

STEWART ISLAND
VERSES

AND OTHERS

By

“SOUTHERNER”



Invercargill, N.Z.
CRAFT AGENCY CO.
1923



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AUGUST, S.G.

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and other

"SOUTHERNER"

- 3 JUL 2008

To

MR. J. J. W. POLLARD

(of "*The Southland Times*")

*without whose encouragement these verses of "The Island,"
Foveaux Strait, and general, would not
have been written.*

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FOVEAUX STRAIT.

I love a flash of wings;
A mountain, mists behind it;
I like a breeze that stings,
On Foveaux Strait you'll find it.

And all day long we ride,
Before a clean wind faring,
Free gipsies of the tide,
Only Mount Anglem staring.

Such is the life, it seems,
And we would claim no other—
This launch, our ship of dreams;
The restless sea, our brother.

ANY SINGER.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Here's a song for you!
Tho' it falters now and then,
I hope that it rings true.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Here's a little book!
Read it in your cosy den,
Or take a hasty look.

Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare,
Shelley, Byron, Pope,
Kipling, Milton, Keats, De Vere,
The Brontes, Laurence Hope,

Sang adown the place of tears,
Told a tale in rhyme,
Gathered up the passing years,
Laughing at Old Time.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Caught in daily strife,
You'll say "An idle pen,"
But after all 'tis life.

THE SEA.

The sea I love, and ships,
And a wide stretch of sand,
And a seagull where it dips
Beyond the reach of land.

I shall forget my dream—
My joy of man and beast
Shall fade in smoke and steam
Of big tramps beating east.

THE TREE.

Gray is the world outside,
Gray as can be;
Nothing to give it pride
Save one green tree.

One green tree crooning low,
A lonely thing;
Tall, rugged, coloured so,
It means the Spring.

THE CALL.

Just a promise of Spring—no more,
A lyric hint to the rover,
The fragrant call of sea and shore,
Till the singing days are over.

And the wise have spoken wisdom's words,
Great thoughts to a great world bringing;
But what is that to the noisy birds,
With always a song, and singing?

LO, I HAVE DANCED.

Lo, I have danced beyond the stars,
A tiny spark lost far in space,
Where comets flared like scimitars,
And worlds chased worlds as in a race.

Where nothing but the life of me
Held on a pin-point flickered on,
A touch in the Immensity
Hid in a universe of song.

So dizzy far above the earth,
So coldly deep from breath of men,
A recluse from the age of mirth
Locked up in ether, aeons ten.

O garden of Eternity
Where worlds in millions bloom like flowers,
I am old as Poesy,
And I am young as lyric hours.

I WAS A SLAVE.

I was a slave once,
Chained fast in a dungeon deep;
A poor clown and dunce,
Who could only eat and sleep.

I would cower and crawl
When the slaver passed my door,
I would cringe and bawl
When the lash fell quick and sore.

And now with the chains gone
I cringe to a shadow still,
I feel the crude irons on,
And the whip still stirs me ill.

I MADE LITTLE SONGS.

I made little songs,
And like bubbles blew them
Out to a world of wrongs,
Where all men saw joy through them.

Tender songs they were,
With bright colours in them,
Lyrics sweet and fair,
And each man tried to win them.

Gentle songs and true,
With many a loss to shade them,
But no listener knew
With what deep pain I made them.

AIR-CRAFT.

Now on the air
The new world spreads its wings,
Noisy and fair,
Mocking a lark that sings.

So far we go
To nearer get to truth,
And yet we know
No finer thing than youth.

RIVER AND OCEAN.

Run to the sea, little river, run,
Join the lofty waves of fate,
Your million lovers there are one,
You mingle in the mass, elate.

You are now lost to yourself indeed,
The suave grass-lands will surely miss you;
Your white hands mark a steamer's speed,
Only the green sea-serpents kiss you.

