't you see? this man, as the last  
 Of a great island race of the perished past —  
 (Save one old gin, from whom can be  
 No further scion, as all can see)  
 Is a wonderful curiosity:  
 And Blank and myself had sworn an oath,  
 Secret from each, yet known to both,  
 To achieve some scientific note  
 In catalogue or anecdote,  
 By the munificent presentation  
 Of King Billy's Skull to the British Nation!  
 Fancy the honour, the kudos, the fame!  
 A whole museum athrill with one's name.  
 Fancy the thousands all crowding to see  
 'Skull of the last Aborigine,  
 Presented by Asterisk Dash, M.D.'!!  
 A couple of men not sufficing to fix  
 The numbers on all the umbrellas and sticks,  
 And every voice in the eager crowd  
 Pronouncing the name of Dash aloud!  
 Fancy the honour, the kudos, the fame!  
 But fancy the everlasting shame,

If in place of Dash the name should be Blank!  
The Quack! the Charlatan! Mountebank!  
'But to proceed. To daily view  
Weaker and weaker His Majesty grew.  
I tended him kindly, went out of my way  
To see how he fared from day to day:  
But all my kindness, in pill or potion,  
Showed small by the side of Blank's devotion;  
All my kindness in potion and pill  
Only made Blank show kinder still.  
Well, one dark day (which ill betide)  
Returning home from a country ride,  
I found, to my sore astonishment,  
That Blank had had the patient sent  
To the Hospital Nigger-ward — to die  
Beneath my antagonist's very eye!  
(Knew you ever such treachery?) —  
I owe him one, to myself I said;  
Let him have the body, I'll have the head,  
By hook or by crook, let what will come —  
By fair or by foul, I'll have my thumb  
On that potentate's caput mortuum!  
I bribed a wardsman to let me know  
When the patient should be in articulo;  
And, accordingly, one afternoon I got  
A letter to say King Billy was not.  
I suddenly found I had been remiss  
In my social duties to Blank, and this  
Induced me to write him to give us to tea  
The pleasure of his company.  
Blank took the bait, came, found — not me,  
But himself alone with Mrs. D.,  
Who very much regretted to say  
How the Doctor was suddenly called away,  
Much, to be sure, against his will,  
But Mrs. . . a . . Harris was very ill: —  
In an hour or so he would return: —  
Edith, tell Mary to bring the urn.  
'Ere Blank sat down with my woman-kind,  
I had slit Billy's head above and behind.  
When Blank was requested to say a grace,  
There was no skull behind Billy's face.

When Blank was just about to begin,  
One skull was out and another skull in.  
Ere Blank had buttered a morsel of toast,  
The job was three-quarters through almost.  
Ere Blank had sipped of his second cup,  
The flesh was spliced, and the head tied up:  
And before he had drunk it to the dregs,  
I had done him, as sure as eggs are eggs!  
'And he knows it too; but, all the same,  
He hasn't blown it as yet for shame.  
Let him publish it now as soon as he may,  
He will find himself rather late in the day,  
For this very night the treasure will be  
Severed from Blank by leagues of sea.  
Think of it, Sir, and congratulate me —  
'Skull of the last Aborigine,  
Presented by Asterisk Dash, M.D.'!!'

\* \* \* \* \*

In a certain Museum, I won't say where,  
But it's not very far from Russell Square,  
Should the gentle Reader e'er happen to see  
'Skull of the last Aborigine,' —  
And find, perchance, some poetical gull  
Crooning the theme of a Monarch's skull,  
Tell him to lay his theme on a shelf,  
On peril of being a numskull himself;  
Or to modulate his Parnassian whim  
To the tune of 'Brother belongin' to him'!!

James Brunton Stephens



# Macaulay's New Zealander

It little profits that, an idle man,  
On this worn arch, in sight of wasted halls,  
I mope, a solitary pelican,  
And glower and glower for ever on Saint Paul's:—  
Will no soft-hearted mortal be so very  
Obliging as to row me o'er the ferry?

Here three-and-thirty years\* I've stood estranged,  
A dream of ruin all around me stretching;  
And centuries shall see me yet unchanged,  
Ever in act to sketch, but nothing sketching;  
Mutely immutable, constrain'dly still,  
With nought to stand against, except my will.

A wondrous lot is mine; ye bide your doom  
Till men say Vixit: mine begins ere birth;  
A lonely ghost projected from the womb  
Of Time-to-come, I linger now on earth.  
Ye vertebrates date back, while I commence  
My weary present in the future tense.

A weird eidolon; a born paradox;  
A fixture framed of incorporeal particles;  
Yet dropped in many an Editorial box,  
Blown thence in squibs, or hurled in Leading Articles;  
A Nomad, though my permanent address is  
In Volume Second of Macaulay's Essays.

I was not born of woman (see Macduff—  
Nor stare to hear my lore so far extends;  
The sire who bore me trafficked in such stuff,  
And had his Shakespeare at his finger-ends:  
The quitch is in the blood—such blood as ghost has;  
I know as much as he; at least, almost as).

I was not born of woman; gave no pain;  
Through no preliminary stage did pass;  
But sprang, a Pallas, from Macaulay's brain,  
Though not like her, with spear and helm of brass;

My spear, a pencil of Queensland plumbago;  
My casque, a felt one—latest from Otago.

And therein lies the sting of all I bear—  
That after brooding ages on mine arch,  
And treasuring what the centuries prepare,  
And noting what ye proudly term the March

Of Progress, and assimilating all  
“The long result of Time,” see “Locksley-hall;”—

That after seeing all that mortal can,  
That after learning all that man can learn,  
This forecast shade, already more than man,  
Must go and be a baby in its turn!  
I've got to go and be a little kid,  
When old perhaps as Cheops' Pyramid!

I've got to wear a little purpled cap;  
Pass through, perchance, some brutal mode of swaddling;  
To gather tissue from a bowl of pap;  
To undergo no end of molly-coddling;  
To be brought up by hand, or, worse and worse,  
To be a parasite upon a nurse.

And in due course this cultured soul of mine  
Must learn its Catechism by easy stages;  
And sundry rods shall yet be steeped in brine,  
To stimulate the heir of all the ages;  
And men shall file away with prose and rhyme  
To sharpen me, the foremost file of time.

I pray you, purist, faint not at the word;  
For in the distant day whereof I speak,  
Your chastened phrases shall be held absurd;  
What you call slang shall be our Attic Greek;  
And every man be file, or bloke, or cove;  
And bloods make oath by Gum, instead of Jove!

For standing here, immovable and dumb,  
An arch-Stylites, birth, not death, awaiting,  
Faint inklings reach me of the time to come,

Beneath the loud To-day reverberating;  
And I could tell of things so strange and wild,  
Your wisest don would feel himself a child;—

Could show up many a now-belauded quackery;  
Could play the deuce with half your saints and sages;  
Could settle for you whether Boz or Thackeray  
Shall be the admiration of the ages;  
And whether Morris, Swinburne, and Rossetti  
Shall number with the great, or with the petty;—

Could tell how empire shall have changed its place,  
But must not "blow," although an Australasian;  
Could tell you which shall be the ruling race,  
But may not shock the orthodox Caucasian,  
Nor dare your curiosity assuage,

Lest I should make half-castes become the rage;—

Could tell you quite a fairy tale of science,  
And wonders in Political Economy,  
That set your time-worn statutes at defiance,  
And hold them out of date as Deuteronomy:  
The darky, boss; the trashy white, a "brudder;"  
Man at the prow, and woman at the rudder;—

How all shall go by natural selection;  
No man allowed to live unless good-looking;  
How love shall vent itself in vivisection,  
And charms be rated subsequent to cooking;  
How girls instead of knitting sofa-covers,  
Shall spend their leisure in tattooing lovers;

And how magnetic belts with dazzling hues  
Shall draw unwilling arms around the waist;  
How damsels to enhance their lips shall use  
Odyllic force condensed into a paste;  
And woo the bashful from his slow simplicity  
With cakes of desiccated electricity; —

How education, as a general rule,  
Shall be conducted by familiar spirits;

How "circles" shall be formed in every school,  
And rappings shall reward superior merits;  
And how the spectroscope, applied to spectres,  
Shall re-enact all history, on reflectors; —

And how your vaunted patents and inventions  
Shall be for playthings to the great hereafter  
And all your philosophical pretensions  
Be themes of inextinguishable laughter  
Your engineering form for future times  
The droll machinery of pantomimes.  
Your steam—your boast! What is it but a vapour?  
Or what more fleeting simile will do:  
'Twill be effete as—let me see—what paper?  
Eureka!—say, the "Saturday Review!"  
Whose name, indeed, shall live—simply because  
These lines give token such a paper was.

For there be those whose memory shall rot,  
And pass, and be as it had never been;  
Of such my famed progenitor's is not;  
Valhalla holds him in the high serene:—  
My Prospero! Oh may he prosper where he is,  
Untouched by that unenviable caries!

For though I dumbly execrate the day  
When first he chained me here, a lorn eidolon,  
To be a literary popinjay,  
And market-stock for every sucking Solon,  
Be Hyperborean calm his long reward!  
I'm proud of him; you know, he was a lord.

Mundanes, I say Good-bye, as on ye march;  
I fain would shake your hands, but can't get at you,—  
My prison-ruin waiting in the arch,  
As in the marble waits the future statue.  
I hate you, London-bridge! And if Saint Paul is  
A name I loathe, the fault is Lord Macaulay's.

Witlings, a word: bring me no more to book;  
And take not any more my name in vain;  
Cast, if ye will, one final, loving look,

As upon one ye ne'er shall see again.  
Behold me—let it be the last occasion—  
Served up in verses for "The Australasian."

\* Macaulay's *New Zealander* dates from 1840.

James Brunton Stephens

# Marsupial Bill

1

IT was the time when geese despond,  
And turkeys make their wills;  
The time when Christians, to a man,  
Forgive each other's bills;  
It was the time when Christmas glee  
The heart of childhood fills.

2

Alas! that, when the changing year  
Brings round the blessed day,  
The hearts of little Queensland boys  
Wax keen to hunt and slay—  
As if the chime of Christmas time  
Were but a call to prey.

3

Alas! that when our dwellings teem  
With comfits and with toys—  
When bat and ball and wicket call  
To yet sublimer joys—  
Whatever can't be caught and killed  
Is stale to certain boys.

4

Strange that, with such instructive things  
From which to pick and choose,  
With moral books and puzzle maps  
That "teach while they amuse,"  
Some boys can find no pleasure save  
In killing kangaroos.

5

Where Quart Pot Creek to Severn's stream  
  
Its mighty tribute rolls,  
There stands a town—the happiest town,  
I think, betwixt the poles;  
And all around is holy ground;

In fact, it's full of holes.

6

And there, or thereabouts, there dwelt  
(Still dwells, for aught I know)  
A little boy, whose moral tone  
Was lamentably low;  
A shocking scamp, with just a speck  
Of good in embryo.

7

His name was Bill. To wallabies  
He bore an evil will;  
All things that hop on hinder legs  
His function was to kill,  
And from his show of scalps he won  
The name, Marsupial Bill.

8

His face and form were pinched and lean,  
And dim his youthful eye:  
'Tis well that growing Queensland boys  
Should know the reason why;—  
My little lads, 'twas all along  
Of smoking on the sly.

9

Through this was William small and lean,  
Through this his eye was dim,  
Nor biceps rose on nerveless arm,  
Nor calf on nether limb;—  
Ye growing boys and hobbledehoys,  
Be warned by me—and him.

10

His elevated shoulders stood  
But little way apart;

His elbow joints—Oh, poor avail  
Of mere descriptive art!  
I would I had an artist man  
To show them William's "carte!"

11

And should you ask how such a one  
A mighty hunter grew,  
So many flying does outsped,  
So many boomers slow—  
Bill owned a canine mate, to which  
His victories were due.

12

A brute so complex that he set  
"The fancy" all agog;  
Of breed that ne'er found name in ex-  
hibition catalogue!  
Oh, would I had an artist man  
To show them William's dog!

13

On Christmas-eve, at set of sun,  
A hollow tree he sought;  
A match, a scratch, a puff, and Bill  
Was lost in smoke and thought,  
And "all his battles o'er again"  
In fervid fancy fought.

14

No ha'penny thing, no penny thing,  
No thing of common clay  
Such brilliant memories evoked,  
With hopes as bright as they—  
It was his father's Sunday pipe  
That Bill had stolen away.

15

For many a time and oft had he  
Admired the wondrous bowl,  
The stem, the mouthpiece, and the tout

Ensemble of the whole,  
Until desire of it had grown  
A portion of his soul—



16

Until desire o'ergrew the fear  
Of kick, or cuff, or stripe.  
That eve, when Bill stepped forth from home  
The guilty scheme was ripe—  
His right-hand trouser-leg concealed  
His father's Sunday pipe.

17

And now within a heaven of smoke  
Against the tree he leant,  
The while the mellow influence  
Through all his vitals went,  
And for the first time in his life  
He knew what meerschaum meant.

18

So subtly stole the influence  
His inmost being through,  
He did not mark the sudden bark  
That signalled kangaroo,  
Nor noted that his constant mate  
Had vanished from his view.

19

His mind and eye were on the pipe  
And he had just begun  
To count how many scalps would go  
To purchase such a one,—  
When turning round his head, he saw,  
Against the setting sun,

20

A Boomer! . . . and, as when the waves  
Close o'er a drowning head,  
Sudden the whole forgotten past  
Before the soul lies spread,

And all the charge-sheet of a life  
In one brief glance is read—

21

Ev'n so in instant tumult thronged,  
About his wildered mind,  
A thousand shapes of wounded things,  
Of every size and kind;  
And some were scalped, and some were maimed  
And some were docked behind.

22

The kangaroo, the wallaroo,  
The wallaby was there;  
The 'possum jabbered in its fright,  
Sore wept the native bear;  
The stricken paddamelon moaned  
Its ineffectual prayer;  
The battered 'guana fixed on him  
Its dull remonstrant stare;  
While tail-less lizards swarmed and crawled  
About him everywhere;  
And limbless frogs denounced him with  
The croaking of despair;  
And tortured bats with ghostly wings  
Clung to his stiffened hair;—  
But suddenly the vision passed,  
And Bill became aware  
That he was in the Boomer's arms,  
And bounding through the air.

23

Hop, hop, they went, o'er broken wilds,  
Where, stacked in many a mound,  
The hoards of clay-embedded ore  
Rose grimly all around:—  
Unheeding miners' rights, they jumped  
A claim at every bound.

24

Then on o'er wastes so very bare  
That even "stripping" ceased;  
  
And as they neared the hill countrie  
The frightful pace increased;  
Nor granite slope nor timbered ridge

Told on the tireless beast.  
The sun went down, the full-orbed moon  
Came swimming up the East,  
Nor yet the "old man" slackened speed,  
Nor yet his prey released.

25

Still on and on, till from a cliff  
A sentry challenged near,—  
Though what the challenge or reply  
No mortal man may hear;  
We only know that for a sign  
Each drooped his dexter ear.

26

Whate'er it meant, the "old man" checked  
His onward course thereat,  
Dropped Bill, and dragged him by the wrists  
A cross a wooded flat,  
To where the KANGAROO-GEMOT  
In full assembly sat.

27

Ringed by the fathers of the tribe,  
Surrounded yet alone,  
The Bossaroo superbly posed  
Upon a granite throne—  
A very old "old man" who had  
Four generations known.

28

Upon his mournful eye the woes  
Of all his race were writ;  
Yet age and sorrow had not dimmed  
His majesty a whit;  
And, oh, his metatarsal bones  
Displayed the real grit!

29

Nor unattended sat the sires;  
Behind them crouched their mates;

Nor kangaroos alone composed  
The Congress of the States,  
But all proscribed marsupial breeds  
Had sent their delegates.

30

Lo, at a signal from the boss  
The serried ring gave way,  
And through an opening in the throng  
The captor dragged his prey,  
Bowed to the chair, then called to aid  
A strapping M.L.A.

31

And thus, betwixt a double guard,  
The prisoner found his place;  
And all around were wrathful eyes  
Without a gleam of grace;—  
One wild concatenated scowl  
Was focussed in his face.

32

Now hitherto poor Bill had been  
As dumb as dumb could be,  
But at that pandemoniac scowl  
His struggling tongue got free;  
He lifted up his voice and cried,  
“Oh, please, it wasn't me!”

33

A tumult rose; but with a sign  
The boss the riot checked,  
Then cleared his throat and bade the guard  
The prisoner's clothes inspect:—  
“Ay, ay, Sir!” came the prompt reply,  
Or words to that effect.

34

They spake the language that was heard

While yet the world was young;  
And he who knows it knows all speech

That out of it hath sprung:—  
(With compliments to Dr. Hearn,  
It was the Aryan tongue).

35

And should you ask how Bill was up  
To every word they said,  
And how such antiquated lore  
Had got into his head—  
'Twas his pre-natal memory  
That served him in such stead.

36

They searched the prisoner's clothes, and first  
They brought the pipe to view,—  
For though it is a mystery  
To me as well as you,  
It is a solemn fact that Bill  
Had stuck to it all through.

37

Then one by one his poor effects  
Were collared by his guards,—  
Peach-stones, fig-chew, a catapult,  
A greasy pack of cards,  
A half-cut cake of cavendish  
(Prime quality—Gaujard's);

38

But when from out a leathern sheath  
A blood-stained knife they drew,  
All round the court, from hand to hand,  
They passed it in review:  
Each sniffed the blade in turn, and each  
In turn said—"Kangaroo!"

39

And last, a printed document  
Their simple souls perplexed:

Each eyed the paper learnedly,  
And passed it to the next;

But not an Aryan of them all  
Could even guess the text.

40

At length they summoned to their aid  
An old and learned clerk,  
Who, as tradition told, had been  
With Noah in the ark—  
Though possibly tradition here  
Had overshot the mark.

41

And while a murmur of applause  
Through all the Congress ran,  
Bowed with the weight of many years  
Hopped forth that gray "old man,"  
Mounted his ancient spectacles,  
Sneezed thrice, and thus began:—

42

"Whereas it is expedient to  
Encourage the destruc-  
tion of marsupial animals—  
(Sensation and a ruc-  
tion in the court, with groans and cries  
From joey, doe, and buck)—

43

"Be it enacted therefore by  
The Queen's most Excellènt  
—er—Majesty—er—by and with  
The advice and the consent  
Of Council and Assembly of  
Queensland in Parliamènt—

44

"In the construction of this Act—"  
But here arose a sort  
Of interruption from the Right,

Betwixt a cough and snort;  
While from the less fastidious Left

Came cries of "Cut it short!"

45

Then clause on clause, with careless haste,  
The learned clerk despatched;  
But when he read, "The scalps when shown  
Must have the ears attached,"  
The whole assembly rushed the guard  
And at the prisoner snatched.

46

But when the reader raised his voice,  
And thus gave forth the sense,  
"For kangaroo scalps ninepence each,  
For wallabies' three pence,"  
Division rose amongst his foes,  
And stayed their violence.

47

For those at ninepence each, elate  
At such a mark of fame,  
Drew back, and left the threepenny mob  
To do the deed of shame;  
But the low-quoted wallabies,  
Disgusted, dropped the game.

48

Bill strove to speak; his voice was drowned  
With catcall, groan, and hiss,  
Until the Bossaroo, with slow  
Judicial emphasis,  
Said, "Capias-nisi-prius—Boy,  
What say you to all this?"

49

Then silence fell upon the peers,  
And on the threepenny mob,  
The while this wicked little boy  
Said, snivelling through a sob,

"Oh please, I never done it, sir—  
No, never; sepmebob!

50

"I am a gentle orphan boy,  
Nor never jines no row:  
My father is a tributer,  
My mother keeps a cow:  
We always lives respectable:  
We tries it, anyhow:  
The bill as that old bloke has read  
I never seen till now;  
And that 'ere blood 's on that 'ere knife  
Since father killed the sow."

51

Then spake the Boss:—"The quality  
Of mercy is not strained;  
Yet there is still a point or two  
We'd like to have explained,  
Ere we absolve you from the charge  
Whereon you stand arraigned.

52

"But since the law is merciful,  
And hastes not to condemn,  
If witnesses to character  
Exist, go, fetch us them:  
The court will sit to-morrow night  
At nine fifteen, p.m.

53

"And since without your father's pipe  
You dare not home return,—  
(Our ancient brother with the specs  
Has twigged the whole concern;  
And, truly, what he doesn't know  
Ain't worth your while to learn):—

54

"And further, since the oath of man  
  
Is but of scant avail,  
And few like Regulus return



Spontaneously to jail—  
(My fit is coming on; I feel  
The symptoms in my tail)—  
We will dispense with oaths, and keep  
The meerschaum as your bail.

55

“To-morrow—(oh my vertebrae!)  
To-morrow night at eight,  
At the Wheal Edith, by the flume,  
A corp'ral's guard will wait;  
These shall escort your witnesses,  
Blindfolded. Don't be late.

