

“Nurtured by Nature”  
The Eleventh Hamlin Garland Poetry Reading  
Hosted by the Mitchell County Historic Preservation Society  
June 20, 2021

Introduction Penney Morse

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# SEASONS

## **Spring on the Prairie**

And the fields grew green  
With the mighty mystery  
Of springing grain;  
The poplar trees burst into yellow leaf,  
The oak leaves pricked like a squirrel's ear  
And in the mellow grounds the planter strode;  
The birds paired off and nested,  
The horses fed on the sunny slopes  
Where the crocus bloomed and the early grasses  
Yielded their sweets to the cattle's lips;  
And like some peerless overture, the vast  
Sweet symphony the wild chickens sang at dawn  
Died away to a single note,  
And genial spring was merged in sultry summer.

## **Early May**

BROAD fields of newly-risen wheat  
Whereon lie curving, burnished pools  
Of smooth rose-golden water.  
Across each pond the hylas peep;  
A warm soil-scented wind  
Moves from the wide, unending spaces  
Of the roseate West, where clouds hang  
Like weary birds on wing.

The click of planter, and the shout  
Of driver ringing through the air  
Adds human presence; while through the rays  
Of wide, red-setting sun a slow team moves  
A purple shadow on a golden ground.

## **A Summer Mood**

Oh, to be lost in the wind and the sun,  
To be one with the wind and the stream!  
With never a care while the waters run,  
With never a thought in my dream.  
To be part of the robin's lilting call  
And part of the bobolink's rhyme.  
Lying close to the shy thrush singing alone,  
And lapped in the cricket's chime!

Oh, to live with these beautiful ones!  
With the lust and the glory of man  
Lost in the circuit of springtime suns —  
Submissive as earth and part of her plan;  
To lie as the snake lies, content in the grass!  
To drift as the clouds drift, effortless, free,  
Glad of the power that drives them on,  
With never a question of wind or sea.

## **The Hush of the Plains – July**

As some vast orchestra, listening, waits  
Full-breathed and tense in a sudden lull,  
With only the string-bass throbbing on,  
Ready at fall of the leader's wand  
To break into soft, slow swell,  
So the plain lies, hushed and dumb as death,  
Songless and soundless.

No crickets fill the pause with whirr,  
No bird wakes a note or stirs a wing.  
Only the flute-like note of the lark sounds,  
Only the flashing, inaudible wing of the gull moves,  
All else waits, listens.  
Only the wide wind droning on,  
Wide as the plain, vaguely vast,  
The string-bass throbbing dimly on.

## **In August**

From the great trees the locusts cry  
In quavering ecstatic duo – a boy  
Shouts a wild call – a mourning dove  
In the blue distance sobs – the wind  
Wanders by, heavy with odors  
Of corn and wheat and melon vines;  
The trees tremble with delirious joy as the breeze  
Greets them, one by one – now the oak  
Now the great sycamore, now the elm.

And the locusts in brazen chorus, cry  
Like stricken things, and the ring-dove's note  
Sobs on in the dim distance.

## **September**

COOLNESS, ripeness and repose;  
The smell of gathered grains and fruits,  
The musky odor of melons everywhere.  
The very dust is fruity, and the click  
Of locusts' wings is like the close  
Of gates upon great stores of wheat.  
The gathered grain bleaches in shock,  
The corn breathes on me from the west,  
And the sky-line widens on and on,  
Until I see the waves of yellow-green  
Break on the hills that face the snow and lilac  
Peaks of Colorado mountains.  
The sun, half-sunk, burns through the dusty crimson sky.  
Streamers of gold and green soar in radiating bands, like spokes  
Of God's immeasurable chariot wheels, half-sunk and falling.  
The cattle feed about me, here,  
Sociably, gnawing the scant dry grass.  
I hear their quick short sighs  
As one by one they settle for the night.  
All is peaceful – save the dull report  
Of murderous, quick-repeating gun  
Of some insatiate sportsman  
  
Through the hot haze  
The rapid rattle of a hay-rack goes,  
And as it passes leave a trail  
Of boyish memories, fading, falling  
Like the yellow dust that drifts  
Behind the hay-rack's wheels.

## Indian Summer

AT last there came the sudden fall of frost, when Time  
Dreaming through russet September days  
Suddenly awoke, and lifting his head, strode  
Swiftly forward--made one vast desolating sweep  
Of his scythe, then, rapt with the glory  
That burned under his feet, fell dreaming again.  
And the clouds soared and the crickets sang in the brief heat of noon; the corn,  
So green, grew sere and dry--  
    And in the mist the ploughman's team  
    Moved silently, as if in dream--  
And it was Indian summer on the plain.