Dance with the waves, little river, dance,
Forget yourself, your dreams, your pities,
Your faiths are lost in the old romance,
You live the life of men in cities.

STEWART ISLAND.

There are great seas that flutter to the coast
As some giant sea-bird spent;
There's a green bushland that has no other boast
Than that it clothes content.

And all about the islets studded are,
They laugh back to the sea,
While out beyond the big ships battle far
Into immensity.

LITTLE POET.

No need to worry, little poet,
No need, no need!
The lavish spring knows all you owe it
For sun and seed.

No need to worry, vocal giver,
No need, no need!
The dawn is white along the river,
And you take heed.

No need to worry, tiny singer,
Wee lyric bird!
You are the summer's music bringer,
Your song is heard!

THE SWIMMER.

The tides are warm along the shore,
The town is lost ten miles away,
And every sort of deadly bore
Must miss a chance to have his say.

The blue sea calls me to its side,
The rollers lift me in their play,
And far from streets of dust and pride
One claims a perfect holiday.

Away beyond the white mists drift,
The tang of salt is in the air,
Here life's a lute without a rift,
And day a dream without a care.

A TREE.

A tree is not a lonely thing,
It has the sky for mate,
And wears, to meet the minstrel Spring,
Green robes of queenly state.

While careless breezes wandering,
The gipsies of the earth,
Have words to share and songs to sing,
Sad songs and songs of mirth.

THE MARCH OF TIME.

The march of time is quiet and slow,
It has no gaudy pomp to show ;
It has no blatant brass or blare,
But it moves on with dull despair.

And all about it strews the land
With dust of all that once was grand,
It conquers every lovely thing,
But yet it cannot take the Spring.

GIFTS.

Simple things are best of all:
Health and love and air,
They don't make a fuss at all,
They don't seem to care.

Yet they spell out happiness,
And the joys of life
Bloom like daisies in a field,
Without ill or strife.

Simple things like little birds
Sing into the heart,
And their worth is more than gold,
And richer far than art.

SHE'S A FAIR GIRL.

She's a fair girl, a rare girl,
And I feel as sad as sad,
Because I am no more a boy—
Her style of careless lad.

She's a sweet girl, a neat girl,
A girl with smiling eyes,
And on her cheek there always is
A faint blush of surprise.

She's a shy girl, she's my girl,
A playful dimple chin,
I'd like to sing her many songs,
But I'm too scared to begin.

She's a tall girl, but small girl,
With her golden hair up-piled,
But I always call her little,
Because she's such a child.

VERS LIBRE.

And there was Yang Chow
Sitting out late into the misty night
(This was in B.C. 1400)

Writing verses.

The ancestral estates had gone to the dogs—
Yang held to his verses.

His best girl married a bamboo grower—
Yang held to his verses.

At ninety years of age, deaf, blind and senile,
Yang still kept poetising

And now 3,400 years later
I, Hosea Pund, find his MSS. in a granite box,
And unfold the beauty of his soul
To the modern post-war Europe.

Without Yang, where would I have been?
Yang Chow, you have not lived in vain.

THE PADDOCKS.

The fields are wide green stretches lost in air,
Dappled with daisies like a shell-strewn beach,
Blue sky and glassy sunlight everywhere—
And singing birds with only joy to teach.

THE HOSPITAL.

Some things are heartless and appal,
But nothing hurts me like a wall
Barren of human light and touch.
And painted greyly overmuch.

The beds in cold official rows,
The windows which can never close,
And herded men who cannot sleep
In such a dungeon, dim and deep.

SONGS UNHEARD.

They will give you trinkets rare
And speak the honeyed word,
But I shall hardly seem to care
And whisper songs unheard.

Mere speech can break up any spell,
And tumble towers in Spain;
The others only bid farewell,
I have a loss to gain.

GOOD-BYE.

When you have left the sleepy town,
It will be sleepier then,
With dusty streets and houses brown,
And crowds of girls and men.