56

“And this remember—(oh my joints!)—  
Not one of all the race  
Whose leaders boss this scalping job  
May stand before my face;  
The witness of a Britisher  
Will prejudice your case.

57

“Now he who brought you will reverse  
The process—(oh my toe!)—  
Your downward path is up above,  
Your upward down below:  
Stand not upon the order of  
Your going, sir; but go.

58

“And take this for thy dowry, boy,  
'Existence is a sell,'  
I once was bitten by a dog,  
Since which I am not well.  
Methinks my speech already shows  
Symptoms of doggerel.”

James Brunton Stephens

## Marsupial Bill: Part Second.

1

FAST flew the hours. We may not tell  
Of William's weary quest,  
How round the outskirts of the town  
He roamed like one possessed —  
Nor with what guileful arts he plied  
The foreign interest.

2

Enough that at the appointed hour,  
With backers at his back,  
He faced the noble Bossaroo,  
(Still hypochondriac) —  
And introduced his witnesses,  
A yellow and a black;

3

A placid-eyed Mongolian  
From sandy Pechelee,  
Who'd stimulate an inch of soil  
To do the work of three,  
Or make a metamorphic rock  
Sprout into cabbage;

4

A big buck nigger next; who once  
Bowed down to stocks and stones  
(For years digested captives formed  
The tissue of his bones),  
But now he is an Anglican,  
Who a live 'Bissop' owns,  
Besides a gorgeous suit of slops,  
And the proud name of Jones.

5

Slow rose the lordly Bossaroo,  
And bade unveil their eyes;  
And, when those aliens gazed around  
On all that dread assize,  
They howled in unison and made  
Night hideous with their cries.

6

For Bill had lured them lyingly —

But why should we explain;  
The whole thing was exceptional,  
And can't occur again.  
Besides, to poke at mysteries  
Is wanton and profane.

7

With single will they turned on Bill,  
And blazed his evil name;  
With double tongue their charge they flung,  
And swore unto the same;  
With treble spite did both unite  
To spoil his little game.

8

'Me see him catchee kangaloo,'  
Deponed on oath Ah Chee;  
'Me see him — hi! hst! — soolem dog,  
No mind my cabbageee —  
Me lose hap clown, him knockee down  
Ten twenty lettucee!'

9

'Massoopy Bill, him wicked boy,'  
Deponed the South Sea swell;  
'Two moon, come Bissop preach in church,  
Him loaf outside an' yell;  
Me run — him run — me catch — him say  
'Tree scalp if you no tell.'

10

So, when the learned clerk had both  
Their depositions read,  
The judge drew forth his judgment cap,  
And put it on his head,  
And sentenced poor Marsupial Bill  
To hang till he was dead.

11

'But since' — so spake the Bossaroo —  
'From evidence we know  
That many a scalped and gory head  
This night through him lies low,  
We'll scalp him first!' — and all the house,  
Nem. con., cried 'Be it so!'  
And as a sign and seal of doom,  
Turned down the right thumb-toe.

12

'With his own knife,' the Boss resumed,  
'Ah Chee shall do the deed —  
The gods poetic justice love —  
And make the assassin bleed  
By his own proper instrument.  
Mongolian, proceed.'

13

What followed next, who gave the word  
For mate to link with mate,  
Nor Bill, nor Jones, nor yet Ah Chee  
Can very clearly state;  
But that 'twas a corroboree  
All three corroborate.

14

In vain poor William prayed — in vain  
His suppliant knees he bowed,  
And by a pile of sacred names  
For mercy cried aloud —  
The point was at his occiput,  
When, lo! from out the crowd

15

Stepped forth a rare and radiant dame,  
The Boss's pride and stay,  
(The dam of Bossáarovitch,  
Still young, though somewhat gray,  
An elegant marsupial,  
Well-mannered, bien née) —  
Stepped forth before them, and remarked  
Seductively, 'Belay!'  
Then, kneeling by the judgment seat,  
Thus sweetly said her say: —  
'Most Noble Grand, have you forgot  
That this is Christmas Day?

16

'Beseech you, bid that heathen hand  
Withhold the bloody knife!  
Recall your fearful words of doom —  
Nay, turn not from your wife,  
But give me as a Christmas Box  
The little captive's life.'

17

Then quickly from his granite throne  
Down leaped the Noble Grand,  
And, kneeling, kissed right courteously  
His royal lady's hand;  
Then, as he raised her up, pronounced  
The joyful countermand;  
Whereat the rest turned up their toes,  
That Bill might understand  
The Congress willed his days should yet  
Be long upon the land.

18

Then raged the revelry anew,  
With sound of drum and fife;  
The Boss himself forgot his woes,  
And danced as if for life;  
While the old clerk forgot himself,  
And kissed the Boss's wife,

19

And when there fell a weariness  
On all the panting throng,  
And Bossaroo and ancient clerk  
Alike had nigh 'gone bong,' —  
Amid a jaded pause was heard  
A call for 'Joey's Song!'

20

And presently a little head,  
As from a little nest,  
Peeped o'er a snug maternal pouch,  
And sang its little best,  
(The song is very rare, and full  
Of antique interest): —  
'What does little Joey say  
In his pouch at peep-of-day?  
'Let me hop,' says little Joey;  
'Mother, let me hop away.'  
'Joey, rest a little longer,  
Till the little legs are stronger.'  
So he rests a little longer,  
Then he gaily hops away.'

21

He ceased; the pre-diluvian clerk  
Rose on his quivering shanks,

And with a well-turned compliment  
Proposed a vote of thanks —  
Just then a breathless picket broke  
All gory through the ranks!

22

But ere his trembling tongue had time  
To tell his tale of woe,  
And why thus grimly he disturbed  
The happy status quo, —  
With giant bound, Bill's faithful hound  
Leaped madly on the foe!

23

Ah, then and there was sudden scare,  
The swiftest took the lead;  
Ah, there and then — but oh, the pen  
Is impotent indeed!

Oh, would I had an artist man  
To show the Great Stampede!

24

What next befell may somewhat strain  
The limits of belief;  
But where so many marvels are,  
Why boggle at the chief?  
'Twere shame if lack of faith should cause  
Our moral come to grief.

25

From all the flying ruck the dog  
Had singled out the Queen;  
Another instant, and the Boss  
A widower had been,  
When — (that's a pithy saw that bids  
Expect the unforeseen) —

26

BILL CALLED HIM OFF! The dog drew back,  
And on a boulder leant.

'Twas months ago, and still that dog  
Is pondering the event,  
And even to this very hour  
Can't fathom what it meant;

It was a thing so utterly  
Without a precedent.

27

But Bill, the Chinaman, and Jones,  
The Queen, and you, and I,  
We know the secret of the change,  
We know the reason why;  
And — may I be allowed to add? —  
The moral hangs thereby.

28

But since nor boy nor man receives  
Advice without a pang,  
And this narrator's muse has failed  
To catch the proper twang, —  
The moral hanging plainly there,  
Suppose we let it — hang.

James Brunton Stephens

# Mute Discourse

"Fulmina. . . . coelo nulla sereno."

—LUCRETIUS.

God speaks by silence. Voice-dividing man,  
Who cannot triumph but he saith, Aha—  
Who cannot suffer without Woe is me—  
Who, ere obedience follow on the will,  
Must say, Thou shalt—who, looking back, saith Then,  
And forward, Then; and feebly nameth, Now,  
His changing foothold 'twixt eternities;  
Whose love is pain until it finds a voice—  
Whose seething anger bubbles in a curse—  
Who summarizes truth in party-cries,  
And bounds the universe with category,—  
This word-dividing, speech-preëminent man,  
Deeming his Maker even as himself,  
Must find Him in a voice ere he believe.  
We fret at silence, and our turbulent hearts  
Say, "If He be a God He will speak out."  
We rail at silence, and would fain disturb  
The duly ordered course of signless years.  
We moan at silence, till our quivering need  
Becomes incarnate, and our sore desire  
Passes into a voice. Then say we, "Lo,  
He is, for He hath spoken; thus and thus  
He said."  
So ever radiating self,  
Conditioning a God to our degree,  
We make a word the top of argument—  
Fond weaklings we, whose utmost scope and goal  
Is but a pillared formula, whereon  
To hang the garlands of our faith and love.  
Well was it in the childhood of the world  
To cry for open vision and a voice:  
But in the riper time, when we have reached  
The kindly heart of universal law,  
And safe assurance of essential good,  
Say, rather, now that had there been no God,



There had been many voices, freaks of sound,  
Capricious thunders in unclouded skies,  
Portentous utterance on the trembling hills  
And Pythian antics in oracular caves—  
Yea, signs and wonders had been multiplied,

And god succeeded god, the latest ever  
Lord-paramount, until the crazèd world  
Had lost its judgment 'mid contending claims.  
O men! It is the child's heart in the man's  
That will not rest without a lullaby—  
That will not trust the everlasting arm  
Unless it hear the voice in tale or song.  
It is the child's heart in the man's that seeks,  
In elements of old Semitic thought,  
And wondrous syllables of Grecian tongue,  
Recorded witness of another way  
Of things than that which God hath willed to be  
Our daily life. And if in times of old  
The child-heart caught at wonder, and the charm  
Of sundered system—if untutored faith  
Found confirmation in arrested suns,  
And gnomon-shadows of reverted hours,  
And in the agonized Thus saith the Lord  
Of mantled seers with fateful burden bowed—  
We, children of a clearer, purer light  
(Despising not the day of smaller things,  
Nor calling out to kick the ladder foot  
Because our finger-tips have verged on rest)—  
We, youths, whose spring brings on the lawful hope  
To loose the girdle of the maiden Truth,—  
We, men, whose joyous summer morn hath heard  
The marriage bell of Reason and of Faith—  
We, turning from the windy ways of the world,  
And gazing nearly on the silent march  
Of love in law, and law in love, proclaim  
"In that He works in silence He is God!"  
So, from the very permanence of things,  
And voiceless continuity of love,  
Unmixed with human passion, fretted not  
By jealousy, impatience, or revenge,  
We gather courage, and confirm our faith.

So, casting back the scoffer's words, we say,  
Even because there is no fitful sign,  
And since our fathers fell asleep all things  
Continue as at first—this wonder of no change  
Reputes the God, to whom a thousand years  
Are as one day. Yea, to the willing ear,  
The dumb supremacy of patience speaks  
Louder than Sinai. And if yet we lack  
The witness and the voucher of a voice,  
What hindereth that we who stand between  
The living Nature and the living God,

Between them, yet in both—their ministers—  
By noble life and converse pure, should be  
Ourselves the very voice of God on earth,  
Living epistles, known and read of all?  
O Brothers! Were we wholly soul-possessed  
With this Divine regard—would we but soar  
Beyond the cloud, and centralize our faith  
Upon the stable sun—would we reject  
Kaleidoscopic views of broken truth  
Distorted to the turn of perverse will—  
Make daylight through traditionary ranks  
Of intervening hells, and fix the eye  
Upon the shining heart of Supreme Love,—  
Would we . . . But why prolong the bootless “would”?—  
I, who know all the weakness and the fear,  
The weary ways of labyrinthine doubt,  
The faintness on the dizzy height—who lack  
The Gabriel-pinion wherewithal to range  
The unsupporting medium of pure sky—  
Who know the struggle of the natural soul,  
Breathing a finer ether than its own—  
Who, venturing on specular power too vast,  
Scathed by my own reflector, fall down blind;  
Who, at the least wind of calamity,  
Drag shiftlessly the anchor of my hope,  
And, shrieking from the waves, catch gladly at  
A Name and Sake wherewith to close a prayer!  
Yet though I faint and fail, I may not take  
My weakness for the Truth, nor dare misread  
The manual sign of God upon the heart,

The pledge, beyond the power of any voice,  
Of sure advance unto the perfect whole;  
Nor treat the tablet-tracing of His hand  
As it were some old tombstone left apart  
In grave-yard places for the years to hide  
Deep in irrelevant and noxious growth.  
Oh, Brothers! push the weeds aside, lay bare  
The monument, and clear the earthy mould  
From the Divine intaglio. Read thereon  
The uncancelled charter of your native hope,  
Nor crave articulate thunders any more,  
Read there the universal law of good;  
Unqualified evangel; blessedness,  
The birthright of all being; peace, that lends  
No weak subscription unto sin, and yet  
Disarms despair. Read, and believe no more  
In final triumph of concreted sin

In any soul that cometh forth from God,  
And lives, and moves, and hath its being in Him.  
Read thus, and pray the while that he who writes  
Reck his own rede.  
Oh, Sister, would I bruise  
The snowy petals of thy prayerful faith,  
Or chill the tendril-twinings of thy hope  
With evil influence of wintry scorn?  
Would God that any faith of mine could give  
Such quiet stability unto my feet  
As thine to thine! Oh, if thy kneeling wakes  
A smile at all, 'tis Heaven that smiles because  
Thou ask'st so little! God will o'erfulfil  
Thy dreams of silver with unmeted gold.  
Oh, Sister, though thou dost believe in wrath,  
Though shapes of woe flit through thine imagery,  
Though thou has ta'en the cloud into thy faith,  
The little rift of blue that breaks thy dark  
Brings thee more comfort and more fixèd hope  
Than unto me this cloudless open vast  
Wherein my soul floats weary and alone!  
Yet think not we are voyaging apart  
To different havens. Truth is one. Yet One  
Alone hath reached it in straight course. Each soul

Hath its own track, its currents, and its gales;  
And each toward sequel of attainment must  
Fetch many a compass. Some keep land in view—  
The beacon-hills of old authority—  
And draw assurance from a shore defined,  
Though it be dire with cloud, and capes of wrath;  
While some shoot boldly into perilous seas—  
Pacific-seeming seas, yet not without  
A weary loneliness of land forsook,  
And fear of sudden cyclone, and still more  
Deceitful calm. Or, if the metaphor  
Be yet too cruel for a sister's heart,  
Oh, think that in the common way of love  
We are never out of hearing; but may each,  
Whene'er we will, join hand with each, and say,  
"God—Father—Love," the triune sum of truth,  
And Watchword of the universal Christ.  
Sister, I think, and in the thought take heart,  
That when the Day of Reconcilement comes,  
As come it will, the all-transmuting Truth  
May find affinities in things that seem  
To us the very elements of war.  
Dost thou remember how, in childhood's days,

One gave us with to recognize the south  
By turning faceward to the mid-day sun;  
And we believed, and took the facile plan  
For unexceptioned law? But even now  
I hear the chime of Austral noon, and, lo,  
The sun is in the north? Yet 'tis the same  
Bright sun that shone and shines upon us both,  
On me the evil, and on thee the good;  
Yea, more, it is the same, noon-glaring here,  
That now with hints of orient twilight steals  
Over the stillness of thy morning dreams.  
Dost thou remember how in those old days,  
The dear old days that ne'er may come again—  
Though love, like history, repeats itself,  
But with the larger feature, stronger hand,  
And keener sense, evoked of common grief—  
When we would scan the circling mountain-cope  
That made our little valley all a world,

One taught our young unlearnèd lips to say,  
"The Sensible Horizon;" then dissolved  
Our bounded dream, and showed our widening minds  
That this was not the limit of the truth,  
But grew from our own petty finitude; and far  
In unconceived remote another line,  
Yet only in concession named a line,  
"The Rational," made space intelligible,  
And gave relation to the stars. Yet not  
The less our early mountain-narrowed sky  
Was still the sky to us, cloud, storm, and all.  
Oh take my parable, and fondly think  
That though the years have brought me wider range,  
And shifting zeniths been my law of life,  
Did thou and I yet tread the native vale,  
I not the less, beneath that homely sky,  
Would point to it whene'er we spoke of heaven.

James Brunton Stephens

# My Chinee Cook

They who say the bush is dull are not so very far astray,  
For this eucalyptic cloisterdom is anything but gay;  
But its uneventful dulness I contentedly could brook,  
If I only could get back my lost, lamented Chinee cook.

We had tried them without number—cooks, to wit—my wife and I;  
One a week, then three a fortnight, as my wife can testify;  
But at last we got the right one; I may say 'twas by a fluke,  
For he dropped in miscellaneous-like, that handy Chinee cook,

He found the kitchen empty, laid his swag down, and commenced;  
My wife, surprised, found nothing to say anything against;  
But she asked him for how much a year the work he undertook—  
“Me workee for me ration,” said that noble Chinee cook.

Then right off from next to nothing such a dinner he prepared,  
That the Governor I'm certain less luxuriously fared;  
And he waited, too, in spotless white, with such respectful look,  
And bowed his head when grace was said, that pious Chinee cook.

He did the work of man and maid—made beds and swept out rooms;  
Nor cooled he in his zeal, as is the manner of new brooms:  
Oh, he shed celestial brightness on the most sequestered nook,  
For his mop and pail were everywhere—my cleanly Chinee cook.

We got fat upon his cooking; we were happy in those days,  
For he tickled up our palates in a thousand pleasant ways.  
Oh his dinners! Oh his dinners! they were fit for any duke!  
Oh delectable Mongolian! Oh celestial Chinee cook!

There was nothing in creation that he didn't put to use,  
And the less he got to cook with, all the more he could produce,  
All nature was his kitchen range, likewise his cook'ry book—  
Neither Soyer nor Meg Dod could teach that knowing Chinee cook.

And day by day upon my wife and me the mystery grew,  
How his virtues were so many and his earnings were so few;  
And we laid our heads together to find out by hook or crook,  
The secret of the cheapness of that priceless Chinee cook.

And still the sense of mystery grew on us day by day,  
Till it came to be a trouble, and we wished him well away;  
But we could not find a fault in one so far above rebuke—  
Ah, we didn't know the value of that valuable cook.

But one day when I was out he brought my wife a lot of things,  
Turquoise earrings, opal bracelets, ruby brooches, diamond rings,

And he ran their various prices o'er as glibly as a book,  
And dirt cheap, too, were the jewels of that jewel of a cook.

I returned, and just in time to stop the purchase of the lot,  
And to ask him where on earth those costly jewels he had got,  
And when I looked him in the face, good gracious how he shook!  
And he says, says he, "Me bought him"—did that trembling Chinee cook.

And I a justice of the peace! O Fortune! how unkind!  
For a certain Sydney robbery came rushing to my mind  
"You bought them! Ah, I fear me, John, you paid them with a hook!  
I am bound to apprehend you, oh unhappy Chinee cook!"

So the mystery was solved at length; the secret now we saw;  
John had used us as a refuge from the clutches of the law;  
And, now, alas, too late would I his frailty overlook!  
He is gone, and I am left without my skilful Chinee cook.

Oh, could I taste again of those delicious luscious things,  
I could pardon him the robbery of other people's rings;  
I exaggerated principle, my duty I mistook,  
When I handed over to the law my peerless Chinee cook.

What would I give just now for one of his superb ragouts,  
His entremets, his entrées, his incomparable stews?  
Oh, art and taste and piquancy my happy board forsook,  
When I came the J.P. over my lamented Chinee cook.

Take away the hated letters. 'Twas my "justice" robbed my "peace";  
Take my name from the commission, and my matchless cook release.  
But I fear my Johnny's dead, for I am haunted by a spook,  
With oblique eyes and a pigtail, like my lost, my Chinee cook.

James Brunton Stephens



# My Other Chinee Cook

Yes, I got another Johnny; but he was to Number One  
As a Satyr to Hyperion, as a rushlight to the sun;  
He was lazy, he was cheeky, he was dirty, he was sly,  
But he had a single virtue, and its name was rabbit pie.

Now those who say the bush is dull are not so far astray,  
For the neutral tints of station life are anything but gay;  
But, with all its uneventfulness, I solemnly deny  
That the bush is unendurable along with rabbit pie.

We had fixed one day to sack him, and agreed to moot the point  
When my lad should bring our usual regale of cindered joint,  
But instead of cindered joint we saw and smelt, my wife and I,  
Such a lovely, such a beautiful, oh! such a rabbit pie!

There was quite a new expression on his lemon-coloured face,  
And the unexpected odour won him temporary grace,  
For we tacitly postponed the sacking-point till by-and bye,  
And we tacitly said nothing save the one word, "rabbit pie!"

I had learned that pleasant mystery should simply be endured,  
And forebore to ask of Johnny where the rabbits were procured!  
I had learned from Number One to stand aloof from how and why,  
And I threw myself upon the simple fact of rabbit pie.

And when the pie was opened, what a picture did we see!  
They lay in beauty side by side, they filled our home with glee!  
How excellent, how succulent, back, neck, and leg, and thigh!  
What a noble gift is manhood! What a trust is rabbit pie!

For a week the thing continued, rabbit pie from day to day;  
Though where he got the rabbits John would ne'er vouchsafe to say;  
But we never seemed to tire of them, and daily could descry  
Subtle shades of new delight in each successive rabbit pie.