## In Stacking Time

WITHIN the shelter of the towering stack I lie in shadow, blinking at the light;  
The sun-light floods the snow-rimmed purple clouds. I hear the glorious southern wind  
Sweep the sere stubble like a scythe, while dropping crickets patter 'round me,  
Shaken down in flying showers from wind-tossed yellow grain.  
O first ripe day of autumn! O memory half of pain and half of joy!  
As if the fate of some dead girl  
Haunted my heart, I dream and dream  
With aching throat, of dim but unforgotten days.  
O wind and light and cool high cloud!  
O smell of corn-leaves ripening! It is so sweet  
To lie here, taskless, dumb and rapt  
With wordless weight of reminiscent scenes and sounds,  
Weight of unremembered millions of autumns--  
Filled with the wonder of a myriad varied years,  
Wonder of winds and woods and rivers, and the smell  
Of ripened yellow grain and nuts, and the joy  
Of sunset rest from toil in dim small fields  
In Anglo-Saxon days.  
    And the shadows wheel and lengthen  
    Across the level stubble-land, which glows  
    A mat of gold inlaid with green  
The sun is sunk; sighing I rise to go, and the jocund call  
Of near-by street-boy breaks the spell  
Of cloud and sun and rustling sheaves  
And the sweep of the unresting mystical wind--  
And overhead I hear the jar and throb  
Of giant presses, and the grinding roar  
Of ceaseless tumult in the street below  
Comes back and welters me again.

# SENSES

## The West Wind

Oh! the wind is abroad in the hollows  
And a-sweep on the swells of the plain,  
Where the dun grass tosses and wallows,  
And the hazel bush shakes as in pain  
With a petulant air and a shiver  
Of fright and of pain  
While the broad breeze streams like a river  
And roars like a far-off main.  
The wide waves, restless, but weary,  
Roll on to the half-hid sun.  
Hear the rush! Hear the roar! Hear the murmur!  
See the swift waves serially run,  
Like fowls from the eagle's swift wings!  
To the bowed ear's hearing, there comes  
The sound of far harping of harp strings,  
The noise of dim pipings and drums.  
Oh! magic west wind of the prairie!  
How he leaps in his might!  
No boundaries knows he or cares he,  
No day and no night.  
His footsteps grow weary never,  
He is here! He is there!  
Now he harries the clouds in the air,  
Now he tramples the grass in his flight.  
But whether in spring or in summer,  
Or in autumn's gray shadow or shine,  
Chainless and care-free is he  
As a faun in a riot of wine.  
He is lord of the whole sky's hollow;  
He possesses the whole vast plain;  
He leads and the wild clouds follow—  
He frowns and they vanish in rain.

### **Coming Rain on the Prairie**

IN SOUNDING southern breeze  
The spire-like poplar trees  
Stream like vast plumes  
Against a seamless cloud a high  
Dark mass, a dusty dome that looms  
A rushing shadow on the western sky.  
The lightning falls in streams,  
Sprangling in fiery seams,  
Through which the bursting rain  
Falls in trailing clouds of gray;  
The cattle draw together on the plain,  
And drift like anchored boats upon a wind-swept bay.

### **A Song of Winds**

Winds from the prairies where wild weeds shiver;  
Winds from the popple trees' quick leaves' quiver,  
Where the blithe chickens boom and shrill frogs chime  
O winds from my boyhood's far-away time,  
I wait for you, long for you, here in the town!  
Filled with the memory of grasses and trees,  
I long for my prairies as a sailor loves seas;  
I hear in red mornings the wild chickens calling,  
I hear at still nooning the bugle note falling  
From crane sweeping by in the fathomless sky.  
I long, oh! I long to lie in the stubble,  
Close by the creek, where the cool waters bubble;  
Longing to lose in a dream all my care,  
Feeling the summer winds kissing my hair,  
Hearing the willows shake over my head!

### **The Cool Gray Jug**

O cool gray jug that touched the lips  
In kiss that softly closed and clung!  
No Spanish wine the tippler sips,  
Or Port the poet's praise has sung,  
Such pure, untainted sweetness yields  
As cool gray jug in harvest fields.  
I see it now! A clover leaf outspread upon its sweating side  
As from the standing sheaf I pluck and swing it high, the wide  
Field glows with noon-day heat--  
The winds are tangled in the wheat.  
The myriad crickets blithely cheep;  
Across the swash of ripened grain  
I see the burnished reaper creep—  
The lunch-boy comes, and once again  
The jug its crystal coolness yields—  
O cool gray jug in harvest fields!