No secret poems I then shall make,
And no one will not hear,
My songs the crowds will gladly take,
All plain and crystal-clear.

I shall not need to hide my dream
Deftly in owl-wise rhymes,
Or play the juggler with a theme,
As I've done many times.

I shall not bring a tone so thin
Out of the lyre I play,
But will the noisy city win
All that you take away?

PARADOX.

Song is a deep thing,
But it cannot go
To that hidden place
Where the heart's springs flow.

Song is a cheap thing,
Yet it reaches down
To the soul's far depths,
Touching king and clown.

THE AIM.

The broken things and things half-made,
The hours of spending,
The quick speed down a falling grade,
The ill attending.

And all the little waste made plain,
Of time and laughter,
The dream that is both void and vain,
The sorrow after.

And in the muddle of to-day—
A place of guessing,
We'd win a scrap of time to pray
For this one blessing:

*The joy of building strong and true
We would have tasted—
God, give us honest work to do
That is not wasted.*

THEY HAVE NOT.

They have not found the noble place they sought
for,
No, not on land or sea;
They have not won the golden end they wrought
for,
For such was not to be.

They sleep sound now, and never dream while
sleeping,
Once dreams were all they had;
They sleep still now, nor hear Old Time go
creeping,
Up to the good and bad.

Not with immortals on the page of glory,
When death is a new birth;
But with the nameless dead without a story,
Deep in the silent earth.

DOUBT.

Sometimes when at night in bed,
With the quilt above your head
To keep out the grinning moon,
You are in a wakeful swoon,
Thinking of the days that were
Like a lot of bubbles rare
Strung upon a tangled thread,
And you count them in your head.

As you count you seem to see
People laughing bitterly,
Those you knew who were so nice
Looking at you cold as ice,
Persons that you thought were rich
Sleeping in some dried-up ditch,
And others who could only board,
Living like a landed lord.

Next day when you go to work,
You seem to get an awful jerk,
You look at each one careful then
To see if they are really men,
And not names decked out to sell,
Moving down the street pell-mell,
Thinking then as out you walk,
They are all priced up in chalk.

THE TOY-WORLD.

A busy world outside our ways
Looms big wherever a child plays,
And louder than the roar of trains
The penny trumpets boom their strains.

The dolls' parade is out to-day,
The little prams in fine array
Carry their burdens thro' the street,
And motherwise doll-mothers meet.

"How's Trixie?—Her new dress looks fine!"
"Your pram's a lovely one—like mine!"
"The smudge upon your baby's face
Meant careless washing by young Grace!"

"No, no! That mark is in the wax,
But isn't her hair such lovely flax?"
So on parade doll-mothers go,
Making their babies' claims—just so!

The penny trumpets roar and blare,
The shilling drums roll out a scare,
And gaudy Tartar, Jap and Russ,
Are all dressed up to cause a fuss.

Tin swords, toy pistols, and a march
Of baby soldiers, stiff as starch,
A yelling rush, a tin-made rattle,
And the mimic world is out for battle.

The mimic world where every one
Is either a king or a king's son,
And each coloured-paper belted "sir"
Is prouder than a Kitchener.

Soldiers lofty, soldiers gay,
Chewing lollies all the day,
Dollies naked, dollies dressed,
Sticky where they are caressed.

ACROSS THE WORLD.

VAIN FIRST LOVE.

(After the Russian of Anna Akhmatova)

“How this hurts me, laughing girl!”
Says the eager boy to me,
And I greatly pity him—
Feel for him so tenderly.

Yesterday he was content,
Knew sorrow but in strangers' eyes,
Now to-day he knows as much
As we who are oldly wise.

To-day his face is clouded, dull,
He does not smile as once he did,
I know he will not master pain—
That bitter pain, first love unbid.

Helplessly and eagerly,
And pitifully he lingers,
Stroking my cold hands, clasping
My unresponsive fingers.