Sunday came; by rabbit reckoning, the seventh day of the week;  
We had dined, we sat in silence, both our hearts (?) too full to speak,  
When in walks Cousin George, and, with a sniff, says he, "Oh my!  
What a savoury suggestion! what a smell of rabbit pie!"

"Oh, why so late, George?" says my wife, "the rabbit pie is gone;  
But you must have one for tea, though. Ring the bell, my dear, for John."  
So I rang the bell for John, to whom my wife did signify,  
"Let us have an early tea, John, and another rabbit pie."

But John seemed taken quite aback, and shook his funny head,  
And uttered words I comprehended no more than the dead;

"Go, do as you are bid," I cried, "we wait for no reply;  
Go! let us have tea early, and another rabbit pie!"

Oh, that I had stopped his answer! But it came out with a run:  
"Last-a week-a plenty puppy; this-a week-a puppy done!"  
Just then my wife, my love, my life, the apple of mine eye,  
Was seized with what seemed "mal-de-mer," — "sick transit" rabbit pie!

And George! By George, he laughed, and then he howled like any bear!  
The while my wife contorted like a mad "convulsionnaire;"  
And I—I rushed on Johnny, and I smote him hip and thigh,  
And I never saw him more, nor tasted more of rabbit pie.

And the childless mothers met me, as I kicked him from the door,  
With loud maternal wailings and anathemas galore;  
I must part with pretty Tiny, I must part with little Fly,  
For I'm sure they know the story of the so-called "rabbit pie."

James Brunton Stephens

# New Chum And Old Monarch

"Chieftain, enter my verandah;  
Sit not in the blinding glare;  
Thou shalt have a refuge, and a  
Remnant of my household fare.

"Ill becomes thy princely haunches  
Such a seat upon the ground:  
Doubtless on a throne of branches  
Thou hast sat, banana-crowned.

"By the brazen tablet gleaming  
On the darkness of thy breast,  
Which, unto all outward seeming,  
Serves for trousers, coat, and vest;—

"By the words thereon engraven,  
Of thy royal rank the gage,  
Hail! true King, in all things save in  
Unessential acreage.

"Such divinity doth hedge thee,  
I had guessed thy rank with ease—  
Such divinity—(but edge thee  
Somewhat more to leeward, please).

"Though thy lineage I know not,  
Thou art to the manner born;  
Every inch a king, although not  
King of one square barleycorn.

"Enter, sire; no longer linger;  
Cease thy signals grandly dumb:  
Point not thus with royal finger  
To thy hungry vacuum.

"Though thy pangs are multifarious,  
Soon they all shall pass away:  
Come, my begging Belisarius—  
Belisarius I should say.

"Fear not; I am the intruder;  
I, and white men such as I:  
Simpler though thou art, and ruder,

Thou art heir of earth and sky.

"Thine the mountain, thine the river,  
Thine the endless miles of scrub:  
Shall I grudge thee, then—oh never!—  
Useless ends of refuse grub?

"Lay aside thy spears—(I doubt them),  
Lay aside thy tomahawk;  
I prefer thee, sire, without them,  
By a somewhat longish chalk.

"Lay aside thy nullah-nullahs;  
Is there war betwixt us two?  
Soon the pipe of peace shall lull us—  
Pipe a-piece, bien entendu.

"Seat thee in this canvas chair here;  
Heed not thou the slumbering hound;  
Fear not; all is on the square here,  
Though thou strangely lookest round.

"Or if thou, my chair deriding,  
Follow thine ancestral bent,  
To the naked floor subsiding  
Down the groove of precedent,—

"If the boards have more temptation,  
Wherefore should I say thee No,  
Seeing caudal induration  
Must have set in long ago?

"Take thou now this refuse mince-meat;  
Pick this bone, my regal guest:  
Shall a fallen warrior-prince meet  
Other welcome than the best?

“Treated like a very rebel,  
Chased from town at set of sun,  
Wert thou ev'n the debbil-debbil,  
Thou shouldst eat—when I am done.”

On the bare floor sat the sable  
Chieftain of a fallen race,  
Two black knees his only table,  
“Wai-a-roo” his simple grace.

Stood I by and ruminated  
On the chief's Decline and Fall,  
While his highness masticated  
What I gave him, bone and all.

“Chief,” said I, when all had vanished,  
“Fain am I thou shouldst relate  
Why thou roam'st discrowned and banished  
From thy scrub-palatinat.”

Stared the chief, and wildly muttered,  
As if words refused to come;  
“Want him rum,” at length he uttered;  
“Black f'lo plenty like him rum!”

“Nay! 'Twill make thee mad—demoniac!  
Set thee all a-fire within!  
Law forbids thee rum and cognac,  
Though in mercy spares thy gin.

“Come; thy tale, if thou hast any.”—  
Forth the chieftain stretched his hand,  
Stood erect, and shouted “Penny!”  
In a voice of stern command.

“Out upon thee! savage squalid!  
Mine ideal thus to crush,  
With thy beggary gross and solid,  
All for money and for lush!

“Out upon thee! prince degenerate!  
Get thee to thy native scrub!

Die a dog's death!—or, at any rate,  
Trouble me no more for grub!

“At him, Ginger! Up and at him!  
Go it, lad! On, Ginger, on!  
King, indeed! the beggar! . . . Drat him!  
One more fond illusion gone.”

James Brunton Stephens



## Nonsuited

"Dear Richard, come at once;"—so ran her letter;  
The letter of a married female friend:  
"She likes you both, and really knows no better  
Than I myself do, how her choice will end.  
Be sure of this, the first who pops will get her.  
He's here for Chris—" Whatever else was penned  
Dick never knew: nor knows he to this day  
How he got drest, and mounted—and away!

Like arrow from the bow, like lightning-streak,  
Including thunder following fierce and quick,  
By ridge and flat, through scrub and foaming creek  
Dick galloped like a very lunatic;  
Whipped, jerked, and spurred, but never word did speak,  
Although his thoughts rushed furious and thick,  
Headed by one he strove in vain to wipe out,  
The fear that this same "he" might put his pipe out.

And faster yet, and ever faster grew  
The maddening music of the pace, until  
The station-roofs gleamed suddenly in view,  
Quivering in noon-heat on the vine-clad hill:  
When all at once his bridle-rein he drew,  
But not from craven fear or flagging will,—  
Though, truth to tell, his heart a moment sank  
To see the river nearly "bank and bank."

For Bowstring was the choice of all his stud,  
And he at least had no fair bride to win;  
And wherefore should he risk him in the flood?—  
A question Bowstring also asked within:  
For though he was a squatter's horse by blood,  
And held the grazing interest more than kin,  
He eyed the huge logs wheeling, bobbing, bowling,  
As if his soul objected to "log-rolling."  
And by that curious telegraphic force,  
Outspeaking half-a-dozen formal speeches,  
That works its quick inexplicable course  
Through saddle-cloth, pigskin, and buckskin breeches,



Until the dumb opinion of a horse  
Its sympathetic rider's spirit reaches—  
Dick, feeling under him the strong flanks quiver,  
Knew that his thoroughbred would funk the river

A moment more, Dick from his seat had leapt,  
Ungirthed, uncurbed, unreined his trembling steed;  
Who straightway vanished from his sight, nor kept  
The high tradition of a loyal breed,  
But quickened by no stimulus except  
His own unbridled (and unsaddled) greed,  
Before a man had time to reckon two,  
Was gorging in fresh fields and pastures new.

Then Dick threw off his boots, undid his belt,  
Doffed—here we shirk particulars. In brief,  
When nought remained but his primeval pelt,  
He tied his garments in his handkerchief;  
Then feeling as "the grand old gardener" felt  
(After the apple), crouching like a thief,  
Down to the stream did this lorn lover slink,  
And threw his bundle to the further brink.

Nor longer paused, but plunged him in the tide,  
A hero and Leander both in one;  
Struck the entangling boughs from either side,  
And held his head up bravely to the sun;  
Dodged the huge logs, the torrent's strength defied;—  
To cut it short, did all that could be done;  
Touched land, and uttering a fervent "Thank . . .  
—Just then his bundle floated by, and sank.

Take Yarra-bend, take Bedlam, Colney Hatch,  
And Woogaroo, and mix them weight for weight,  
And stir them well about—you could not match  
Dick's madness with the whole conglomerate.  
If the Recording Angel did but catch  
One half his ravings against Heaven and Fate,  
And rising creeks and slippery banks, some day  
Poor Dick will have a heavy bill to pay.

Was ever lover in so lorn a case?

Was ever lover in so wild a mood?  
He nearly pulled the beard from off his face;  
He would have rent his garments, if he could.  
How could he woo a dame his suit to grace  
Who had no suit, save that wherein he stood?  
Oh! what were youth, wealth, station in society,  
Without the textile adjuncts of propriety!

When oaths and half-an-hour were spent in vain,  
It dawned on Dick that he might slyly crawl  
From tree to tree across the wooded plain,  
And gain "the hut," that stood a mile from all

The other buildings—whence some labouring swain,  
Unscared by nudity, might come at call,  
And lend, for thanks or promissory payment,  
Whatever he could spare of decent raiment.

From one variety of Eucalypt  
Unto another, blue gum, spotted gum,  
Black-butt, etcetera, Dick crawled or skipped,  
Bitten and blistered like the newest chum;  
Till, marking where the open level dipped,  
Distracted with mosquito-martyrdom,  
He rushed and plunged—and not a bit too soon—  
Into the coolness of a quiet lagoon.

No, not a bit too soon; for something white,  
Topped by a parasol of lustrous pink,  
At this same perilous moment hove in sight,  
And glided gently to the water-brink;  
The while in thickest sedge the rueful wight  
Hid his diminished head, and scarce did wink—  
No more a gallant daringly erotic,  
But consciously absurd and idiotic.

'Twas she—his love; and never had he thought  
Her face so beautiful, her form so stately;  
Ophelia-like she moved, absorbed, distraught;  
'Twas plain to Dick she had been weeping lately;  
And now and then a weary sigh he caught,  
And once a whisper that disturbed him greatly,

Which said, unless his ears played him a trick,  
"What in the world can have come over Dick?"

And presently, through his aquatic screen,  
His hated rival he beheld advance,  
With airy grace and captivating mien,  
And all the victor in his countenance:  
And too, too late he learned what might have been,  
When at her watch he saw the lady glance,  
And heard her say, "Here's Fred. The die is cast!  
I gave poor Dick till two; 'tis now half-past."

And then Dick closed his eyes, his ears he stopped;  
Yet somehow saw and heard no whit the less,—  
Saw that the lover on his knees had dropped,  
And heard him all his tale of love confess;  
And when the question had been duly popped,  
He heard the kiss that sealed the answering "Yes!"—  
'Twas rough on Dick: ah me! 'twas mighty rough:  
But he remained true blue (though all in buff),—

And never winced, nor uttered word or groan,  
But gazed upon the treasure he had lost,  
In agony of soul, yet still as stone,  
The saddest man since first true love was crossed:  
And when at length the mated birds had flown,  
He waited yet another hour, then tossed  
His modesty unto the winds, and ran  
Right for the hut, and found—thank Heaven!—a man.

\* \* \* \* \*

On that same evening, in his rival's coat,  
Waistcoat, and things, Dick sat among the rest  
And though he could have cut their owner's throat,  
He kept his feelings underneath his vest,  
And proved by some mendacious anecdote  
That he was there by chance—a passing guest.  
One boon at least stern Fate could not refuse:  
He stood that evening in his rival's shoes.

James Brunton Stephens





# Off The Track

Oh where the deuce is the track, the track?  
Round an' round, an' forrard, an' back!  
"Keep the sun on yer right," they said—  
But, hang it, he's gone an' got over my head!

"Make for a belt of apple trees;"—  
Jist so. But where's yer belt, if ye please?  
By gum, it's hot! This child'll melt,  
An' there ain't no apples, nor ain't no belt.

"Keep clear o' the timber-getters' tracks,"  
But wich is wich, I'd beg to ax?  
They forks and jines, the devil knows how—  
I wish I'd a sight o' either now!

"Leave the track," sez they, "when you sees  
Some yards to the right two big grass trees."  
Two! It's dozens on dozens I pass—  
Most on 'em big, an' all on 'em grass.

Oh where the deuce is the track, the track?  
I'm fairly taken aback, aback.  
"Keep tow'rd the river. You can't go wrong."  
Whew? Can't I, though! That was rayther strong.

"Follow the lay o' the land," sez they;  
But, Lord, this flat ain't got no lay!  
Whew! Ain't it hot on the pint o' the nose?  
An' the more I mops the hotter I grows.

"An' when you comes to the foot o' the range"—  
WHEN! That's the pint. But ain't it strange,  
That the further I goes, to left or right,  
The more there ain't no range in sight.

Gum trees, gum trees, slim an' high,  
Timber green an' timber dry.  
Blackened stumps an' fallen logs—  
Lively work as on we jogs!

Oh the devil an' all take the flat, the flat!  
I'm one myself for the matter o' that.  
I'm mazed, an' so is the brute I rides,  
An' the sun's getting over the left besides.

Dash it, I'll follow my nose, my nose!  
Step out, straight forrard, here goes, here goes!

Let the sun be left, or the sun be right,  
Summat or other must come in sight.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, well! If this ain't too bad by half!  
Lor', how the beggars 'll laugh an' chaff!  
Back to my startin' point? Yes; tis so.  
I put up them slip-rails six hours ago.

James Brunton Stephens

# On A Fork Of Byron's

Like any other fork.—No mark you meet with  
To point some psychological conceit with.  
An ordinary fork. A fork to eat with.

No individuality of fashion:  
No stamp of frenzy fine, or poet-passion;  
An article in no respect Parnassian.

No muse "with ivy never sere" hath decked it:  
In fact, it would be foolish to expect it.  
I question if the muses recollect it.

A plain straightforward fork; yet interesting,  
As to the world in general attesting  
That poetizing hinges on digesting.  
A fork not standing on its merits merely,  
But, being Byron's, testifying clearly  
That verse and victuals are related nearly.

Quite genuine; crest and all; a fork to swear by;  
Some poet-stories doubtless hanging thereby,—  
Associations such as gold can ne'er buy.

For 'twixt the fork and the divine afflatus  
The links are perfect; there is no hiatus;  
Fork, stomach, brain, pen,—all one apparatus.

So when the food that on the fork ascended  
Grew into verse as with the brain it blended,  
The fork wrote just as truly as the pen did.

For though the fork the earlier resource is,  
Between the two no violent divorce is,—  
I hold them to be correlated forces.

Perchance the unsuspected ministration  
Of this same fork first set in circulation  
The coinage of his rich imagination.



Perchance this very fork could give the clue to  
What many of the famous thoughts were due to,  
That now are part of me, and part of you too.

And if its prongs administered the fuel  
That working duly unto brain-renewal

Kindled the thoughts that even yet fire you all,—

This very fork—(unless I quite astray be,  
And you of unimpressionable clay be)—  
A factor in your moral product may be.

And musing thus, does not this fork begin to you  
To seem as consanguineously akin to you  
As if the bard himself had stuck it into you?

'Tis ever thus: what Genius consecrateth  
The nearest with the most remote collateth,  
Till meanest use on highest issue waiteth.

This salad, now, in which the fork I'm pressing,  
Wherein are all sweet savours coalescing—  
What subtle shoot of genius efflorescing  
Flowered in the flavour of so rich a blessing?  
Is it that Byron's fork, some charm possessing,  
Transmutes the—stop a bit—Who did the dressing?

James Brunton Stephens

## Once More

I had not thought again to be  
A dreamer of such dreams as these.  
The springtime is no more for me;  
My summer died beyond the seas.  
From what untimely source begin  
These stirrings of the life within?

I had not thought again to taste  
The bitter sweet, the joyous pain.  
I dreamed that I had trodden waste,  
Beyond the power of sun or rain,  
The soil that grew the passion fruit;—  
Then, whence this blossom underfoot?  
I had not thought again to see  
Beyond the homely pale of truth;—  
The lights and shapes of witchery,  
That glorify the skies of youth,  
I only know as perished things;—  
Whence, then, this flash of angel wings?

How spend the day, yet save the hours?  
I had my day; the hours are fled.  
How eat the fruit, yet hold the flowers?  
I ate the fruit; the flowers are dead.  
Oh, what divine or fiendish art  
Hath twined fresh tendrils round my heart?

I said, 'tis good to be alone,  
No alien hand to urge or check.  
I said, my spirit is my own,  
To loose or bind, to save or wreck.  
I trod on Love, called Reason lord;—  
Lo, whence this subtle silken cord?

Oh, who shall tell if this be strength  
Re-risen, or ghost of old defect?  
The truth of manhood come at length,  
Or weakness born of purpose wrecked?  
I only know it is the whole

Arch-craving of a hungry soul.

I only know that all the hordes  
Of buried hopes and jealousies

Are risen again and crossing swords,  
And that 'twas but an armistice,  
A breathing time 'twixt strife and strife,  
Which I had deemed a peace for life.

Oh! who can tell where duty lies—  
To urge, repress, advance, or stay?  
To grasp at Good in Beauty's guise,  
Or brush the pretty lure away,  
Ere doubtful war of hopes and fears  
Consume the hoarded strength of years?

James Brunton Stephens

# Opening Hymn

[Sung at the Opening of the Queensland National Society's Exhibition, 1876.]

While nations joining gifts  
Their fanes of Art adorn,  
Hear, Lord, the lowly voice that lifts  
The song of the youngest-born.  
The gifts of the youngest-born,  
We spread them forth to Thee,—  
What toil hath wrought, what skill hath taught,  
What Freedom hath brought the free.

No storied name we vaunt,  
Nor martial trophies raise;  
No battle-riven banners flaunt  
The triumphs of other days.  
But triumphs of peaceful days  
Adorn our jubilee:  
Here toil and skill Thine ends fulfil,  
With hands that from blood are free.

We pile the arms of Peace,  
Her trophies manifold,  
Her ploughshare swords, her shields of fleece,  
Her armour of bloodless gold.  
Our treasures of fleece and gold  
We consecrate to Thee,  
With choicest yield of fruitful field,  
And spoil from the forest-tree.

We bless Thee for our land,  
Broad streams and gladdening rills,  
For flocks that roam on ev'ry hand,  
For herds on a thousand hills.  
From all its thousand hills  
Our land doth call to Thee,  
Still do Thou bless with happiness  
This youngest of the free.

James Brunton Stephens

## Part Second

1

Fast flew the hours. We may not tell  
Of William's weary quest,  
How round the outskirts of the town  
He roamed like one possessed—  
Nor with what guileful arts he plied  
The foreign interest.

2

Enough that at the appointed hour,  
With backers at his back,  
He faced the noble Bossaroo,  
(Still hypochondriac)—  
And introduced his witnesses,  
A yellow and a black;

3

A placid-eyed Mongolian  
From sandy Pechelee,  
Who'd stimulate an inch of soil  
To do the work of three,  
Or make a metamorphic rock  
Sprout into cabbage;

4

A big buck nigger next; who once  
Bowed down to stocks and stones  
(For years digested captives formed  
The tissue of his bones),  
But now he is an Anglican,  
Who a live "Bissop" owns,  
Besides a gorgeous suit of slops,  
And the proud name of Jones.

5

Slow rose the lordly Bossaroo,  
And bade unveil their eyes;  
And, when those aliens gazed around

On all that dread assize,  
They howled in unison and made  
Night hideous with their cries.

6  
For Bill had lured them lyingly—  
But why should we explain;  
The whole thing was exceptional,  
And can't occur again.  
Besides, to poke at mysteries  
Is wanton and profane.

7  
With single will they turned on Bill,  
And blazed his evil name;  
With double tongue their charge they flung,  
And swore unto the same;  
With treble spite did both unite  
To spoil his little game.

8  
"Me see him catchee kangaloo,"  
Deponed on oath Ah Chee;  
"Me see him—hi! hst!—soolem dog,  
No mind my cabbageee—  
Me lose hap clown, him knockee down  
Ten twenty lettucee!"

9  
"Massoopy Bill, him wicked boy,"  
Deponed the South Sea swell;  
"Two moon, come Bissop preach in church,  
Him loaf outside an' yell;  
Me run—him run—me catch—him say  
'Tree scalp if you no tell.'

10  
So, when the learned clerk had both  
Their depositions read,  
The judge drew forth his judgment cap,  
And put it on his head,

And sentenced poor Marsupial Bill  
To hang till he was dead.

11

"But since"—so spake the Bossaroo—  
"From evidence we know  
That many a scalped and gory head  
This night through him lies low,  
We'll scalp him first!"—and all the house,  
Nem. con., cried "Be it so?"  
And as a sign and seal of doom,  
Turned down the right thumb-toe.

12

"With his own knife," the Boss resumed,  
"Ah Chee shall do the deed—  
The gods poetic justice love—  
And make the assassin bleed  
By his own proper instrument.  
Mongolian, proceed."