### **Boyish Sleep**

And all night long we lie in sleep,  
Too sweet to sigh in, or to dream,  
Unnoting how the wild winds sweep,  
Or snow clouds through the darkness stream  
Above the trees that moan and sigh  
And clutch with naked hands the sky.  
Beneath the checkered counterpane  
We rest the soundlier for the storm;  
Its wrath is only lullaby,  
A far off, vast and dim refrain.



## **In the Autumn Grass**

Did you ever lie low  
In the depth of the plain,  
In the lee of a swell that lifts  
Like a low-lying island out of the sea,  
When the blue joint shakes  
As an army of spears;  
When each flashing wave breaks  
In turn overhead  
And wails in the door of your ears?  
If you have, you have heard  
In the midst of the roar,  
The note of a lone gray bird,  
Blown slantwise by overhead  
As he swiftly sped  
To his south-land haven once more!  
O the music abroad in the air,  
With the autumn wind sweeping  
His hand on the grass, where  
The tiniest blade is astir, keeping  
Voice in the dim, wide choir,  
Of the infinite song, the refrain,  
The wild, sad wail of the plain!

## **Dreams of the Grass**

O! to lie in long grasses!  
O! to dream on the plain!  
Where the west wind sings as it passes,  
A weird and unceasing refrain!  
Where the rank grass tosses and wallows,  
And the plain's rim dazzles the eye  
Where hardly a silver cloud bosses  
The flashing steel shield of the sky!  
To watch the gay gulls as they glitter  
Like snowflakes, and fall from on high  
To dip in the deeps of the prairie;  
Where the crows foot tosses awry,  
Like the swirl o' swift waltzers in glee,  
To the harsh, shrill creak of the cricket  
And the song of the lark and the bee!

# NOSTALGIA

## Prairie Memories

A WIDE cloud-peopled summer-sky;  
Sea-drifting grasses, rustling reeds,  
Where young grouse to their mothers cry,  
And locusts pipe from whistling weeds;  
Broad meadows lying like lagoons  
Of sunniest waters, on whose swells  
Float nodding blooms to tinkling bells  
Of bob-o'-linkum's wildest tunes;  
Far west-winds bringing odors, fresh  
From mountains clothed as monarchs are  
In royal robes of ice and snow,  
Where storms are bred in thunder-jar;  
Land of corn, and wheat, and kine,  
Where plenty fills the hand of him  
Who tills the soil or prunes the vine  
Or digs in thy far canons dim  
My Western land, I love thee yet!  
In dreams I ride my horse again  
And breast the breezes blowing fleet  
From out the meadows cool and wet.  
From fields of flowers blowing sweet,  
And flinging perfume to the breeze.  
The wild oats swirl along the plain;  
I feel their dash against my knees,  
Like rapid splash of running seas.  
I pass by islands, dark and tall,  
Of slender poplars thick with leaves;  
The grass in rustling ripple, cleaves  
To left and right in emerald flow;  
And as I listen, riding slow,  
Out breaks the wild bird's jocund call.  
Oh, shining suns of boyhood's time!  
Oh, winds that from the mythic west  
Sang calls to Eldorado's quest!  
Oh, swaying wild bird's thrilling chime!  
When the loud city's clanging roar  
Wraps in my soul as if in shrouds  
I hear those sounds and songs once more,  
And dream of boyhood's wind-swept clouds.

## **Pioneers**

THEY rise to mastery of wind and snow;  
They go like soldiers grimly into strife  
To colonize the plain. They plow and sow,  
And fertilize the sod with their own life,  
As did the Indian and the buffalo.

## **Settlers**

Above them soars a dazzling sky,  
In winter blue and clear as steel,  
In summer like an arctic sea,  
Wherein great icebergs drift and reel  
And melt like sudden sorcery;  
Beneath them plains stretch far and fair,  
Rich with sunlight and with rain;  
Vast harvests ripen with their care  
And fill with overplus of grain  
Their square great bins;  
Yet still they strive! I see them rise  
At dawn-light going forth to toil;  
The same salt sweat has filled my eyes;  
My feet have trod the self-same soil behind the snarling share.