HAVE NO FEAR *(after H. Heine)*

Have no fear in this house, little girl,
Outside the bleak rains pour,
And in case that burglars may intrude,
Look, I have locked the door!

Hear the winds so rage outside,
This is the stormiest night,
So to prevent any fear of fire,
Look, I've turned out the light!

And now allow me to entwine
My arm around your neck and throat,
For one can catch cold so easily
Without a large fur coat.

HER GARDEN (*after H. Heine*)

At the dawn of the summer morning,
The flowers speak to me, across the rail.
They say, "Don't be angry with our sister,
You mournful man, and pale."

THE SOURCE.

(*After the Russian of Ivan Michekoff*)

There was a seeking and a finding,
And the path was winding, winding.
And all the time, as in a rhyme
A rhythm called me like a chime
From some old temple bells
In some old village.

Sweeter spells
I found in books which turned the key
Of life and left the door ajar to me,

Half-open only, I could peer—no more—
And strained to see what was behind the door.
A vision of the world was there I knew,
To be seen only by the gifted few.
I was a slave, a nomad passing by,
And looking in—I knew not why—
There was a seeking and no finding,
And the path was winding, winding.

THE SONG.

In China in a village
Beside the Hoang-Ho,
A poet made a lyric
Ten thousand years ago.

And all along the river,
The little song was sung
By yellow men and women,
When all the world was young.

The Wall was in the building,
The workmen heard and sang,
And far into Siberia
A haunting minor rang.

A king would hear a workman,
A soldier or a slave
Sing, and then remember
He had a soul to save.

The centuries have speeded,
And China's old, my dear,
But the poet's not forgotten,
His little rhyme is here.

So in the twilight singing
A tune not on the page,
Think of the Chinese effort,
Ten thousand years of age.

The mighty Wall is crumbling,
The new has touched the old,
Fame dies of kings and warriors,
All but the song is cold.

What matter of the country,
The age, the manner paid,
In China, France or England,
The lyrist plys his trade.

VALUES.

Sun and sky and stars and sea
Are not called a novelty,
Nor is grass as green as paint,
Ticketed with pricings quaint.

Yet what money buys wears out,
Always putting us about,
But the moon with its broad grin
Leads the age of gold right in.

SECRETS.

Life is a secret hidden far
From street and busy mart.
Can it be found on some dim star,
Or deep down in the heart?

There are secrets in the air,
And a secret song to sing;
But the deepest secret everywhere
Is your ancient secret, Spring.

SONGS.

An old song, a cold song ;
It has no singing lure,
But when I wrote it years ago
I was assured that it did glow
Like lyric literature.

A dead song, a fled song,
It had a voice that day,
But now its words are meaningless,
Its purport I can't even guess,
Its charm has passed away.

"ROSE AYLNER."*

(1779—1800.)

Rose Aylmer, simply clad in rhyme,
A-singing thro' the world you go,
Disdainful of the touch of time,
A pretty little cameo.

Rose Aylmer, dying like a flower,
Your rich youth drenched in lovers' tears,
Claims more than futile place and power:
Your beauty lingers down the years.

*Landor's poem appeared in 1846.

THE WINDS.

[TO CECIL H. WINTER.]

Winds blow thro' the street,
Winds, like waves on a shore,
Arrogant, blatant, fleet,
And shaking window and door.

Flakes of dust in the air,
Papers and showers of grit,
Wind—you housemaid rare,
Your broom—nought dodges it!

Blow winds across the town,
Take far our vagrom dreams,
Tumble air-castles down,
Break idols, lash love themes.

Take everything called vain
Clean to the white South Pole,
Then storm with strife and pain,
Windows and doors of the soul.

SAPPHO.

[To F. A. S.]

The dust of Sappho mingles with the rose,
And they that loved her are not e'en a name;
Her lavish beauty and her queenly pose
Are now but printed words, a myth of fame.