13

What followed next, who gave the word  
For mate to link with mate,  
Nor Bill, nor Jones, nor yet Ah Chee  
Can very clearly state;  
But that 'twas a corroboree  
All three corroborate.

14

In vain poor William prayed—in vain  
His suppliant knees he bowed,  
And by a pile of sacred names  
For mercy cried aloud—  
The point was at his occiput,  
When, lo! from out the crowd

15

Stepped forth a rare and radiant dame,  
The Boss's pride and stay,  
(The dam of Bossárovitch,



Still young, though somewhat gray,  
An elegant marsupial,  
Well-mannered, bien née)—  
Stepped forth before them, and remarked  
Seductively, "Belay!"  
Then, kneeling by the judgment seat,  
Thus sweetly said her say:—  
"Most Noble Grand, have you forgot  
That this is Christmas Day?"

16

"Beseech you, bid that heathen hand  
Withhold the bloody knife!  
Recall your fearful words of doom—  
Nay, turn not from your wife,  
But give me as a Christmas Box  
The little captive's life."

17

Then quickly from his granite throne  
Down leaped the Noble Grand,  
And, kneeling, kissed right courteously  
His royal lady's hand;  
Then, as he raised her up, pronounced  
The joyful countermand;  
Whereat the rest turned up their toes,  
That Bill might understand  
The Congress willed his days should yet  
Be long upon the land.

18

Then raged the revelry anew,  
With sound of drum and fife;  
The Boss himself forgot his woes,  
And danced as if for life;  
While the old clerk forgot himself,  
And kissed the Boss's wife.

19

And when there fell a weariness  
On all the panting throng,  
And Bossaroo and ancient clerk

Alike had nigh "gone bong"—  
Amid a jaded pause was heard  
A call for "Joey's Song!"

20

And presently a little head,  
As from a little nest,  
Peeped o'er a snug maternal pouch,  
And sang its little best,  
(The song is very rare, and full  
Of antique interest):—  
"What does little Joey say  
In his pouch at peep-of-day?  
'Let me hop,' says little Joey;  
'Mother, let me hop away.'  
'Joey, rest a little longer,  
Till the little legs are stronger.'  
So he rests a little longer,  
Then he gaily hops away."

21

He ceased; the pre-diluvian clerk  
Rose on his quivering shanks,  
And with a well-turned compliment  
Proposed a vote of thanks—  
Just then a breathless picket broke  
All gory through the ranks!

22

But ere his trembling tongue had time  
To tell his tale of woe,  
And why thus grimly he disturbed  
The happy status quo,—  
With giant bound Bill's faithful hound  
Leaped madly on the foe!

23

Ah, then and there was sudden scare,  
The swiftest took the lead;  
Ah, there and then—but oh, the pen  
Is impotent indeed!

Oh, would I had an artist man

To show the Great Stampede!

24

What next befell may somewhat strain  
The limits of belief;  
But where so many marvels are,  
Why boggle at the chief?  
'Twere shame if lack of faith should cause  
Our moral come to grief.

25

From all the flying ruck the dog  
Had singled out the Queen;  
Another instant and the Boss  
A widower had been,  
When—(that's a pithy saw that bids  
Expect the unforeseen)—

26

BILL CALLED HIM OFF! The dog drew back,  
And on a boulder leant.  
'Twas months ago, and still that dog  
Is pondering the event,  
And even to this very hour  
Can't fathom what it meant;  
It was a thing so utterly  
Without a precedent.

27

But Bill, the Chinaman, and Jones,  
The Queen, and you, and I,  
We know the secret of the change,  
We know the reason why;  
And—may I be allowed to add?—  
The moral hangs thereby.

28

But since nor boy nor man receives  
Advice without a pang,  
And this narrator's muse has failed

To catch the proper twang,—

The moral hanging plainly there,  
Suppose we let it—hang.

James Brunton Stephens

# Progress In The Pacific

Lapp'd in blue Pacific waters lies an isle of green and gold,  
A garden of enchantment such as Eden was of old;  
And the innocent inhabitants, pure children of the sun,  
Resembled those of Eden, too—in more respects than one.

But included in its list of charms this peaceful isle possessed  
A feature that seemed rather out of keeping with the rest;  
A huge volcano frowned above palm-grove and taropatch  
That ev'n for Krakatoa might have proved an equal match.

"Might have proved," I say advisedly,—for ages now had past  
Since this passion-worn volcano in a fit had breathed its last;  
Now flowery vegetation draped its shoulders like a shawl—  
Only the sullen cone stood unapparelled over all.

To this happy bower of innocence, this Island of the Blest,  
Came two Melbourne Presbyterians—no matter on what quest—  
Leading men in Church and Market, always found within the ring,  
John McTaggart, William Wallace, Agents for—for everything.

How glowed their weary hearts before the beauty of the scene,  
The palm-groves, the acacia-groves, and all the varied green!  
How swelled their souls with sentiment when, swarming from their huts,  
Oame the simple natives wooing them with pigs and cocoa-nuts!

"Eh, man, but this is sweet!" said John, and wiped away a tear.  
"It is good for us (I say with the apostle) to be here.  
The islands are God's handiwork, their beauties are His own—  
And, Weelyum—man, there should be lots of sulphur in that cone!

"These natives are a guileless folk, as we can well discern,  
But how to make gunpowder is a thing they yet may learn.  
Now, gunpowder leads to homicides, and other sinful scenes,  
And I feel it is our duty to deprive them of the means.

"So lest some flagitious traders should come fossicking about,  
This very day we'll purchase that volcano out and out.  
Lest guilt should stain these blameless souls we'll form a Sulphur Co."—  
And, William, though a silent man, replied to him, "Juist so."

Then they summoned their interpreter and made their wishes known,  
And before the day was over that volcano was their own,  
And the chiefs were paid the price in costly axes, hooks and knives,  
While invaluable necklaces were showered upon their wives.

But not before McTaggart had impressed the native mind  
With a solemn deed of transfer of a strictly legal kind,

Which Scripture, fraught, as was supposed, with threats and terrors dark,  
Was attested by the signature of "Na-Galoo, His Mark."

Then home they sailed, nor thought again for many and many a day  
Of their potential riches in that island far away:  
They had other fish to fry and other irons in the fire,  
And success upon success but seemed to multiply desire.

But at length there came a season when their wealth developed wings,  
And their hearts grew sad within them at the general look of things,  
But most of all they sorrowed at the worldliness and pride  
Of the smarter men who bested them and hustled them aside.

Said McTaggart, "Let us quit this sordid sphere, and for a while  
Let us bathe our souls in innocence in yon sequestered isle;  
The aims of men are vanity; life's but a fleeting show—  
And the Argus says that sulphur's up."—And William said "Juist so."

So they raised, and raised with credit, all the necessary plant,  
Nor forgot amid their haste that solemn league and covenant;  
And thus and thus it came to pass ere many days had fled  
That the island lay before them, and the grey cone towered o'erhead.

But where—where were the simple folk that greeted them of yore  
And who were these red-shirted swells that met them on the shore,  
And covered them with muskets of a fashion obsolete,  
But possibly still lethal if discharged at twenty feet?

Alas, too soon they gathered from their semi-English speech  
That the sixty three Kanaka bucks who blocked them on the beach  
Were time-expired "Returns," enlightened men, who not in vain  
Had spent the intervening years in Queensland trashing cane.

"You come take solfa," cried a Chief, who recognised the two,

"Flenchman Comp'ny buy him solfa. Solfa no belonga you  
We sell him Comp'ny thing man call in Queensland mineral lease"—  
And sixty-three Kanaka smiles broke up the evening peace.

Then McTaggart, white with godly ire, yet calm in sense of right,  
Drew forth the sacred covenant and spread it to the light,—  
"I bought your hill entire," he said; "the whole volcano's mine!"  
But the Chieftain took the document and read it line by line

Read it word by word and line by line, date, signature and all,  
As one who fain would do the right although the heaven's should fall,  
Then delivered this decision, "Hill belonga you all right.  
But paper no say solfa. Flenchman buy him that. Goo' night."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is this the land," McTaggart cried, "where we had fondly thought

To bathe our souls in innocence and bag what we had bought!  
Sawtan hath made this isle his own! Arise and let us go.  
Weelyum, Progress is a curse! a curse!" And William said "Juist so."

James Brunton Stephens

# Psalm Xc

O God, the everlasting One,  
In Thee alone, from sire to son,  
Through generations all, our race  
Hath found a sure abiding place.

Before the mountains rose from earth,  
Before the world itself had birth,  
Ere yet the heav'ns were spread abroad,  
Thou wast and art eternal God.

But man, the creature of Thy breath,  
Thou humblest to the deeps of death;  
Few days and sad thou giv'st and then  
"Return," Thou say'st, "ye sons of men."

For, lo, the space of thousand years  
To Thine unchanging eye appears  
As yesterday to mortal sight,  
When passed, or as a watch of night.

As comes a flood on those who sleep,  
So over man Thy wrath doth sweep.  
As fades the freshness of the grass,  
So swiftly doth his vigour pass.

As grass at morn he flourisheth;  
Cut down, at eve he lies in death;  
Like flame Thy wrath against us burns,  
And all our life to anguish turns.

Thou our iniquities hast set  
Before Thy face, unpardon'd yet;  
Our secret sins, in darkness done,  
Thy light reveals them ev'ry one.

And all our days beneath the blast  
Of Thy consuming wrath are past;  
Our barren lives from year to year  
Ev'n as an idle tale appear.



In seventy years our race is run,  
And what if here and there an one,  
Through greater strength four-score attains  
He only added sorrow gains.

And soon the longest life is o'er,  
We pass away and are no more.

Oh, who Thine anger can express,  
Thine ire is as Thine awfulness.

Lord, teach us so our days to count,  
That as we mark their small amount,  
Our hearts we may the more apply  
To learn Thy wisdom ere we die.

Return, Oh God. How long wilt Thou  
Thy grace withhold? Oh, even now,  
In mercy hear Thy servant's voice,  
That all our days we may rejoice.

According as the days have been  
Wherein we have but sorrow seen,  
According to our years of ill  
Do Thou our lives with gladness fill.

Give Thou to us Thy works to know;  
Thy glory to our children show,  
And on Thy servants let there rest  
The beauty of the Holiest.

To all the work we do on earth  
Give Thou, O Lord, enduring worth;  
Yea, that our handwork may endure,  
Do Thou, Eternal, make it sure.

James Brunton Stephens

## Quart Pot Creek

On an evening ramble lately, as I wandered on sedately,  
Linking curious fancies, modern, mediaeval, and antique—  
Suddenly the sun descended, and a radiance ruby-splendid,  
With the gleam of water blended, thrilled my sensitive physique—  
Thrilled me, filled me with emotion to the tips of my physique,  
Fired my eye, and flushed my cheek.

Heeding not where I was going, I had wandered, all unknowing,  
Where a river gently flowing caught the radiant ruby-streak;  
And this new-found stream beguiling my sedateness into smiling,  
Set me classically styling it with Latin names and Greek,  
Names Idalian and Castalian, such as lovers of the Greek  
Roll like quids within their cheek.

On its marge was many a burrow, many a mound, and many a furrow,  
Where the fossickers of fortune play at Nature's hide-and-seek;  
And instead of bridge to span it, there were stepping-stones of granite,  
And where'er the river ran, it seemed of hidden wealth to speak.  
Presently my soul grew stronger, and I, too, was fain to speak:—  
I assumed a pose plastique.

"Stream," said I, "I'll celebrate thee! Rhymes and rhythms galore await thee!  
In the weekly 'poet's corner' I'll a niche for thee bespeak:  
But, to aid my lucubration, thou must tell thine appellation,  
Tell thy Naiad-designation—for the journal of next week—  
Give thy sweet Pactolian title to my poem of next week.  
Whisper, whisper it—in Greek!"

But the river gave no token, and the name remained unspoken,  
Though I kept apostrophising till my voice became a shriek;—  
When there hove in sight the figure of a homeward veering digger,  
Looming big, and looming bigger, and ejecting clouds of reek—  
In fuliginous advance emitting clouds of noisome reek  
From a tube beneath his beak.

"Neighbour mine," said I, "and miner,"—here I showed a silver shiner—  
"For a moment, and for sixpence, take thy pipe from out thy cheek.  
This the guerdon of thy fame is; very cheap indeed the same is;  
Tell me only what the name is—('tis the stream whereof I speak)—

Name the Naiad-name Pactolian! Digger, I adjure thee, speak!"  
Quoth the digger, "Quart Pot Creek."

Oh, Pol! Edepol! Mecastor! Oh most luckless poetaster!  
I went home a trifle faster in a twitter of a pique;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living rhyming being  
Ever yet was cursed with seeing, in his poem for the week,

Brook or river made immortal in his poem for the week,  
With such name as "Quart Pot Creek!"

\* \* \* \* \*

But the river, never minding, still is winding, still is winding,  
By the gardens where the Mongol tends the cabbage and the leek;  
And the ruby radiance nightly touches it with farewell lightly,  
But the name sticks to it tightly,—and this sensitive physique,  
The already-mentioned (vide supra) sensitive physique,  
Shudders still at "Quart Pot Creek!"

James Brunton Stephens

## Song From "fayette"

Why doth the dawning speak of her?  
What kindred hath she with the morn?  
Why should my wakening thoughts transfer  
To her the glow in Orient born?  
I only know that wheresoe'er  
Awaketh Beauty, she is there.

Why is the noontide full of her?  
What kindred hath she with the sun?  
Why should the whole world's minister  
Be eloquent alone of one?  
I only know that wheresoe'er  
Exulteth Beauty, she is there.

Why is the midnight fraught with her?  
What kindred hath she with the night?  
O dreams that are of things that were,  
Ye change my darkness into light!  
I know, I know that wheresoe'er  
Reposeth Beauty, she is there.

James Brunton Stephens

## Spirit And Star

Through the bleak cold voids, through the wilds of space,  
Trackless and starless, forgotten of grace,—  
Through the dusk that is neither day nor night,  
Through the grey that is neither dark nor light—  
Through thin chill ethers where dieth speech,  
Where the pulse of the music of heaven cannot reach,  
Unwarmed by the breath of living thing,  
And for ever unswept of angel's wing—  
Through the cold, through the void, through the wilds of space,  
With never a home or a resting-place,  
How far must I wander? Oh God, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

Once on a time unto me was given  
The fairest star in the starry heaven—  
A little star, to tend and to guide,  
To nourish and cherish and love as a bride.  
Far from all great bright orbs, alone,  
Even to few of the angels known,  
It moved; but a sweet pale light on its face  
From the sapphire foot of the throne of grace,  
That was better than glory and more than might,  
Made it a wonder of quiet delight.  
Still must I wander? Oh God, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

On the starry brow was the peace of the blest,  
And bounteous peace on the starry breast;  
All beautiful things were blossoming there,  
Sighing their loves to the delicate air:  
No creature of God such fragrance breathed,  
White-rose girdled and white-rose wreathed;  
And its motion was music, an undertone,  
With a strange sad sweetness all its own,  
Dearer to me than the louder hymn  
Of the God-enraptured seraphim.—  
How far must I wander? Ah Heaven, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

In a round of joy, remote and alone,  
Yet ever in sight of the great white throne,  
Together we moved, for a love divine  
Had blent the life of the star with mine:—  
And had all the angels of all the spheres  
Forecast my fate and foretold my tears,

The weary wand'ring, the gruesome gloom,  
And bruited them forth through the Trump of Doom—  
Hiding a smile in my soul, I had moved  
Only the nearer to what I loved.  
Yet I must wander! Oh God, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

Ah, woe the delusive demon-light  
That beckoned me, beckoned me, day and night!  
The untwining of heartstrings, the backward glance,  
The truce with faith, and the severance!  
Ah, woe the unfolding of wayward wings  
That bore me away from all joyous things,  
To realms of space whence the pale sweet gleam  
Looked dim as a dimly-remembered dream—  
To farther realms where the faint light spent  
Vanished at length from my firmament;  
And I seek it in vain—Ah God, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

On sleepless wings I have followed it  
Through the star-sown fields of the Infinite;  
And where foot of angel hath never trod  
I have threaded the golden mazes of God;  
I have pierced where the fire-fount of being runs,  
I have dashed myself madly on burning suns,  
Then downward have swept with shuddering breath  
Through the place of the shadows and shapes of death,  
Till sick with sorrow and spent with pain  
I float and faint in the dim inane!  
Must I yet wander? Ah God, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

Oh could I find in uttermost space  
A place for hope, and for prayer a place,

Mine were no suit for a glittering prize  
In the chosen seats of the upper skies—  
No grand ministration, no thronèd height  
In the midmost intense of unspeakable light.  
What sun-god sphere with all-dazzling beam  
Could be unto me as that sweet, sad gleam?  
Let me roam through the ages all alone,  
If He give me not back my own, my own!  
How far must I wander? Oh God, how far?  
I have lost my star, I have lost my star!

In the whispers that tremble from sphere to sphere,  
Which the ear of a spirit alone can hear,

I have heard it breathed that there cometh a day  
When tears from all eyes shall be wiped away,  
When faintness of heart and drooping of wings  
Shall be told as a tale of olden things,  
When toil and trouble and all distress  
Shall be lost in the round of Blessedness.  
In that day when dividing of loves shall cease,  
And all things draw near to the centre of peace,  
In the fulness of time, in the ages afar,  
God, oh God, shall I find my star?

James Brunton Stephens





# Stabat Mater

Nigh the cross with sorrow laden,  
Weeping stood the Mother-maiden  
While her Son in torment hung:  
Sadly moaning, deeply wailing,  
Now the cruel sword prevailing  
Pierced her soul with anguish wrung.

Oh how sad that spirit lowly,  
Blessèd Virgin, pure and holy,  
Mother of the Only-born.  
She with bitter grief and sighing,  
Piteous Mother of the dying,  
Saw her son with anguish torn.

Who could, tearless, thus behold her,  
While such agonies enfold her,  
Mother of the Crucified?  
Who could see the Christ before him  
See his Mother grieving o'er Him,  
And unpitying turn aside?

In His torment she beheld Him,  
While the cruel scourge compelled Him  
Others' sins to expiate,  
Saw her Son so meek and tender  
Forth His stainless spirit render,  
Hers, yet dying desolate.

Mother, fount of all affection,  
Let me, bowed in sore dejection,  
Share the grief and bear the rod.  
Let my soul with ardour glowing,  
Hence abound to overflowing  
With the love of Christ my God.

Holy Mother, pierce my spirit  
With the wounds for my demerit  
Borne upon the accursed tree.  
Let me, keenly sympathising,

Feel the torment agonising,  
Of the cross endured for me.

Tear for tear, thy sorrow bearing,  
Be it mine, thine anguish sharing,  
While I live to weep with thee,  
With thee at the cross abiding,

With thee mournful watch dividing,  
This I ask thee tearfully.

Virgin, virgins all excelling,  
May my spirit near thee dwelling,  
Feel thy bitter grief its own;  
Share the Saviour's dark affliction,  
Passion, scourge, and crucifixion,  
Pang for pang and groan for groan.

Pierce me till my spirit bleedeth,  
Pierce me till my sense recedeth,  
Blood-enraptured clean away.  
Virgin blest when time is ended,  
Be my soul by thee defended,  
In the dreadful Judgment Day

Christ, when hence my soul is fleeting,  
Through thy mother mercy meeting,  
Be the palm of victory given.  
When this mortal bond shall sever,  
Take my spirit home for ever,  
To the glorious rest of Heaven.

James Brunton Stephens

## Stanzas For Music

Now once more the world is bright,  
Gone the clouds that hid the light,  
Gone the mists that dimmed my sight  
Gone sigh and tear.

As the sunshine after rain  
Mirth and gladness come again,  
"Sweet is pleasure after pain,"  
Hope after fear.

Now again the joyous Hours  
Strew my path with leaves and flowers,  
Leading where enchanted bowers  
Bid Love repose.  
And I follow full of glee,  
Weary though the way may be,  
For my love is waiting me  
There at its close.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Angel Of The Doves

The angels stood in the court of the King,  
And into the midst, through the open door,  
Weeping came one whose broken wing  
Piteously trailed on the golden floor.

Angel was she, and woman, and dove:  
Dove and angel all womanly blent  
With the virginal charm that is worshipped of love  
On the hither side of the firmament.

Where a rainbow hideth the holiest place,  
Thither she moved, and there she kneeled;  
And fain with her wings would have veiled her face,  
Ere the bow should be lifted, and God revealed.

'Tis the angels' wont; and afresh she wept,  
As with maimèd pinion she strove in vain,  
And tremor on tremor convulsively swept  
O'er her plumes in a shuddering iris of pain.

And the angels who dwell from sorrow remote  
Gazed on her woe as a marvellous thing;  
For they wist but of pain from its echoes that float  
In the strange new songs that the ransomed sing.

"Sister," at length said a shining one,  
"To whom earth's doves for a care were given,  
What hast thou done, or left undone,  
That grief through thee should be known in heaven?"