## **A Human Habitation**

The sky was like a low-hung purple disk,  
The plain its counterpart. Eastward, between  
These infinite disks of variant purple, the train  
Rushed steadily, entering a belt of orange-colored sky,  
Wherein the spring-time sunlight grew in power.  
Against the glowing band,  
A tooth of purple plain upreared, to notch  
The otherwise unbroken, splendid sweep  
Of intersecting sky and plain. From it a thin blue smoke arose.  
It was a human habitation. It was not a prison. A prison,  
Resounds with songs, yells, the crash of gates,  
The click of locks and grind of chains.  
Voice shouts to voice. Bars do not exclude the interchange of words.  
This was solitary confinement.  
The sun up-sprang tts light swept the plain like a sea  
Of golden water, and the blue-gray dome  
That soared above the settler's shack,  
Was lighted into magical splendor.  
To some worn woman another monotonous day was born.

## **Home from the City**

Out of the city, out of the street!  
Out in the wind and the grasses,  
Where the bird and the daisy wooing meet,  
And the cloud like an eagle passes, far from the roaring street.  
Out of the hurry, away from the heat  
And clamor of iron wheels and hooves,  
Out of the stench and scorching heat  
We come as a dove to its native roofs,  
Far from the thunderous street.  
Into the silence of cool-breathed leaves,  
Where the wind like a lover  
Murmurs, and waits to listen, and weaves  
His arms in the leafy cover  
Back to a world of stubble and sheaves  
We flee from the murderous street!

## **My Prairies**

I LOVE my prairies, they are mine  
From zenith to horizon line  
Clipping a world of sky and sod  
Like the bended arm and wrist of God.  
I love their grasses. The skies  
Are larger, and my restless eyes  
Fasten on more of earth and air  
Than sea-shores furnish anywhere.  
I love the hazel thickets and the breeze,  
The never-resting prairie winds; the trees  
That stand like spear-points high  
Against the dark blue sky,  
Are wonderful to me. I love the gold  
Of newly shaven stubble, rolled  
A royal carpet, toward the sun, fit to be  
The pathway of a deity.  
I love the life of pasture lands, the songs of birds  
Are not more thrilling to me, than the herd's  
Mad bellowing – or the shadow stride  
Of mounted herdsmen at my side.  
I love my prairies, they are mine,  
From high sun to horizon line.  
The mountains and the cold gray sea  
Are not for me, are naught to me.

## Home from Wild Meadows

THROUGH cool dry dust the wagons rattle,  
Their talk subdued and grave and low.  
The horses walk with heads low hanging,  
Their footfalls muffled, rhythmical and slow.  
Upon the weedy load of rank fall grasses,  
I lie and watch the daylight wane,  
Hearing the distant thresher's howl and clatter  
And cow-bells moving down the dusty lane.  
The darkness deepens and the stars appearing  
Line out the march of coming night.  
And now I catch the sound of farm-yard's bustle  
And cross the kitchen's band of friendly, fragrant light.  
Familiar voices call, the falling neck-yokes rattle,  
The pump gives out its welcome squeal.  
The barn's gloom swallows team and drivers,  
And mother's call to supper rings a hearty peal.  
O fragrant waste of autumn grasses!  
prairie by the plowshare torn and rent!  
I think of you in days of heat and hurry,  
Like traveler in deserts lost and spent.  
I wonder if some future world or cycle  
Will bring again those radiant seas of bloom,  
Wherein all life seemed fair and peaceful,  
And bird and beast found generous room.  
I'll meet them! They are not gone forever!  
They lie somewhere, those sun-lit prairie lands,  
Unstained of blood, possessed of peace and plenty  
Untouched by greed's all desolating hands.

## How Will She Look to Me?

How will she look to me after long waiting?  
What will she do when she first meets my eyes?  
Will she start – and smile – the curving lips parting?  
Will she reach up to kiss me, or look down with sighs?

Now I am nearing her

So I am fearing her

Longing for, fearing the flame of her eyes!

Seven long years since we parted in anger,  
Seven lost years since that stormy good bye—  
O, could I relive them! – could I destroy them!—  
Ah God, the irrevocable years, how they fly!

I chide as I ride

The engine's slow stride,

That bears me to Agnes, my sweet-heart, my bride!...

Perhaps to be married—a mother—I know not!  
I've come back to see her, to see her again,  
To hold her dear hand while I say "O forgive me!  
A worn weary man with hot restless brain—"

I cry as I ride

To the engine's stern stride

"O Agnes, forgive me my anger and pride!"