But still her voice, unspoiled two thousand
years,
Rings clear across the world fresh as the
Spring,
And in her broken songs of nameless tears,
Her lovers glow to man's remembering.

PASTELS.

There are a hundred lovely things
To keep life sweet,
To make it pass in pageantry,
A march of eager feet;
The gold and purple of dead kings,
The myriad voice of sweet poesy,
Old trees beside a river growing,
And thro' them noisy breezes blowing.
The exquisite tenderness of new grass,
Greener than polished jade;
The fleeces white of lambs that pass
Between the sunlight and the shade;
The mists that fall
Across the busy streets at six o'clock
To catch the strollers in a golden haze,
A magic proving all
A picture from the quaintest picture-book,
Smoothing to marble all the crudest rock,
Touching the commonplace with a new glaze,
Putting a world into a glance, a look;
And showing all the people all asway
With drama like the actors in a play.

A POET: WM. H. DAVIES.

Secure, unto yourself a law,
You sing the world with best of grace;
You take the whole, you see the flaw,
A master of the commonplace.

We walk with you close to the ground,
But lo, you take a sudden flight,
A lyric bird with wings new-found,
Destined to reach a starry height.

THE LOOKER-ON.

A down the hill old Doctor Time
Comes plodding on a shaky stick,
He mumbles some historic rhyme
About the ancient politic.

He says he knew a chap in Rome
Called Cæsar, many years ago,
And Horace, who could make a pome,
Or Nero who would fiddling show.

He knew the gilded youth of Greece
When Athens was a busy hub;
Old Socrates, a man of peace,
And Diogenes in his tub.

He knew poor King Tutankhamen,
So modern, as an expert tells;
But Tutankh. in his rocky den
Won't turn a hair of H. G. Wells.

Nor could the writers of the dawn,
Who dealt with humans in the raw,
Show half the heroes put in pawn
As those displayed by Bernard Shaw.

The past had masters without doubt,
From Alexander cutting cord
To great Lord Chatham with his gout,
But could it boast a Henry Ford?

And did an older Einstein try
To prove what is, in truth, is not,
So that a line straight as a die
Curves like the handle of a pot?

The wisdom of the ancient seers,
And moderns, too, he would discuss,
Then while he smiles at all he hears,
Old Doctor Time just winks at us.

HOMeward BOUND.

The lash of foam-decked breakers
Is drumming in my brain,
The green unresting acres
Call me out once again.

And mammoth tramps smoke-blackened
Fade out across the blue,
With steady gait unslackened
They make old ports anew.

The little craft go chasing
Like seabirds in the bay,
The launches go a-racing
On any sunny day.

But when the mists are falling
And waves build up like hills,
I hear home's magic calling,
I know a voice that thrills.

There is a throb of pumping,
There is a crash of steel,
And the big boat goes a-romping
With joy that one can feel.

There is a far horizon,
There is a wind that stings,
And a day one has his eyes on,
And a heart that calls and sings.

A past that is forgotten,
And washed away like pain,
No crude ambitions thought on,
No ends and goals to gain.

But just the sea a-sounding,
And just the engine's song,
The big boat forward pounding,
And a voyage six weeks long.

GHOSTS.

[TO SHAUN O'SULLIVAN.]

And every day a new ghost whitely goes
 Into the vast to come back none knows when?
Maybe at midnight when a weird wind blows,
 Or in the sunlight 'midst a crowd of men.

Ghosts of old days and rare remembered faces,
 Ghosts of strange towns, and bitter words that
 stung,
Pale ghosts that haunt us sweet with many
 graces,
And that sad ghost of lyric hours unsung.

WORDS TO GIVE.

[To H. P. KELK.]

I sometimes think we shall forget our songs,
And all that we have made,
With pride and skill to lighten the world's
wrongs,
Now less than dreams that fade.

The world we saw was something far away,
We had but words to give;
Was it all vain, and must we go to-day
Seeking but life to live?

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