"When together for joy the angels sang,  
Calling the new-made world to rejoice,  
Sweeter than all hosannas that rang  
Was the trembling rapture that thrilled thy voice.

"For thine was the grace to minister there—  
Oh, favoured child of the heavenly host!—  
To the sacred and lovely lives that wear  
The mystic shape of the Holy Ghost.

“And we marked thy flight as the flight of a dove,  
Till the luminous vapours around thee curled,  
And we said, ‘She is glad in her errand of love  
To the happy glades of the new-born world.’

“And now thou returnest woe-stricken as one  
That hath fallen from grace and is unforgiven.

What hast thou done, or left undone,  
That grief through thee should be known in heaven?”

Faint was her voice as an echo heard  
From the past by the soul in dreamful mood;  
Sweet and sad as the plaint of a bird  
Mourning forlorn in solitude.

“I tended my doves,” she said through her tears,  
“By day and by night, in storm and calm.  
Happily flew the uncounted years  
In bowers of myrtle and groves of palm.

“Many, alas, were the beautiful dead,  
But the life of the race was always new,  
For, ever ere one generation fled,  
Out of its love another grew.

“And many a dove for man's sake died,  
Noted in heaven with none offence,  
Save when the heart of the cruel took pride  
In slaying the witness of innocence.

“When countless seasons had come and gone,  
Come and gone as a happy dream,  
One noon of summer I lingered upon  
The eastward marge of a sacred stream.

“And lo, 'mid a crowd on the further side,  
That stood in the stream or knelt on the sod,  
I saw—though a veil of flesh did hide  
The splendour of Godhead—the Son of God.

“And ev'n as I gazed, the azure above

Burst into glory that dimmed the sun;  
And the Spirit of God in the form of a dove  
I saw descend on the Holy One.

"I deemed that my task was over then;  
'Tis the dawn,' I said, 'of the reign of love;  
Henceforth my doves will be safe with men,  
Since God hath hallowed the form of the dove.'

"Then I soared aloft, but again returned;  
For I said in my heart, 'I will not cease  
From my care, till man from His lips hath learned  
That the birds have a share in the Gospel of Peace.'

"And it chanced on a day in the soft springtide,  
When birds were joyous and love was sweet,  
I saw the Lord on a mountain side,

And with Him were twelve, who sat at His feet.

"And I heard Him say, 'Not a sparrow doth fall  
To the ground but your Father taketh note,'  
Then all the air grew musical,  
And song awoke in each warbling throat.

"For into bird-music the message passed,  
And from choir to choir in melody ran;  
And I said, 'My mission is over at last.  
Farewell, my doves. Ye are safe with man.'

"Weeping, yet gladsome, I soared aloft,  
Being fain of the glories of other spheres,  
Whose beckoning lustre had lured me oft  
In starry midnights of bygone years.

"And on seas of ether and isles of light  
Through ages of joy I floated or trod,  
Till I chanced on an angel in upward flight,  
Bearing an infant home to God.

"And a waft of earth from the flowers that lay  
On the young dead breast came sweet and faint;

And again, dream-echoed from far away,  
I heard in the woodlands the turtle's plaint.

"For memory woke at the flowers' sweet breath,  
And my spirit yearned to the earth again,  
And I cried, 'Canst thou tell, oh angel of death,  
How fare my doves at the hands of men?'

" 'Sad is their lot,' the angel sighed;  
'For the pleasure of man they suffer pain;  
And the heart of the cruel taketh pride  
To slay thy doves and to number the slain.'

"I knew no more till the vapours of earth  
Clung to my wings, and a pealing sound  
Smote on mine ear, and voices of mirth;  
And beneath me a dove fell dead to the ground.

"Leave me with God; for ye cannot know  
How death takes shape in the human hand,  
Nor the subtle devices that work for woe;  
But the Lord will hear and will understand.

"And if, as I clove my unseen way  
Between my doves and the deadly rain,  
It was given unto me to become as they,  
To share their wounds and to know their pain—

"Surely the rather will God give ear  
To one who knoweth what He hath known;  
Surely the rather will Jesus hear,  
Who suffered, as I, for love of His own.

"Can it be that the great Lord doth not know  
How Christ is needed on earth again?  
Rise, lingering curtain! that I may show  
The wounds of my doves, and may pray for men."

\* \* \* \* \*

Slowly the rainbow rose, parting in twain;  
And, lo, in the midst of the throne of love

There stood a Lamb as it had been slain;  
And over the throne there brooded a Dove.

James Brunton Stephens



# The Boy Crusader

"Oh father, is that Jerusalem—  
Those walls and towers so strong!"  
"Ho, boy, we are yet in our own fair France,  
That is only Avignon."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, are these the Jordan's banks?  
Let us rest in those vineyards fair"  
"Ho, boy, these are only the banks of the Rhone,  
And we may not linger there."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, I fear them—the waves! the waves!  
Is Jerusalem over the sea?"  
"Ay, over the sea and then over the hills—  
But cling, my boy, to me."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, is that Jerusalem,  
Like a shell of gold in the bay?"  
Nay, it is only Palermo, boy;  
And this is Saint Rosalie's day."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, I feared the sea, but more  
I fear this burning sand"  
"Good cheer, my boy; take heart of grace,  
We tread upon holy land."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, can it be Holy Land,  
With all this blood and death?"  
"That was Acre we stormed, my boy;  
Now let us to Nazareth."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, the hills are so high—so high!  
Is Jerusalem very far?"

"Hush, hush, my boy, and I'll tell you the tale  
Of the Kings who followed the Star."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, the hills are so steep—so steep!  
Will Jerusalem soon be near?"

"Boy, what had it been had you carried the cross,  
Instead of your father's spear?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh father, I am weary and faint;  
This must be Calvary!"

"Good cheer, my boy; but one hill more;  
Jerusalem is nigh.

"The men-at-arms have passed the ridge.

Hark, boy, how the warriors sing!"

"I only hear the sound of harps,  
And waters murmuring."

'Wake, boy, this is no time to fail!

Oh best of happy hours!

Behold at length Jerusalem—

Its gates, and domes, and towers!"

"Father, I see Jerusalem,

Ah, nearer than you deem!"

"Your eyes are closed, you see it not,  
Or see it in a dream!

"Your eyes are closed, my boy, my boy!  
Your face is to the West!"

"Father, I see it overhead,  
And, oh, so full of rest!

"There are little children clothed in white,  
And angels leading them;

There are streets of gold and gates of pearl!

At last—Jerusalem.

"And our little Marie is beckoning me,

In her hand a diadem.

Father, I must go on before

We'll meet in Jerusalem.”

James Brunton Stephens

# The Chamber Of Faith

There's a room in my soul that has long been closed;  
Many and many a year has passed  
Since I stood at the door and looked my last  
On the things within, all seemly disposed  
In the curtained obscurity, nevermore  
To be lit of the sun through window or door;—

Looked my last with a sense of crime,  
On the smooth white bed where my dead had lain,  
At the cross I had left on the counterpane,  
Having kissed it twice and a long third time  
Ere I laid it down where the head had been,  
With a rose for the breast, and a lily between;

At her altar-table, where, side by side,  
Lay her Bible, her Hymnal, her Book of Prayer;  
At her silent harp, at her hallowed chair,  
Where, ever at morning and eventide,  
With her hand on my head, and my head on her knee,  
I had knelt, that her blessing might rest on me;

At saint and angel on wall and screen,  
Painted, and carven, and silken wrought,  
At flower and bird, by her hand and thought  
Moulded to meanings of things unseen;  
At the sombre recess where, dimly descried,  
Hung the shadowy form of the Crucified.

Looked my last with a sense of crime,  
As one who, free of intent to slay,  
Hath yet unwitting made wide the way  
For death to enter before his time;  
For, had I not strayed from her sheltering side,  
Peradventure my mother had not died.

For this was the Chamber of Faith, my Mother,  
Faith that was Mother, and Sister, and Wife,  
Joy of my joy, and life of my life,  
Fair as none else was fair, loved as no other,

Mother to nourish me, Sister to cheer,  
Wife to be dearest of all held dear.

And all of her now was the void she had left,  
And a stillness that even a sigh had profaned—  
Gone, with her mysteries unexplained,  
And all her tokens of purport reft,

Save the reproach I seemed to trace  
In the dumb appeal of each angel face.

So I closed the door and departed—alone:  
And all these years I have dwelt aloof,  
In a turret chamber over the roof,  
With undarkened outlook on all things known,  
On horizons that ever enlarge and withdraw,  
On the boundless realms of immutable law.

Bereft of Faith, but redeemed from fear,  
With enfranchised vision, with reason free  
From the bondage of ancient authority,  
I say to myself it is good to be here,  
High o'er all vain imaginings,  
And face to face with the truth of things.

But at times, in the night, to the drowsing sense  
The sound of a harp played long ago  
Floats faintly up from a room below,  
The old music of love and reverence,  
And I wake, and, behold, all unaware,  
I have left my bed, and am kneeling in prayer.

It is thus to-night, and with heart oppressed  
By the heavy hand of the truth of things,  
I am fain of the old imaginings,  
And a hope arises within my breast,  
That beyond the beyond and above the above  
There yet may be things that I know not of.

I will go down to the Chamber of Faith;  
Perchance in her symbols I yet may find  
Some meaning missed, some drift undivined,

Some clue to a refuge this side of death,  
Where Reason and Faith, where Man and Child,  
Where Law and Love may be reconciled.

\* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \*

I stand in her precincts, alien, estranged,  
A waking man in a place of dreams.  
How ghostly the room in the lamplight seems!  
Yet all is familiar, all is unchanged;  
All that was fair, still fair to see,  
Save the flowers, which have withered—for these were of me.

Frescoed seraph and carven saint  
Gaze on me still with their wistful appeal,  
Oh, Heavenly Ministries, would I could feel  
Some thrill of response however faint,  
Some touch, some grace of the olden days  
That would quicken my heart to prayer and praise!

Lo, for a moment, I burn to accost  
Your Lord of Love in the old sweet way;  
I seize the harp and begin to play,  
But the chords are loose and the key is lost,  
And the sudden dissonance shatters the mood  
Wherein the unseen is the understood—

Shatters the mood and arrests the thought,  
The fluttering thought that essayed to soar  
To the region where seraph and saint adore,  
To the sphere where the wonders of Faith are wrought,  
And her symbols decline to pigment and stone  
As I lapse again to the seen and known.

Wherefore, then, should I linger here?  
What is it I seek to understand?  
I open her Scriptures with random hand,  
And I chance on the words of the holy Seer  
Which one of old in his chariot read,  
"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter is led."

And I turn to the Christ. Though my lamp grows dim,  
I can see the tortured arms outspread,  
The broken body and drooping head,  
And I would I could weep as I wept for Him,  
And I cry as I bend the unwonted knee,  
Quicken me Jesu! Quicken me!

Thou in whom God and man are met—  
(If indeed the twain in one can meet)—  
Quicken me, Lord, as I kneel at Thy feet!  
By Thine Agony and Bloody Sweat,  
By Thy Cross and Passion, Thy Death, Thy Grave,  
Save!—(if indeed Thou hast power to save).—

By Thy rising again—(if indeed Thou didst rise)—  
Oh, if and if! Oh, doubt upon doubt!  
I cannot pray. My light flickers out,  
And the Christ is hid from my straining eyes,  
And my groping hands, in the darkness drear  
Clasp but an image. The Lord is not here.

Oh, ye who have taken away my Lord,

In these palsied lips that are powerless to pray,  
In this fount run dry, in this life grown grey,  
Behold your exceeding great reward!  
Oh, gather the strong to your side if you will,  
But leave to the weak our Saviour still!

Why shame myself thus with a witless plea?  
There is none, there is none that hath taken away.  
I alone did kiss and betray;  
But with tears I did it; and, oh, it may be  
That this way Renunciation lies  
That Faith herself is my Sacrifice!

And who knows but beyond the narrow scope  
Of these chamber walls, she lives again,  
A transmuted force unnamed of men,  
One wave whereof is this trembling hope,  
That beyond the beyond and above the above,

There yet may be things that we know not of?

James Brunton Stephens



# The Courtship Of The Future

HE.

“What is a kiss?”—Why, long ago,  
When pairs, as we, a-wooing sat,  
They used to put their four lips. . . . so, . . .  
And make a chirping noise. . . . like that.  
And, strange to say, the fools were pleased;  
A little went a long way then:  
A cheek lip-grazed, a finger squeezed,  
Was rapture to those ancient men.

Ah, not for us the timid course  
Of those old-fashioned bill-and-cooers!  
One unit of our psychic force  
Had squelched a thousand antique wooers.  
For us the god his chalice dips  
In fountains fiercer, deeper, dearer,  
Than purling confluence of lips  
That meet, but bring the Souls no nearer.

Well; 'twas but poverty at worst:  
Poor beggars, how could they be choosers!  
Not yet upon the world had burst  
Our Patent Mutual Blood-Transfusers.  
Not yet had Science caught the clue  
To joy self-doubling, -squaring, -cubing,—  
Nor taught to draw the whole soul through  
A foot of gutta-percha tubing.

Come, Lulu, bare the pearly arm;—  
Now, where the subtle blue shows keenest,  
I hang the duplex, snake-like charm,  
(The latest, by a new machinist).  
And see, in turn above my wrist  
I fix the blood-compelling conduits . . .  
Ah, this is what the old world missed,  
For all the lore of all its pundits!

I turn the tap—I touch the spring—  
Hush, Lulu, hush! our lives are blending.

(This new escapement's quite the thing,

And very well worth recommending.)

Oh circuit of commingling bliss!

Oh bliss of mingling circulation!

True love alone can merge like this

In one continuous pulsation.

Your swift life thrills me through and through:

I wouldn't call the Queen my mother:

Now you are I, and I am you,

And each of us is one another.

Reciprocally influent

The wedded love-tide flows between us:—

Ah, this is what the old fables meant,

For surely, love, our love is venous.

Now, now, your inmost life I know,

How nobler far than mine and grander;

For through my breast your feelings flow,

And through my brain your thoughts meander.

I feel a rush of high desires

With sweet domestic uses blending,

As now I think of angel-choirs,

And now of stockings heaped for mending.

And see—myself! in light enshrined!

An aureole my hat replacing!

Now, amorous yearnings half-defined,

With prudish scruples interlacing.

Next, cloudlike floats a snowy veil,

And—heavens above us!—what a trousseau!..

Come, Lulu, give me tale for tale;

I'll keep transfusing till you do so.

SHE.

Oh, love, this never can be you!

The stream flows turbid, melancholic;

And heavy vapours dull me through,

Dashed with a something alcoholic.

The elective-forces shrink apart,

No answering raptures thrill and quicken;

Strange feelings curdle at my heart,  
And in my veins vile memories thicken.

I feel an alien life in mine!  
It isn't I! It isn't you, Sir!  
This is the mood of Caroline!  
Oh, don't tell me! I know the brew, Sir!

Nay, nay,—it isn't "the machine"!  
This isn't you—this isn't I, Sir!  
It's the old story—you have been  
Transfusing elsewhere on the sly, Sir.

James Brunton Stephens





# The Dominion

Oh, fair Ideal, unto whom,  
Through days of doubt and nights of gloom,  
Brave hearts have clung, while lips of scorn,  
Made mock of thee as but a dream—  
Already on the heights of morn  
We see thy golden sandals gleam,  
And, glimmering through the clouds that wrap thee yet,  
The seven stars that are thy coronet.

Why tarriest thou 'twixt earth and heaven?  
Go forth to meet her, Sisters seven!  
'Tis but your welcome she awaits  
Ere, casting off the veil of cloud,  
The bodied Hope of blending States,  
She stands revealed, imperial, proud;  
As from your salutation sprung full-grown,  
With green for raiment and with gold for zone.

From where beneath unclouded skies  
Thy peerless haven glittering lies;  
From where o'er pleasant pastures rove  
The flocks from which thy greatness sprang;  
From vine-clad slope and orange-grove:  
From "grave mute woods" thy Minstrel sang;  
From Alpine peaks aglow with flush of morn,  
Go forth to meet her, thou, the eldest-born.

From where, reverberant at thy feet,  
The billows of two oceans meet;  
From where the rocks thy treasures hide;  
From mart and wharf, and harbour-mouth;  
From where the city of thy pride  
Ennobles all the teeming South—  
To meet her, thou with loftiest zeal inflamed,  
Go forth, Victoria, queen and queenly named.

And thou, the youngest, yet most fair,  
First to discern, and first to dare;  
Whose lips, sun-smitten, earliest spoke

The herald words of coming good,  
And with their clarion-summons broke  
The slumber of the sisterhood—  
Foremost of all thy peers press on to greet

Her advent, strewing flowers before her feet.

And thou, around whose brow benign  
Vine-leaf and olive intertwine;  
Upon whose victories the Star  
Of Peace looks down with no rebuke,  
The weapons of whose warfare are  
The ploughshare and the pruning-hook—  
Take with thee gifts of corn, and wine, and oil,  
To greet thy liege with homage of the soil.

Thou, too, whom last the morning-beams  
Wake from thy sleep by peaceful streams  
Slow westering to the Indian main—  
Thou, too, beneath thy later sun  
Conspire with these in glad refrain  
Of welcome to the coming One,  
And from thy fragrant forests tribute bring  
Of grateful incense for thine offering.

And thou, Pomona of the South,  
Ruddy of cheek, and ripe of mouth,  
Who from thy couch of orchard-bloom  
With fearless foot are wont to stray  
By mountain lakes, or in the gloom  
Of forest-depths unknown of day—  
Be thy shrill greeting borne upon the breeze  
Above the thunder of thy girdling seas.

Nor thou delay, who dwell'st apart,  
To join thy peers with gladsome heart—  
Whether the summons thee o'ertake  
On icy steep or fruitful plain,  
Or where thy craggy bulwarks break  
The onslaught of the warring main,  
Or find thee couched within some ferny lair,  
Flax-flower and hyacinth mingling with thy hair.

Bind ye the sevenfold cord apace;  
Weave ye the sevenfold wreath, to grace  
The brow of her whose avatar  
The mighty Mother waits to bless;  
In sevenfold choir be borne afar  
The music of your joyfulness.  
Till o'er the world's disquiet your song prevail—  
"Australia Foederata! Hail! all hail!"

James Brunton Stephens



# The Dominion Of Australia

She is not yet; but he whose ear  
Thrills to that finer atmosphere  
Where footfalls of appointed things,  
Reverberant of days to be,  
Are heard in forecast echoings,  
Like wave-beats from a viewless sea—  
Hears in the voiceful tremors of the sky  
Auroral heralds whispering, "She is nigh."

She is not yet; but he whose sight  
Foreknows the advent of the light,  
Whose soul to morning radiance turns  
Ere night her curtain hath withdrawn,  
And in its quivering folds discerns  
The mute monitions of the dawn,  
With urgent sense strained onward to descry  
Her distant tokens, starts to find Her nigh.

Not yet her day. How long "not yet?" . . .  
There comes the flush of violet!  
And heavenward faces, all aflame  
With sanguine imminence of morn,  
Wait but the sun-kiss to proclaim  
The Day of The Dominion born.  
Prelusive baptism!—ere the natal hour  
Named with the name and prophecy of power.

Already here to hearts intense,  
A spirit-force, transcending sense,  
In heights unscaled, in deeps unstirred,  
Beneath the calm, above the storm,  
She waits the incorporating word  
To bid her tremble into form.  
Already, like divining-rods, men's souls  
Bend down to where the unseen river rolls;—

For even as, from sight concealed,  
By never flush of dawn revealed,  
Nor e'er illumed by golden noon,

Nor sunset-streaked with crimson bar,  
Nor silver-spanned by wake of moon,

Nor visited of any star,  
Beneath these lands a river waits to bless  
(So men divine) our utmost wilderness,—

Rolls dark, but yet shall know our skies,  
Soon as the wisdom of the wise  
Conspires with nature to disclose  
The blessing prisoned and unseen,  
Till round our lessening wastes there glows  
A perfect zone of broadening green,—  
Till all our land, Australia Felix called,  
Become one Continent-Isle of Emerald;

So flows beneath our good and ill  
A viewless stream of Common Will,  
A gathering force, a present might,  
That from its silent depths of gloom  
At Wisdom's voice shall leap to light,  
And hide our barren feuds in bloom,  
Till, all our sundering lines with love o'ergrown,  
Our bounds shall be the girdling seas alone.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Famine In Ireland

They shall not perish! Not if help can save  
Our hunger-stricken brethren from the grave!  
They shall not perish! With no impious breath  
We vow that Love shall stronger prove than Death!  
Say not, 'Tis vain to strive against the Hand  
That writeth Judgment o'er a mourning land!—  
Say not, 'Tis Heav'n that worketh good or ill;  
And if our brother die—it is God's will;—  
Say not, if He is pleased to hide His face,  
'Tis ours and theirs to wait returning grace;  
Nor, listless, into prayerful chambers creep,  
And be content to weep with those who weep;—  
Say not that Nature but fulfils her plan,  
Through righteous retribution teaching man;  
Nor round your easy acquiescence draw  
The curtain of inexorable Law.  
Say rather, We are now the hands of God  
To pour our fruits upon their fruitless sod!  
Say rather, We are God's incarnate Will  
To feed His lambs, His children's mouths to fill,  
And in our very plenty read the sign  
That we are chos'n as instruments Divine!  
Say rather, if His face be darkened there,  
'Tis ours to light the darkness of despair,  
And through the tears that dim their sorrowing eyes  
Show God reflected from our happier skies!  
And what though Nature in her changelessness  
Works out her ends through cycles of distress,—  
We too are Nature! and, enthroned above  
All other law, we own the Law of Love!  
Therefore they shall not perish!—Oh sad Isle,  
Endure thy burden yet a little while—  
Yea, but a little while, for bounteous Heaven  
The lightning for our messenger hath given,  
To flash from cape to cape, o'er ocean's bed,  
The word that for thy need becometh bread!  
Oh grief-worn father, gazing on the soil  
That mocks thy husbandry; whose fruitless toil  
Provides no answer to the children's cry;

Who turn'st aside lest thou should'st see them die;  
Lo, God hath not forsaken ev'n thy least.

Turn yet again: Help cometh from the East!  
Oh drooping mother, bowed with hopeless cares  
That labour lightens not, nor tears, nor prayers,—  
Who spread'st ev'n now before thy famished brood  
The scanty remnant of unwholesome food,—  
Once more let hope awake within thy breast.  
Be of good cheer: Help cometh from the West!  
Ye little ones, whose raiment, rent and old,  
Scarce hides the forms that tremble in the cold;  
Whose play is silenced; all whose frolic wiles  
Are turned to weariness; whose sunny smiles  
Have vanished from the hunger-wasted mouth,—  
Be warmed and fed: Help cometh from the South!  
Say we too much? Nay, less than this would shame  
Alike our hearts, our honour, and our name.  
Nothing too much while Famine stalks abroad,  
And Winter grips the shivering lambs of God!  
Nothing too much while weeping kindred cry  
To happier kindred, "Save us, or we die!"  
Nothing too much while we whose bread is sure  
Have hearts to pity, hands to help, the poor,—  
And eyes in Ireland's hour of need to see  
Queensland's, Australia's opportunity!

James Brunton Stephens

# The Gentle Anarchist

I am a gentle Anarchist,  
I couldn't kick a dog,  
Nor ever would for sport assist  
To pelt the helpless frog.  
I'd shoot a Czar, or wreck a train,  
Blow Parliament sky-high,  
But none could call me inhumane;  
I wouldn't hurt a fly.  
I wouldn't hurt a fly,  
And why indeed should I?  
It has neither land nor pelf  
That I covet for myself,  
Then wherefore should I hurt a fly?

I am a gentle Anarchist,  
I live on herbs and fruits;  
It don't become a communist  
To eat his fellow-brutes.  
I'd fire a town, upset a state,  
Make countless widows weep,  
Yet I am so compassionate  
I wouldn't kill a sheep,  
I wouldn't hurt a fly;  
And why indeed should I?  
If it doesn't interfere  
With my personal career,  
Why the dickens should I hurt a fly?

I'm such a gentle Anarchist  
I hate all hunting men;  
I couldn't hook a fish, or twist  
The neck of cock or hen.  
I'd level gaols, let scoundrels loose,  
Blow priests and churches up—  
But, oh, my pity's so profuse  
I couldn't drown a pup.  
I wouldn't hurt a fly;  
And why indeed should I?  
Unless, that is to say,

I found it in my way,  
And then it's all up with the fly.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Goths In Campania (Placidia, In The Tent Of Adolphus.)

I.

I am not Roman when he looks upon me  
With those mild eyes of unaccustomed blue;  
Woman, not Roman, when his strong embraces  
Crush me with rugged promises of love.  
Time was, ere yet the Gothic trump had broken  
The dream of that inviolate majesty  
Whose very sleep was empire—Rome its pillow—  
Its couch, the world—its overhanging, heaven;  
Time was, when only words of courtly homage  
Brought to mine ear the import of such praise,  
As had bestirred Divinity to wonder  
That men should deem it of so high account,  
When careful speech of long premeditation  
Lost grace and aptitude in present awe;  
When lips, late ruddy with the blood of Caesars,  
Grew white in rash petition for such boons  
As gods had smiled at—unrewarding favour,  
A word, a look, yea, even indifference,  
As if in me the fear of adverse fortune  
Had recognized some godhead of caprice.  
But when the sun shone in the palace garden,  
And May was in the roses and in me,  
And all my soul cried out for what it had not,  
To crown the life of summer and my own,  
Honorius' sister, Theodosius' daughter,  
Placidia, I, of Roman maidens first,  
Had welcomed fellowship and clasped intrusion;—  
Yet no man asked my heart, no man my love.  
None to the longing of my life made answer;  
None broke the still Imperial solitude  
With sweet audacity of hardy wooing;  
None wronged the princess by the woman's right.  
Such time had been, until this bold Adolphus  
With warrior-laugh o'erleaped prerogative,  
And caught me for a spoil beneath his buckler,

The princess captive, but the woman free.  
A dreary code of law inscribed in purple  
Had been the record of Placidia's years,  
But that this Goth from out the Boreal lustre

Of his blue eye shed heav'n upon the page,  
And wrote in crimson characters of triumph  
The story of a glad captivity.  
For in restraint of foot I leaped to rescue  
From golden chains and regal servitude;  
And this my durance is a fond redemption  
That makes me free to love, and to be loved.

## II.

Yet there are moments, when as now he slumbers  
Beside my feet, 'mid these disorder'd spoils  
That make my prison-tent a Roman ruin—  
Fierce moments of resurgent memory,  
Full of rebuke of race and name forsaken,  
And peopled with the spirits of the past.  
Oh, it doth wrench me when his heedless fingers,  
Circling the chalice in Falernian dreams—  
The golden chalice that my father drank of,  
Enriched with his own emblems, priceless work,  
Gazing whereon his well-instructed spirit  
Enhanced the vintage with the pride of art—  
Relax and glide adown the rare embossment,  
Until they touch that laurelled head, whose nod,  
More than of Jove, shook not Olympus only,  
But Jove himself, and all his kindred gods.  
Then, daughter, sister, princess, rise within me,  
A trinity abhorrent of itself—  
That other self, which, when Adolphus sleepeth,  
Sleeps, and, when he awaketh, wakes to him.

## III.

Why should the spirit of my father vex me?  
Or what allegiance owe I unto him  
Who dwells apart, inglorious in Ravenna,  
And could not, if he would, renew my state?  
I see them not, and wherefore should I deem me  
So much beholden to the unbeheld?



I hear them not; shall I be answerable  
To irresponsible death and voiceless sloth?  
They touch me not; can unembracing shadow  
With close assurance compass me about?  
Nor eye, nor ear, nor any sense declares them,  
Unseen, unechoing, uncomforting:  
But eye, and ear, and every sense is captive,  
And thrall for ever to the comely Goth.

Why should the spirit of my father vex me?  
Behold, I give to him a worthier son!  
And though he be barbarian who woos me,  
The Roman bride shall wed his heart to Rome.

IV.

One thing I owe—beyond all ransom precious—  
To father, brother, and Imperial name,  
The chastity that makes me worth the winning,  
A virgin love unstained of force or guile.  
For this I thank thee, Theodosius, father;  
For this, Honorius, thy fraternal name;  
Nor thee the less, thou sleeping soul of honour,  
That no barbarian art in sense of law.  
For this, to silk and purple, crowns historic,  
Goblets of gold and priceless spoil of pearl—  
To all the glories of the cunning workman,  
Sculptured or graven, or inlaid with gems—  
To all the glittering legacies of triumph,  
And hoarded trophies of a thousand years—  
To all the wealth of harvest, pasture, vintage,  
To corn and cattle, oil, and spice, and wine—  
Yea, to the sacred things of God, most welcome!  
Since thou hast kept me sacred, even from thee.  
The noon consumes me in the thick pavilion,  
Yet I am fain of close-drawn solitude,  
Lest I should look upon the godless riot,  
That, once seen, haunts me like a dream of shame  
For all around the large-limbed Goths were lying  
Beneath the plane-trees—yet but half-perceived  
'Mid soft entanglement of arms and tresses  
By captive beauty wreathed around its lords;  
The pride of Romans, daughters of great houses,

Hiding their faces from my pitying gaze  
In hideous refuge of barbarian bosoms . . .  
God pardon them the wrong He hindered not!  
God take my thanks for what is more than empire,  
And speed the warrior whom no greedy haste  
Hath spurred beyond the pace of loyal loving,  
The pure caress, and broken utterance  
Of mingling tongues half-learnt in march of conquest—  
To which the ordered flow of Roman speech  
Is feeble—rich in sweetest hesitations,  
And wishful voids of tongueless eloquence.  
He stirs, and this pavilion's girth becometh  
My orb of lands, and hallowed round of love.

He wakes, and country is a dream forgotten:  
Where thou, Adolphus, art, there is my Rome.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Great Pig Story Of The Tweed

"Hands off, old man!" the young man cried—  
They stood beside the Tweed,  
Where still the name of Murder Creek  
Records some bloody deed.

The old man seized the hapless youth,  
With frantic grasp and rough,  
By what is popularly called  
(But vulgarly) the scruff;

And shouted as he twirled him round,  
And shook him to and fro,  
"Was them consignments pigs? . . Great Scott!  
Was them things pigs or no?"

Wild-eyed and gaunt, and grim he stood,  
Beneath the scorching noon,—  
Cantharides P. Roebuck, late  
Of the steamboat Arakoon.

He was an ancient mariner,  
A Yankee skipper he,  
Whom winds of adverse destiny  
Had blown across the sea;—

Whom hither still had Fate pursued,  
And served with many a trick,  
Till now he roamed the Tweed a one-  
Idea'd lunatic;—

Whom all men shunned, for whosoe'er  
Upon his beat might chance,  
Was bound to hear his tale in each  
Minutest circumstance.

A tale that haunted such as heard,  
Nor left them night or day;  
A torturing enigma, too,  
That turned their wits astray;—

For ofttimes they, like him who told,  
Would vaguely wandering go,  
And cry, "Was them consignments pigs?  
Was them things pigs or no?"

"Hands off!" again the young man cried.  
"It's this way, boss, you see,

We've come a stretch of thirty mile,  
Her uncle, her, an' me.

"You see it's this way. Parson comes  
Our road but once a year—  
We lives at Yougerbungaree,  
Just thirty mile from here;—

"At sundown yesterday I spied  
The parson ridin' past;  
I runs to Sue's, an' 'Sue,' says I,  
'Our chance is come at last!'

"This morning to his camp we goes,  
Us three, an' mother, four;  
'Splice us,' says we, but parson, he  
Puts in his blessed oar.

" 'Fill up this form,' says he. We fills.  
'Hullo!' he cries, 'my dear!  
Father alive? You under age?  
Me marry ye! No fear.'

"(Don't throttle, boss!)—Says parson then;  
'Go, seek a magistrate;  
Get his consent; an' hurry back;  
I leave to-night at eight.'

"So off we starts, ten mile an hour—  
(For heav'n's sake let me speak!)  
You see, it's this way, boss; they've gone  
To square it with the beak.

"I'm only hangin' round. I fixed

To meet them there at one;  
An' if I fail, my pretty Sue  
Will think I've cut an' run."—

"Was them things pigs?"—"Oh drat the pigs!  
It's this way, boss,—we're late.  
Think, thirty mile! the mokes dead beat!  
An' parson off at eight!"

'Twas all in vain; and when at length,  
Exhausted, limp, and pale,  
He gave reluctant ear, 'twas thus  
The skipper told his tale.

"I took the things on board as pigs,  
As pigs I signed for them;  
I passed an entry on them—pigs!

Pigs, sar, from starn to stem.

"Wal, wal; I little guessed that Fate  
Would play it down so low.  
Was them things pigs, d'ye hear! . . . But how  
The [Hades] should you know!

"It was the steamboat Arakoon,  
A craft of coasting fame;  
Cantharides P. Roebuck, sar,  
Was skipper of the same.

"The iserlated cusses here  
Was runnin' all to seed  
When first the steamboat Arakoon  
Come tradin' to the Tweed.

"Pigs, pigs, all sprung (mark that) from two,  
They fetched them by the score,  
An' nary strain had crossed the breed  
For twenty year an' more.

"I cleaned the settlement of pigs,  
Upp'd steam an' tore for town,

Nor guessed that them all-fired galoots  
Had been and done me brown.

"An' sech a voyage! grunt and squeak!  
(Pard, never load with swine.)  
Whate'er the durned abortions wur,  
The grunt was genu-ine.

"A hundred thousand times I swore  
To drown them in the sea;  
But, lord, they had an idgiot look  
That fairly gravelled me.

"We made the port. Upon the wharf  
A Brisbane butcher sot,  
An' through the roarin' of the steam,  
He hollered, 'What ye got?'

" 'Got pigs,' sez I, 'like bullocks, sar!'  
Cries butcher, 'I'm your man,'  
An' clewin' up his apron, slick  
Along the plank he ran."—

(But here the youth renewed his plaint;  
"Have mercy on me mate!  
It's thirty miles! the mokes dead beat!  
An' parson leaves at eight!")

"He eyed the brutes," the tale flowed on,  
"An' tossed his cussèd head;  
An' turnin' on his heel, sez he,  
'I thought 'twas pigs you said.'

" 'An' ain't them pigs?'—but he was gone.  
Wal, though I biled at this,  
I tried my level best to see  
The p'int he took amiss.

"But 'cep' a kinder cur'ous smile  
That squintin' didn't mend,  
An' an appealin' way they had  
Of settin' up on end,—

"An' cept' about the snout a tech  
Of Native Porkypine,  
I couldn't see no reason why  
That parcel wasn't swine.

"Wal, stranger, just as I had cussed  
My liver into tune,  
Another bloomin' butcher stepped  
On board the Arakoon."

(But here, at sound of distant hoofs,  
The captive writhed anew;  
"That's them!" he cried, "They've given me up!  
Oh curse your pigs and you!")

"No, pard—it ain't no use to squirm.  
Whar was I? le'mme see.  
Another butcher jumps aboard;  
'Good marnin', sar,' sez he.

"Got any p—?' But here he stuck.  
The critturs caught his eye.  
Sakes! how he stared as one by one  
The things meandered by.

"At length sez he, astoopin' down,  
The better to survey,  
'I wonder now what day o' the week  
The Lord created they!

" 'What name, mate?' 'Pigs, sar, PIGS!' I yelled,  
'As prime as ever growed!  
D'ye know pigs when you see them, sar?'  
'Oh, pigs,' sez he, 'be blowed.'

"Pard, should you come across him, say

That I apologize;  
For, oh! I banged that butcher's head  
Agin the smokestack guys!

"I sought an old an' trusted friend,  
A butcher in the town;  
I struck his diggin's, seized him, hailed  
A shay, and yanked him down.

"I carried him aboard—he was  
A heavy man and slow—  
'Now on your naked oath,' sez I,  
'Air them things pigs or no?'

"He made no sign, he made no sound,  
But something in his eye,  
As plain as signal lights, declared  
The contract was awry.

"At last sez he, consid'rin' like,  
An' strokin' down his jaws,  
'Cantharides P., it seems to me  
Them pettitoes is claws!'

" 'Great Neptune!'—that was all I said,  
And fell down in a swoon,  
A broken wreck, upon the deck  
Of the steamboat Arakoon.

"But twurn't Finis yet, old hoss,  
For at the smell of gin  
Cantharides P. Roebuck's soul  
Jumped back into his skin.

" 'Go, fetch me a zew-ologist!  
I thundered as I rose.  
'Let's see what larnèd science makes  
Of them 'ere pettitoes!  
" 'Who knows of one?'—The fireman's son  
Sez, 'Captain, if you please,  
If what you mean stuffs beastises,  
I'll fetch you wan o' these.'

" 'Go, bub!' I cried. 'Make tracks to onst,  
An' ketch him out or in!—  
This butcherin' conspiracy



Is just a trifle thin.'

"Wal, pard, the great man came. I slipped  
A sov'rin in his hand,

Which, though he 'peared almighty skeered,  
He seemed to understand.

"Sez I then, as he stooped an' spread  
His hands upon his knees,  
'Illustrious zew-ologist,  
What articles air these?'

"A wild surprise lit up his eyes  
As through his specs he blinked,—  
'Dear me,' sez he, 'I always thought  
That griffins wur extinct!'

\* \* \* \* \*

"From that to this is blank—all blank;  
But if 'tis true they say,  
I ordered round the vessel's head,  
An' ran her down the Bay.

"An' there, in spite of mate an' crew,  
An' cook an' fireman's son,  
I slung the critturs overboard,  
An' drowned them every one.

"An' now beside this blessèd Tweed  
I wander day an' night,  
An' vainly ask of airth an' heaven  
To read the riddle right.

"I ask the sea, I ask the skies,  
I ask it high an' low,—  
Was them 'ere shipments pigs? . . Great Scott!  
Was them things pigs or no?"

\* \* \* \* \*

That night at Yougerbungaree,  
The house clock striking ten,

Into a maiden's presence burst  
The most distraught of men.

"Oh, Ned, he's gone!" the maiden wailed.  
"How could you treat me so?"—  
For all reply there came the cry,  
"Was them things pigs or no?"

James Brunton Stephens

# The Headless Trooper

"No; not another step, for all  
The troopers out of hell!  
I'll camp beside this swamp to-night,  
Despite the yarns you tell.  
I'm dead beat, that's a solid fact;  
The other thing's a sell."

And Ike gave in—good, easy Ike;  
Though now and then he stole  
A glance across that dismal swamp,  
Lugubriously droll;  
'Twas plain that Headless Trooper lay  
Heavily on his soul.

And, ere he slept, again he told  
That tale of bloody men;  
And how the Headless Trooper still  
Rode nightly in the fen;  
And then he slept, but in his sleep  
He told it all again.

I cannot rest beside a man  
Who mutters in his sleep;  
It makes the chilly goose-flesh rise,  
The epidermis creep—  
('Tis no objection in a wife—  
You get her secrets cheap).

I put a hundred yards between  
The muttering Ike and me:  
I lay and thought of things that were,  
And things that yet might be:  
I could not sleep; I know not why;  
My hair rose eerily.

I rose and sat me on a log,  
And tried to keep me cool;  
I thought of "Hume on Miracles,"  
And called myself a fool;

But still the proverb racked my soul,  
"Exceptions prove the rule."

The moon was full; the stars were out;  
I tried to fix my eye  
Where Night laid shining love-gifts  
On the bosom of the sky;—

But well I knew that all the while  
The Thing was standing by.

How tall this pine tree on my left!  
How graceful in its height!  
Its topmost branches seem to touch  
The very brow of Night;—  
But all the while I knew the Thing  
Was panting at my right.

The 'possum leaves his hollow tree;  
The bandicoot is glad;  
It is the human heart alone  
The still night maketh sad;—  
And all the while the Headless Thing  
Was wheezing there like mad.

How ghostly is the mist that crawls  
Along the swampy ground!  
The Headless Thing here cleared its throat  
With most unearthly sound!  
And then I heard a gurgling voice,  
But dared not glance around.

"They shot me; Was it not enough?  
Look, darn you! Here's the hole!  
Was this not passage amply wide  
For any human soul?  
But, no! the blasted convict gang  
Must likewise take my poll!"

I turned; looked up; and at the sight  
My heart within me sunk:  
'Twas new to me to find myself

In such a mortal funk;—  
But newer still to fraternise  
With a bifurcated trunk!

Above the neck no trooper was;  
But formless void alone;  
There physiognomy was nil,  
Phrenology unknown;  
Where head had been there but remained  
The frustum of a cone!

Nay; I retract the "formless void;"  
The case was otherwise;  
For on the clotted marge there spun  
A living globe of flies!  
When one is dealing with the truth

One can't be too precise.

The loathsome whirling substitute  
Buzzed in the vacant space,  
And a thousand thousand little heads  
Of one head took the place:—  
And oh, the fly expression  
Of that rotatory face!

The breast was bare; the shirt thrown back  
Exposed the wound to view:  
The bullet, in its course of death,  
Had cleared an avenue:—  
Oh Gemini! I saw the Twins  
Distinctly shining through!  
And those same Twins are shining still  
To prove my story true.

In breeches, boots, and spurs arrayed  
The nether Trooper stood;  
The soundless phantom of a horse  
Grazed in his neighbourhood,—  
At all events went through the form  
Of hoisting in his food.

“What would'st thou, Headless Trooper,  
On the night's Plutonian shore?”  
I took it from Poe's Raven  
I had read not long before;  
And I more than half expected  
He would answer “Nevermore!”

But the Trooper only answered  
By a perfect storm of sighs,  
Which, through his crater issuing,  
Played Hades with the flies,—  
As I have seen Vesuvius  
Blow ashes to the skies.

“O wherefore, Headless Trooper,  
With the living intermix?  
Since thou art dead, and hast no head,  
Why kick against the pricks?  
Why dost thou not, as others do,  
Get clear across the Styx?”

The Trooper cleared his cone of flies,  
And through his crater said,  
“’Tis true I have no business here,  
’Tis true that I am dead;

And yet I cannot cross the Styx—  
They've fixed a fare `per head!’

“Fain would I cross as others do—  
Fain would I pay my shot!  
They only mock me when I ask  
For leave to go to Pot!  
How can I pay so much `per head’  
When I no head have got?

“Yet what could I, thus headless, do  
In that last Land of Nod?  
It is not that the thing is dear,  
So much as that it's odd;—  
They only charge an obolus,  
A sort of Tommy Dodd.

"I've tried the ferryman with gold—  
With every coin that goes:  
He merely cries, 'Oh, go a-head!'  
And, laughing, off he rows.  
He can't twit me, at all events,  
With paying through the nose!

"A drachma once I offered him,  
Six times the fare in Greek;  
He merely cursed my 'impudence,'  
And pushed off in a pique:—  
I didn't think a faceless man  
Could be accused of cheek.

"From day to day, from night to night,  
My prayer the wretch denies;  
Yet even in this headless breast  
Some grateful thoughts arise—  
For though he's blasted all my hopes,  
He cannot blast my eyes.

"I know not where the convict crew  
My missing head consigned,  
But I am doomed to walk the earth  
Till that same head I find.  
Oh, could I come across it,  
I would know it though I'm blind,—  
The bump of amativeness sticks  
So strongly out behind!

"The mouth extends from ear to ear;  
The hair is fiery red;  
Perchance it might attract thine eye

Who art not blind or dead;  
I pray thee help me to obtain  
My disembodied head!"

"Oh Headless Trooper, fain would I  
With thee the search begin,  
But ere the day I must away,

And trudge through thick and thin;  
For I am bound to Stanthorpe town,  
And time with me is tin.

“But ere upon my pilgrimage  
With dawn's first streak I go,  
I fain would do what in me lies  
To mitigate thy woe.  
If I can serve thee anywise,  
I pray thee let me know.”

The Trooper thought a little space,  
His body forward bowed,  
With plenteous sighs dispersed the flies,  
And once more spoke aloud:—  
“’Tis long since I have tried the weed,  
I'd like to blow a cloud.”

“How canst thou, headless man, who hast  
No lips wherewith to puff?”  
Here deprecatingly he waved  
His hand, and said, “Enough.  
Myself will guarantee the how,  
If thou supply the stuff.”

I took a meerschaum from my pouch,  
A meerschaum clean and new,  
As white as is undoctored milk,  
As pure as morning dew:—  
I pray you mark that it was white,  
’Twill prove my story true.

I passed it to him, filled and lit,  
Still wondering in my mind.  
“Thanks, generous colonial,  
Thou art very, very kind.  
Now pick a thickish waddy up,  
And plug my wound behind.”

I picked a thickish waddy up,  
And did as I was bid;  
And right into the bullet-hole



The amber mouth he slid;

And then !—You never saw the like;  
At least I never did.

Like a forge bellows went his chest,  
And upward from his cone  
There shot a vaporous spire, like that  
From Cotopaxi blown.  
The flies unglobed themselves, and fled  
With angry monotone.

So fierce the blast, the pipe was void  
Ere one might reckon ten;  
And then with gesture wild he signed  
To fill the bowl again;  
The which I did, till he had smoked  
Enough for fifty men.

Hour after hour he drew and blew,  
Till twist began to fail,  
Till all the sky grew dim with smoke,  
And all the stars grew pale;  
Till even the seasoned stomach turned  
Of him who tells the tale.

The smoke mixed darkly with the mists  
On the adjacent bogs,  
And roused the hoarse remonstrant wail  
Of semi-stifled frogs,  
The 'possums all within a mile  
Went home as sick as dogs.

But suddenly the phantom steed  
Neighed with sepulchral sound,  
And where both man and horse had been  
Nor man nor horse was found!  
I stood alone; the meerschaum lay  
Before me on the ground.

The meerschaum lay upon the ground—  
This much I may avouch;

I took it, and with trembling hand  
Replaced it in my pouch;  
And, overcome with nausea,  
I sought my grassy couch.

The sun was up when I awoke,  
And in his gladsome beams  
I mocked the things of yesternight,  
And laughed away my dreams:  
Disciples of the School of Doubt

Are always in extremes.

But when I roused me from my couch  
To take my morning smoke,  
Like lightning flash the verity  
Upon my laughter broke;—  
The scarcity of 'baccy proved  
The thing beyond a joke.

And when my pouch I opened next—  
(Now check the wanton jeer)—  
My pipe, my new, fresh meerschaum pipe—  
('Tis true as I am here)—  
My pipe was "coloured!" as if I  
Had smoked it for a year.

My pipe was coloured!—no, not brown,  
But black, as black as jet.  
You don't believe it?—Man alive,  
The pipe is coloured yet!  
Look here—why, here's the best of proofs—  
The pipe, videlicet.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Midnight Axe

I.

The red day sank as the Sergeant rode  
Through the woods grown dim and brown,  
One farewell flush on his carbine glowed,  
And the veil of the dusk drew down.

No sound of life save the hoof-beats broke  
The hush of the lonely place,  
Or the short, sharp words that the Sergeant spoke  
When his good horse slackened pace,

Or hungrily caught at the ti-tree shoots,  
Or in tangled brushwood tripped  
Faltered amid disrupted roots,  
Or on porphyry outcrop slipped.  
The woods closed in; through the vaulted dark  
No ray of starlight shone,  
But still o'er the crashing litter of bark  
Trooper and steed tore on.

Night in the bush, and the bearings lost;  
But the Sergeant took no heed,  
For Fate that morn his will had crossed,  
And his wrath was hot indeed.

The captured prey that his hands had gripped  
Ere the dawn in his lone bush lair  
The bonds from his pinioned wrists had slipped,  
And was gone he knew not where.

Therefore the wrath of Sergeant Hume  
Burned fiercely as on he fared,  
And whither he rode through the perilous gloom  
He neither knew nor cared,

But still, as the dense brush checked the pace,  
Would drive the sharp spurs in,  
Though the pendent parasites smote his face,  
Or caught him beneath the chin.

The woodland dipped, or upward bent,  
But he recked not of hollow or hill,  
Till right on the brink of a sheer descent  
His trembling horse stood still.

And when, in despite of word and oath,  
He swerved from the darksome edge,  
The unconscious man, dismounting loth,  
Set foot on a yielding ledge.

A sudden strain on a treacherous rein,  
And a clutch at the empty air,  
A cry in the dark, with no ear to mark  
Its accent of despair—

And the slender stream in the gloom below,  
That in mossy channel ran,  
Was checked a space in its feeble flow,  
By the limbs of a senseless man.

II.

A change had passed o'er the face of night,  
When, waking as from a dream,  
The Sergeant gazed aghast at the sight  
Of moonlit cliff and stream.

From the shallow wherein his limbs had lain  
He crawled to higher ground,  
And, numb of heart and dizzy of brain,  
Dreamily gazed around.

From aisle to aisle of the solemn wood  
A misty radiance spread,  
And like pillars seen through incense stood  
The gaunt boles, gray or red.

Slow vapours, touched with a mystic sheen,  
Round the sombre branches curled,  
Or floated the haggard trunks between,  
Like ghosts in a spectral world.

No voice was heard of beast or bird,  
Nor whirr of insect wing;  
Nor crepitant bark the silence stirred,  
Nor dead nor living thing.

So still that, but for his labouring breath,  
And the blood on his head and hand,  
He might have deemed his swoon was death,  
And this the Silent Land.

Anon, close by, at the water's edge,  
His helmet he espied,  
Half-buried among the reedy sedge,

And drew it to his side.

And ev'n as he dipped it in the brook,  
And drank as from a cup,  
Suddenly, with affrighted look,  
The Sergeant started up.

For the sound of an axe—a single stroke—  
Through the ghostly woods rang clear;  
And a cold sweat on his forehead broke,  
And he shook in deadly fear.

Why should the sound that on lonely tracks  
Had gladdened him many a day—  
Why should the ring of the friendly axe  
Bring boding and dismay?

And why should his steed down the slope hard by,  
With fierce and frantic stride—  
Why should his steed with unearthly cry  
Rush trembling to his side?

Strange, too—and the Sergeant marked it well,  
Nor doubted he marked aright—  
When the thunder of hoofs on the silence fell,  
And the cry rang through the night,

A thousand answering echoes woke,

Reverberant far and wide;  
But to the unseen woodman's stroke  
No echo had replied.

And while he questioned with his fear  
And summoned his pride to aid,  
A second stroke fell sharp and clear,  
Nor echo answer made.

A third stroke, and aloud he cried,  
As one who hails his kind;  
But nought save his own voice multiplied  
His straining sense divined.

He bound the ends of his broken rein,  
He recked not his carbine gone,  
He mounted his steed with a groan of pain,  
And tow'rd the sound spurred on.

For now the blows fell thick and fast,  
And he noted with added dread  
That ever as woods on woods flew past  
The sound moved on ahead.

But his courage rose with the quickening pace,  
And mocked his boding gloom;  
For fear had no abiding-place  
In the soul of Sergeant Hume.

### III

Where the woods thinned out and the sparser trees  
Their separate shadows cast,  
Waxing fainter by slow degrees  
The sounds died out at last.

The Sergeant paused, and peered about  
O'er all the stirless scene,  
Half in amaze, and half in doubt  
If such a thing had been.

Nor vainly in search of clue or guide  
From trunk to trunk he gazed,

For, lo! the giant stem at his side  
By the hand of man was blazed.

And again and again he found the sign,  
Till, after a weary way,  
Before him, asleep in the calm moonshine,  
A little clearing lay;

And in it a red slab hut that glowed  
As 'twere of jasper made.  
The Sergeant into the clearing rode,  
And passed through the rude stockade.

He bound his horse to the fence, and soon  
He stood by the open door.  
With pallid face upturned to the moon  
A man slept on the floor.

Little he thought to have found him here,  
By such strange portent led—  
His sister's son, whom for many a year  
His own had mourned as dead;

Who had chosen the sundering seas to roam,  
After a youth misspent,  
And to those who wept in his far-off home  
Token nor word had sent.

The face looked grim, and haggard, and old,  
Yet not from the touch of time;—  
Too well the Sergeant knew the mould

And lineaments of crime.

And "Better," he said, "she should mourn him dead  
Than know him changed to this!"  
Yet he kneeled, and touched the slumbering head,  
For her, with a gentle kiss.

Whereat the eyelids parted wide,  
But no light in the dull eye gleamed:  
The man turned slowly on his side

And muttered as one who dreamed;

He stared at the Sergeant as in a trance,  
And the listener's blood ran cold  
As he pieced the broken utterance,  
That a tale of horror told;

For he heard him rave of murder done,  
Of an axe and a hollow tree,  
And "Oh, God!" he cried, "must my sister's son  
Be led to his death by me!"

He seized him roughly by the arm,  
He called him by his name;  
The man leaped up in mazed alarm,  
And terror shook his frame.

Then a sudden knife flashed out from his hip,  
And they closed in struggle wild;  
But soon in the Sergeant's iron grip  
The man was as a child.

IV.

A wind had arisen that shook the hut;  
The moonbeams dimmed apace;  
The lamp was lit; the door was shut;  
And the twain sat face to face.

In question put and answer flung  
A weary space had passed,  
But the secret of the soul was wrung  
From the stubborn lips at last.  
As one who resistless doom obeyed  
The younger told his sin,  
Nor any prayer for mercy made,  
Nor appeal to the bond of kin.  
" 'The quarrel? Oh, 'twas an idle thing—

Too idle almost to name;  
He turned up an ace and killed my king,  
And I lost the cursèd game.



“And he triumphed and jeered, and his stinging chaff,  
By heaven, how it maddened me then!  
And he left me there with a scornful laugh—  
But he never laughed again.

“We had long been mates, through good and ill;  
Together we owned this land;  
But his was ever the stronger will,  
And his was the stronger hand.

“But I would be done with his lordly airs;  
I was weary of them and him;  
So I stole upon him unawares  
In the forest lone and dim.

“The ring of his axe had drowned my tread;  
But a rod from me he stood  
When he paused to fix the iron head  
That had loosened as he hewed.

“Then I too made a sudden halt,  
And watched him as he turned  
To a charred stump, in whose gaping vault  
A fire of branches burned.

“He had left the axe by the half-hewn bole,  
As whistling he turned away;  
From my covert with wary foot I stole,  
And caught it where it lay.

“He stooped; he stirred the fire to flame;  
I could feel its scorching breath,  
As behind him with the axe I came,  
And struck the stroke of death.  
‘Dead at a blow, without a groan,  
The sapling still in his hands,  
The man fell forward like a stone  
Amid the burning brands.

“The stark limbs lay without, but those  
I thrust in the fiery tomb——”  
With shuddering groan the Sergeant rose,

And paced the narrow room,

And cried aloud, "Oh, task of hell,  
That I should his captor be!

My God! if it be possible,  
Let this cup pass from me!"

The spent light flickered and died; and, lo,  
The dawn about them lay;  
And each face a ghastlier shade of woe  
Took on in the dismal gray.

Around the hut the changeful gale  
Seemed now to sob and moan,  
And mingled with the doleful tale  
A dreary undertone.

"I piled dry wood in the hollow trunk,"  
The unsparing shrift went on,  
"And watched till the tedious corpse had shrunk  
To ashes, and was gone.

"That night I knew my soul was dead;  
For neither joy nor grief  
The numbness stirred of heart and head,  
Nor tears came for relief.

"And when morning dawned, with no surprise  
I awoke to my solitude,  
Nor blood-clouds flared before mine eyes,  
As men had writ they should;

"Nor fancy feigned dumb things would prate  
Of what no man could prove!—  
Only, a heavy, heavy weight,  
That would not, would not move—

"Only a burden ever the same  
Asleep or awake I bore,  
A dead soul in a living frame  
That would quicken nevermore.

“Three nights had passed since the deed was done,  
And all was calm and still—  
(You'll say 'tis a lie; I say 'tis none;  
I'll swear to it, if you will)—

“Three nights—and, mark me, that very day  
I had stood by the ashy cave,  
And the toppling shell had snapped, and lay  
Like a lid on my comrade's grave—

“And yet, I tell you, the man lived on!  
Though the ashes o'er and o'er  
I had sifted till every trace was gone

Of what he was, or wore:—

“Three nights had passed; in a quiet unstirred  
By wind or living thing,  
As I lay upon my bed I heard  
His axe in the timber ring!

“He hewed; he paused; he hewed again.  
Each stroke was like a knell!  
And I heard the fibres wrench, and then  
The crash of a tree as it fell.

“And I fled; a hundred leagues I fled—  
In the crowded haunts of a town  
I would hide me from the irksome dead,  
And would crush remembrance down.

“But in all that life and ceaseless stir  
Nor part nor lot I found;  
For men to me as shadows were,  
And their speech had a far-off sound.

“For I had lost the touch of souls;  
Men's lives and mine betwixt,  
Wide as the space that parts the poles  
There was a great gulf fixed.

"Sorrow and joy to me but seemed;  
As one from an alien sphere  
I lived and saw, or as one who dreamed.—  
I was lonelier there than here.

"To the sense of all life's daily round  
I had lost the living key,  
And I grew to long for the only sound  
That had meaning on earth for me.

"Again o'er the weary forest-tracks  
My burden hither I bore;  
And I heard the measured ring of the axe  
In the midnight as before.

"And as ever he hewed the long nights through,  
Nor harmed me in my bed,  
A feeble sense within me grew  
Of friendship with the dead.

"And believe me, I could have lived, lived long,  
With this poor stay of mine,  
But the faithless dead has done me wrong:  
Three nights and never a sign,

"Though I've thrice out-watched the stars!—Last night,  
Seeing he came no more,  
Despair anew was whispering flight,  
When I sank as dead on the floor.

"Take me away from this curs'd abode!  
Not a jot for life I care;  
He has left me alone, and my weary load  
Is greater than I can bear.

"But I say if my mate had walked about  
I had never told you the tale!"  
As he spoke the sound of an axe rang out,  
In a lull of the fitful gale.

He sprang to his feet: a cunning smile  
O'er all his visage spread;

"Why, man, I lied to you all the while!  
It was all a lie!" he said.

"Leave go!"—for the trooper dragged him out  
Under the angry sky.

"The man's alive!—you can hear him about!—  
Would you hang me for a lie? . . .

"Not that way! No, not that!" he hissed,  
And shook in all his frame;  
But the Sergeant drew him by the wrist  
To whence the sounds yet came,

Moaning ever, "What have I done  
That I should his captor be?  
Oh, God! to think that my sister's son  
Should be led to his death by me!"

The tempest swelled; and, caught by the blast  
In wanton revel of wrath,  
Tumultuous boughs flew whirling past,  
Or thundered across their path:

Yet ever above the roar of the storm,  
Louder and louder yet  
The axe-strokes rang, but no human form  
Their wildered vision met.

When they reached a spot where a charred stump prone  
On an ashy hollow lay,  
The doomed man writhed with piteous moan,  
And well-nigh swooned away.

When they came to a tree on whose gaping trunk

Some woodman's axe had plied,  
The struggling captive backward shrunk,  
And broke from the trooper's side.

"To left!—for your life! To left, I say!"  
Was the Sergeant's warning call:  
For he saw the tree in the tempest sway,

He marked the threatening fall.

But the vengeful wreck its victim found;  
It seized him as he fled;  
Between one giant limb and the ground  
The man lay crushed and dead.

The Sergeant gazed on the corpse aghast,  
Yet he cried, as he bent the knee,  
"Father! I thank Thee that Thou hast  
Let this cup pass from me!"

James Brunton Stephens

# The Power Of Science

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame."  
Are but the legacies of apes,  
With interest on the same.

How oft in studious hours do I  
Recall those moments, gone too soon,  
When midway in the hall I stood,  
Beside the Dichobune.

Through the Museum-windows played  
The light on fossil, cast, and chart;  
And she was there, my Gwendoline,  
The mammal of my heart.

She leaned against the Glyptodon,  
The monster of the sculptured tooth;  
She looked a fossil specimen  
Herself, to tell the truth.

She leaned against the Glyptodon;  
She fixed her glasses on her nose;  
One Pallas-foot drawn back displayed  
The azure of her hose.

Few virtues had she of her own—  
She borrowed them from time and space;  
Her age was eocene, although  
Post-tertiary her place.

The Irish Elk that near us stood,  
(Megaceros Hibernicus),  
Scarce dwarfed her; while I bowed beneath  
Her stately overplus.

I prized her pre-diluvian height,  
Her palaeozoic date of birth,  
For these to scientific eye  
Had scientific worth.

She had some crotchets of her own,  
My sweet viviparous Gwendoline;  
She loved me best when I would sing  
Her ape-descent and mine.

I raised a wild pansophic lay  
(The public fled the dismal tones);—

I struck a chord that suited well  
That entourage of bones.

I sang the very dawn of life,  
Cleared at a bound the infinite chasm  
That sunders inorganic dust  
From sly-born protoplasm.

I smote the stiffest chords of song,  
I showed her in a glorious burst  
How universal unity  
Was dual from the first.

How primal germs contained in one  
The beau-ideal and the belle;  
And how the "mystery of life"  
Is just a perfect cell.

I showed how sense itself began  
In senseless gropings after sense;—  
(She seemed to find it so herself,  
Her gaze was so intense.)

And how the very need of light  
Conceived, and visual organs bore;  
Until an optic want evolved  
The spectacles she wore.

How headless molluscs making head  
Against the fashions of their line,  
On pulpy maxims turned their backs,  
And specialized a spine.

How landward longings seized on fish,



Fretted the type within their eggs,  
And in amphibian issue dif-  
ferentiated legs.

I hopped the quaint marsupials,  
And into higher mammals ran,  
And through a subtle fugue I stole  
From Lemurs up to Man.

How tails were lost—but when I reached  
This saddest part of all my lay,  
She dropped the corners of her mouth,  
And turned her face away.

And proud to see my lofty love  
So sweetly wince, so coyly shrink,  
I woke a moving threnody—

I sang the missing link.

And when I spake of vanished kin,  
Of Simian races dead and gone,  
The wave of sorrow from her eyes  
Half-drowned the Glyptodon.

I turned to other, brighter themes,  
And glancing at our different scales,  
I showed how lady beetles are  
Robuster than the males.

I sang the Hymenoptera;  
How insect-brides are sought and got;  
How stridulation of the male  
First hinted what was what.

And when—perchance too fervently—  
I smote upon the chord of sex,  
I saw the tardy spark of love  
Blaze up behind her specs.

She listened with a heightened grace,  
She blushed a blush like ruby wine,

Then bent her stately head and clinked  
Her spectacles on mine.

A mighty impulse rattled through  
Her well-articulated frame;  
And into one delighted ear  
She breathed my Christian name.

And whispered that my song had given  
Her secret thought substantial shape,  
For she had long considered me  
The offshoot of an ape.

She raised me from the enchanted floor,  
And, as my lips her shoulder met,  
Between two asthmas of embrace  
She called me marmosette.

I strove to calm her down; she grew  
Serener and serener;  
And so I won my Gwendoline,  
My vertebrate congener.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Southern Cross

(A Frustration)

Four stars on Night's brow, or Night's bosom,  
Whichever the reader prefers;  
Or Night without either may do some,  
Each one to his taste or to hers.  
Four stars—to continue inditing,  
So long as I feel in the vein—  
Hullo! what the deuce is that biting?  
Mosquitos again!

Oh glories not gilded but golden,  
Oh daughters of Night unexcelled,  
By the sons of the north un beholden,  
By our sons (if we have them) beheld;  
Oh jewels the midnight enriching,  
Oh four which are double of twain!  
Oh mystical — bother the itching!  
Mosquitos again!

You alone I can anchor my eye on,  
Of you and you only I'll write:  
And I now look awry on Orion,  
That once was my chiefest delight.  
Ye exalt me high over the petty  
Conditions of pleasure and pain—  
Oh Heaven! here are these maladetti  
Mosquitos again!

The poet should ever be placid.  
Oh vex not his soul or his skin!  
Shall I scare them with sulphurous acid?  
It is done, and afresh I begin.  
Lucid orbs!—that last sting very sore is;  
I am fain to leave off, I am fain;  
It has given me uncommon dolores—  
Simpliciter, pain.

Not quite what the shape of a cross is—  
A little lop-sided, I own—

Confound your infernal proboscis,  
Inserted well nigh to the bone!  
Queen-lights of the heights of high heaven,  
Ensnared in the crystal inane—  
Oh me! here are seventy times seven

Mosquitos again!

Oh horns of a mighty trapezium!  
Quadrilateral area, hail!  
Oh bright as the light of magnesium!—  
Oh hang them all, female and male!  
At the end of an hour of their stinging,  
What shall rest of me then, what remain?  
I shall die as the swan dieth, singing,  
Mosquitos again!

Shock keen as the stroke of the levin!  
They sting, and I change in a flash  
From the peace and the poppies of heaven  
To the flame and the fuel of—dash!  
O Cross of the South ! I forgot you,  
These demons have addled my brain.  
Once more I look upward. . . . Od rot you!  
You're at it again

There ! stick in your pitiless brad-awl,  
And do your malevolent worst!  
Dine on me, and when you have had all,  
Let others go in for a burst!  
O silent and pure constellation,  
Can you pardon my fretful refrain?  
Forgive, oh forgive my vexation—  
They're at it again!

Oh imps that provoke to mad laughter,  
Winged fiends that are fed from my brow,  
Bite hard! let your neighbours come after,  
And sting where you stung me just now!  
Red brands on it smitten and bitten,  
Round blotches I rub at in vain!  
Oh Crux! Whatsoever I've written,

I've written in pain!

Ye chrysolite crystalline creatures,  
Wan watchers the fairest afield,  
Stars—and garters, are these my own features  
In the merciless mirror revealed!  
They are mine, even mine, and none other,  
And my hands how they slacken and strain!  
Oh my sister, my spouse, and my mother!  
I'm going insane!

James Brunton Stephens

# The Squatter's Baccy Famine

In blackest gloom he cursed his lot;  
His breath was one long weary sigh;  
His brows were gathered in a knot  
That only baccy could untie.  
His oldest pipe was scraped out clean;  
The deuce a puff was left him there;  
A hollow sucking sound of air  
Was all he got his lips between.  
He only said, "My life is dreary.  
The Baccy's done," he said.  
He said, "I am aweary, aweary;  
By Jove, I'm nearly dead."

The chimney-piece he searched in vain,  
Into each pocket plunged his fist;  
His cheek was blanched with weary pain,  
His mouth awry for want of twist.  
He idled with his baccy-knife;  
He had no care for daily bread:—  
A single stick of Negro-head  
Would be to him the staff of life.  
He only said, "My life is dreary.  
The Baccy's done," he said.  
He said, "I am aweary, aweary  
I'd most as soon be dead."

Books had no power to mend his grief;  
The magazines could tempt no more;  
"Cut Gold-Leaf" was the only leaf  
That he had cared to ponder o'er.  
From chair to sofa sad he swings,  
And then from sofa back to chair;  
But in the depth of his despair  
Can catch no "bird's-eye" view of things.  
And still he said, "My life is dreary.  
No Baccy, boys," he said.  
He said, "I am aweary, aweary;  
I'd just as soon be dead."

His meals go by he knows not how;  
No taste in flesh, or fowl, or fish;  
There's not a dish could tempt him now,  
Except a cake of Caven-dish.  
His life is but a weary drag;  
He cannot choose but curse and swear,

And thrust his fingers through his hair,  
All shaggy in the want of shag.  
And still he said, "My life is dreary,  
No Baccy, boys," he said.  
He said, "I am aweary, aweary;  
I'd rather far be dead."

To him one end of old cheroot  
Were sweetest root that ever grew.  
No honey were due substitute  
For "Our Superior Honey-Dew."  
One little fig of Latakia  
Would buy all fruits of Paradise;  
"Prince Alfred's Mixture" fetch a price  
Above both Prince and Galatea.  
Sudden he said, "No more be dreary!  
The dray has come!" he said.  
He said, "I'll smoke till I am weary—  
And then, I'll go to bed."

James Brunton Stephens

# The Story Of A Soul

Who can say "Thus far, no farther," to the tide of his own nature?  
Who can mould the spirit's fashion to the counsel of his will?  
Square his being by enactment—shape his soul to legislature—  
Be himself his law of living, his own art of good and ill?

Who can sway the rhythm of breathing? Who can time his own heart beating?  
Fix the pitch of all soul music, and imprison it in bars?  
Who can pledge the immaterial affinities from meeting?  
Who can make him his own orbit unrelated to the stars?

I had marked my path before me, not in flowery lane or by-way,  
Unbeguiled of all bird-singing, by no voice of waters won;  
And across life's silent glacier I had cut a clear cold highway,  
Little recking of the avalanche, or all-dissolving sun.

I had said unto my soul, Be thou the lord of thine own Reason;  
Get thee face to face and heart to heart with everlasting Truth;—  
Thou art heir of all her beauty if thou dare the lofty treason  
To clasp her and to kiss her with the valiant lips of youth.

Not in outer courts of worship, not by darkly-curtained portal,  
But within her inmost chamber, in the glory of her shrine,  
Shalt thou seek her and commune with her, a mortal made immortal  
By the breathing of her presence, by her fervid hand in thine.

With no garment-clinging vassalage, unawed of all tradition,  
Alone, alone of mortals shalt thou gaze upon her face;  
And the years shall pass unheeded in the wonder of the vision,  
And her attributes unfolding make thee free of time and space.

So I left the dewy levels, and with upward-pointing finger  
Marked my goal among the snowy peaks o'er pleasure and o'er pain;  
And the shining arms of Aphrodité beckoning me to linger  
By her side amid her rosy bowers were stretched for me in vain.

And I heard the world pass by me with a far-off dreamy cadence  
Of an alien music uninformed with meaning to mine ears;  
And all sweet melodious laughter in the voice of men and maidens  
Came with distance-saddened undertone, a mockery of tears.



Till alike the throb of pleasure and alike the great o'erflowings  
Of the springs of sorrow seemed to be forgotten things of yore;  
Till the world passed from beneath me, and the rumour of its goings  
Far diffused into the silent ethers reached my soul no more.

And the bodiless and shadowless mute ghosts of contemplation,  
Charmed from spells of bookish lore, were my companions on my way;

And their flake-light footfalls cheered me to a dreamy exaltation  
Where the soul sat with the godheads, unassailable as they.

I had lost the glow of Nature; and the pride of clearer seeing  
Was to me for all elation, for the sunset and the flowers,  
For the beauty and the music and the savour of all being,  
For the starry thrills of midnight, for the joy of morning hours.

Down the slopes I left behind me fled the creeds of many races,  
Fled the gnomes of superstition, fled rebuking fiends of fear,  
And I smiled as I beheld them from the calm of my high places  
Cast integument and substance, melt in mist and disappear.

So I held my way unwavering in dismal mountainpasses,  
Though a voice within my soul was loud, "In vain, and all in vain!"  
And I heard the unassuaging streams far down in deep crevasses,  
And I stumbled snowblind 'mid the boulders of the long moraine.

Still I said, I will not falter, nor revisit earth for ever,  
Who have breathed the breath of deity and lived Olympian hours!  
—When the summer smote the glacier, and the ice became a river,  
And I found me in the valley clinging wildly to the flowers!

Clinging wildly, clinging fondly, in a mad repentant fashion,  
To the blossoms long forsaken, to the graces long foregone,  
Paying lavishly in tears and sighs the long arrears of passion,  
And re-wedded to the joy of earth by one fair thing thereon!

Fools and blind are we who think to soar beyond the reach of Nature!  
Fools and blind who think to bid the tide of feeling from its flood!  
Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?  
Or compel the summer fervours from the solstice of the blood?

Not "as gods." Not yet. Our roots are in the earth that heaves beneath me:

With her rhythm we move and tremble, with her starry dance we whirl.  
Lo, she laughs when I would fly to where her arms shall not enwreath me,  
Draws me back with cords of golden hair, o'erthrows me with a girl!

What was I to deem it duty thus to sunder Truth and Beauty—  
Thus to die among the living, and to live among the dead?  
Ah, the hands of Truth are boonless, and the lips of Truth are tuneless,  
When we sever her from Love, and throne her coldly overhead!

Now I know her drawing nearer in a fairer light and dearer  
Than in wastes of icy solitude or page of weary tome—  
In the gleam of golden tresses, in the eye that smiles and blesses,  
In the glowing hand that presses Love's approved conviction home.

Truth is sphered in sweet communion. Truth is life and love in union.  
Hand in hand from spiritual founts we catch the circling thrill.  
We are not compact of reasons. There are changes in our seasons;

And the crescent orb of youth has many phases to fulfil.

James Brunton Stephens

# The Turn Of The Road

I was playing with my hoop along the road  
Just where the bushes are, when, suddenly,  
There came a shout, -- I ran away and stowed  
Myself beneath a bush, and watched to see  
What made the noise, and then, around the bend,  
I saw a woman running. She was old  
And wrinkle-faced, and had big teeth. -- The end  
Of her red shawl caught on a bush and rolled  
Right off her, and her hair fell down. Her face  
Was awful white, and both her eyes looked sick,  
And she was talking queer. 'O God of Grace!'  
Said she, 'where is the child?' and flew back quick  
The way she came, and screamed, and shook her hands;  
. . . Maybe she was a witch from foreign lands.

James Brunton Stephens

# To A Black Gin

Daughter of Eve, draw near—I would behold thee.  
Good Heavens! Could ever arm of man enfold thee?  
Did the same Nature that made Phryne mould thee?

Come thou to leeward; for thy balmy presence  
Savoureth not a whit of mille-fleurescence:—  
My nose is no insentient excrescence.

Thou art not beautiful, I tell thee plainly,  
Oh! thou ungainliest of things ungainly;  
Who thinks thee less than hideous doats insanely.

Most unaesthetical of things terrestrial,  
Hadst thou indeed an origin celestial?—  
Thy lineaments are positively bestial!

Yet thou my sister art, the clergy tell me;  
Though, truth to state, thy brutish looks compel me  
To hope these parsons merely want to sell me.

A hundred times and more I've heard and read it;  
But if Saint Paul himself came down and said it,  
Upon my soul I could not give it credit.

"God's image cut in ebony," says someone;  
'Tis to be hoped some day thou may'st become one;  
The present image is a very rum one.  
Thy face "the human face divine!" . . . Oh, Moses!  
Whatever trait divine thy face discloses,  
Some vile Olympian cross-play pre-supposes.

Thy nose appeareth but a transverse section:  
Thy mouth hath no particular direction,—  
A flabby-rimmed abyss of imperfection.

Thy skull development mine eye displeases;  
Thou wilt not suffer much from brain diseases;  
Thy facial angle forty-five degrees is.

The coarseness of thy tresses is distressing,  
With grease and raddle firmly coalescing,  
I cannot laud thy system of "top-dressing."

Thy dress is somewhat scant for proper feeling;  
As is thy flesh, too,—scarce thy bones concealing:  
Thy calves unquestionably want re-vealing.

Thy rugged skin is hideous with tattooing,  
And legible with hieroglyphic wooing—  
Sweet things in art of some fierce lover's doing.

For thou some lover hast, I bet a guinea,—  
Some partner in thy fetid ignominy,  
The raison d'être of this piccaninny.

What must he be whose eye thou hast delighted?  
His sense of beauty hopelessly benighted!  
The canons of his taste how badly sighted!

What must his gauge be, if thy features pleased him?  
If lordship of such limbs as thine appeased him,  
It was not "calf-love" certainly that seized him.

And is he amorously sympathetic?  
And doth he kiss thee? . . . Oh my soul prophetic!  
The very notion is a strong emetic!

And doth he smooth thine hours with oily talking?  
And take thee conjugally out-a-walking?  
And crown thy transports with a tom-a-hawking?

I guess his love and anger are combined so;  
His passions on thy shoulders are defined so;  
"His passages of love" are underlined so.

Tell me thy name. What? . . . Helen? . . . (Oh, OEnone,  
That name bequeathed to one so foul and bony  
Avengeth well thy ruptured matrimony!)

Eve's daughter! with that skull! and that complexion?  
What principle of "Natural Selection"

Gave thee with Eve the most remote connection?

Sister of L. E. L. . . . of Mrs. Stowe, too!  
Of E. B. Browning! Harriet Martineau, too!  
Do theologians know where fibbers go to?

Of great George Eliot, whom I worship daily!  
Of Charlotte Brontë! and Joanna Baillie!—  
Methinks that theory is rather "scaly."

Thy primal parents came a period later—  
The handiwork of some vile imitator;  
I fear they had the devil's imprimatur.

This in the retrospect.—Now, what's before thee?  
The white man's heaven, I fear, would simply bore thee;  
Ten minutes of doxology would floor thee.

Thy Paradise should be some land of Goshen,  
Where appetite should be thy sole devotion,  
And surfeit be the climax of emotion;—

A land of Bunya-bunyas towering splendid,—  
Of honey-bags on every tree suspended,—  
A Paradise of sleep and riot blended;—

Of tons of 'baccy, and tons more to follow,—  
Of wallaby as much as thou couldst swallow,—  
Of hollow trees, with 'possums in the hollow;—

There, undismayed by frost, or flood, or thunder,  
As joyous as the skies thou roamest under,  
There shouldst thou . . . Oooey! . . Stop! She's off.  
. . . No wonder.

James Brunton Stephens

# Universally Respected

I.

Biggs was missing: Biggs had vanished; all the town was in a ferment;  
For if ever man was looked to for an edifying end,  
With due mortuary outfit, and a popular interment,  
It was Biggs, the universal guide, philosopher, and friend.

But the man had simply vanished; speculation wove no tissue  
That would hold a drop of water; each new theory fell flat.  
It was most unsatisfactory, and hanging on the issue  
Were a thousand wagers, ranging from a "pony" to a hat.

Not a trace could search discover in the township or without it,  
And the river had been dragged from morn till night with no avail.  
His continuity had ceased, and that was all about it,  
And there wasn't even a grease-spot left behind to tell the tale.  
That so staid a man as Biggs was should be swallowed up in mystery  
Lent an increment to wonder—he who trod no doubtful paths,  
But stood square to his surroundings, with no cloud upon his history,  
As the much-respected lessee of the Corporation Baths.

His affairs were all in order: since the year the alligator  
With a startled river bather made attempt to coalesce,  
The resulting wave of decency had greater grown and greater,  
And the Corporation Baths had been a marvellous success.

Nor could trouble in the household solve the riddle of his clearance,  
For his bride was now in heaven, and the issue of the match  
Was a patient drudge whose virtues were as plain as her appearance—  
Just the sort whereto no scandal could conceivably attach.

So the Whither and the Why alike mysterious were counted;  
And as Faith steps in to aid where baffled Reason must retire,  
There were those averred so good a man as Biggs might well have mounted  
Up to glory like Elijah in a chariot of fire!

For indeed he was a good man; when he sat beside the portal  
Of the Bath-house at his pigeon-hole, a saint within a frame,  
We used to think his face was as the face of an immortal,  
As he handed us our tickets, and took payment for the same.

And, oh, the sweet advice with which he made of such occasion  
A duplicate detergent for our morals and our limbs—  
For he taught us that decorum was the essence of salvation,  
And that cleanliness and godliness were merely synonyms;

But that open-air ablution in the river was a treason  
To the purer instincts, fit for dogs and aborigines,  
And that wrath at such misconduct was the providential reason  
For the jaws of alligators and the tails of stingarees.

But, alas, our friend was gone, our guide, philosopher, and tutor,  
And we doubled our potations, just to clear the inner view;  
But we only saw the darklier through the bottom of the pewter,  
And the mystery seemed likewise to be multiplied by two.

And the worst was that our failure to unriddle the enigma  
In the "rags" of rival towns was made a by-word and a scoff,  
Till each soul in the community felt branded with the stigma  
Of the unexplained damnation of poor Biggs's taking off.

So a dozen of us rose and swore this thing should be no longer:  
Though the means that Nature furnished had been tried without result,  
There were forces supersensual that higher were and stronger,  
And with consentaneous clamour we pronounced for the occult.

Then Joe Thomson slung a tenner, and Jack Robinson a tanner,  
And each according to his means respectively disbursed;  
And a letter in your humble servant's most seductive manner  
Was despatched to Sludge the Medium, recently of Darlinghurst.

II.

"I am Biggs," the spirit said ('t was through the medium's lips he said it;  
But the voice that spoke, the accent, too, were Biggs's very own,  
Be it, therefore, not set down to our unmerited discredit  
That collectively we sickened as we recognized the tone).  
"From a saurian interior, Christian friends, I now address you"—  
(And "Oh heaven!" or its correlative, groaned shudderingly we)—  
"While there yet remains a scrap of my identity, for, bless you,  
This ungodly alligator's fast assimilating me.

"For although through nine abysmal days I've fought with his digestion,



Being hostile to his processes and loth to pulpify,  
It is rapidly becoming a most complicated question  
How much of me is crocodile, how much of him is I.

“And, oh, my friends, 'tis sorrow's crown of sorrow to remember  
That this sacrilegious reptile owed me nought but gratitude,  
For I bought him from a showman twenty years since come November,  
And I dropped him in the river for his own and others' good.

“It had grieved me that the spouses of our townsmen, and their daughters,  
Should be shocked by river bathers and their indecorous ways  
So I cast my bread—that is, my alligator—on the waters,

And I found it, in a credit balance, after many days.

“Years I waited, but at last there came the rumour long expected,  
And the out-of-door ablutionists forsook their wicked paths,  
And the issues of my handiwork divinely were directed  
In a constant flow of custom to the Corporation Baths.

“’Twas a weakling when I bought it; ’twas so young that you could pet it;  
But with all its disadvantages I reckoned it would do;  
And it did: Oh, lay the moral well to heart and don't forget it—  
Put decorum first, and all things shall be added unto you.

“Lies! all lies! I've done with virtue. Why should I be interested  
In the cause of moral progress that I served so long in vain,  
When the fifteen hundred odd I've so judiciously invested  
Will but go to pay the debts of some young rip who marries Jane?

“But the reptile overcomes me; my identity is sinking;  
Let me hasten to the finish; let my words be few and fit.  
I was walking by the river in the starry silence, thinking  
Of what Providence had done for me, and I had done for it;

“I had reached the saurian's rumoured haunt, where oft in fatal folly  
I had dropped garotted dogs to keep his carnal craving up”  
(Said Joe Thomson, in a whisper, “That explains my Highland collie!”  
Said Bob Williams, sotto voce, “That explains my Dandy pup!”)

“I had passed to moral questions, and found comfort in the notion  
That fools are none the worse for things not being what they seem,

When, behold, a seeming log became instinct with life and motion,  
And with sudden curvature of tail upset me in the stream.

“Then my leg, as in a vice”—But here the revelation faltered,  
And the medium rose and shook himself, remarking with a smile  
That the requisite conditions were irrevocably altered,  
For the personality of Biggs was lost in crocodile.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, whether Sludge's story would succeed in holding water  
Is more, perhaps, than one has any business to expect;  
But I know that on the strength of it I married Biggs's daughter,  
And I found a certain portion of the narrative correct.

James Brunton Stephens