

WATERED SCREECH

NORTHERN SEASCAPES

(TRAVELOGUE POEM IN EPIC TRADITION)



BY

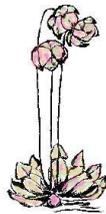
ABEL WORNELL

Mobilewords Limited

2016

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AND
NORTHERN
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Cover photos

The oldest Screech label to be found on the Internet, from a *60 pounder*; and,
SS Springdale, taken after Confederation from the CN logo on her stack

Preface

In 1997, my friend Bob Kelly tipped me off to his uncle Abel Wornell's 1959 poetry anthology, *Rhymes of a Newfoundlander*.

John Cabot, May 2, 1497 from that collection was used as the opening speech for the 500th anniversary pageant in Bonavista, with HM Elizabeth II attending.

To recognize this honour, we approached Abel and he was in full agreement to reissue abridged *Rhymes of a Newfoundlander: Commemorative edition*.

He chose the poems and made some small edits. It was a success and Abel was keen to proceed with another volume of his political and satirical poems, and more than anything else, his unpublished epic, *Northern Seascapes*.

Over the next few years, he and I collaborated to select and prepare this volume. He edited and corrected many on the original typescripts. Before his death he was insistent that it should proceed, there was "money in it, not a lot, but some," he insisted.

Now, everybody knows there is no money in publishing poetry, as general rule, so after much debate I decided to publish digitally and make it available for the world. It is so good it would be a sin to allow it to disappear unheralded.

Abel was an able poet, who loved birding and angling on the barrens and bogs. Like other poets in the 1940's to the 1960's, like Solomon Samson, another Bonavista Bay poet and politician, they held the Island in great reverence.

Imagine my surprise when Abel brought out the excellently crafted (what I call *political* he called *satirical*) poems. Abel was an MHA who maintained a keen interest in his former party, mates and leaders. Evidently, self-deprecation was at the heart of his reflections on public life.

I know he is enjoying his copy by the side of a pond somewhere on Heaven's Barrens.

Tor Fosnæs, Editor, 2016

SONG OF A REJECTED BENEFACTOR

(Air: Trinity Cake)

J.R. had a heart for the Masses,
And a passion for poor Newfoundland;
But the poor soon became upper classes:
Then booted him out of command!

He couldn't believe where his friends went;
He'd bettered their standard and class;
But, when they became independent,
They gave him a kick in the ass!

The moral of this sorry story
Is: Quit while your rating is high;
For greed will diminish your glory,
And few will lament when you die!

THE STUDENTS'* SONG

All hail the power of Joey's name!
Let students prostrate fall!
Go spread abroad his wondrous fame,
'And crown him Lord of All!

Let every member of the Tribe
Who throng the Liberal Ball
To Joe all majesty ascribe:
For he's the Lord of All!

Now that tuition free he gives
He has us all in thrall:
Bring forth your best superlatives,
And crown him Lord of All!

Chorus:

Praise Joe from whom all blessings flow!
Praise him, all students, high and low!
Who cares what fiscal nightmares haunt him:
At last we've got him where we want him!

**'Twas they who brought him down
And took from him his crown!*

BLUEPRINT FOR A POLITICIAN

If you'd like to get elected as an M.H.A. today
Here's the simplest way to do it; the tried and proven way:
You must have your portrait printed every Friday in the press
And announce yourself the spokesman when your district's in
distress!

Take advantage of reporters and express your latest views
On important local issues in the Telegram or News
Get your name in all the papers; make appearance on TV
And do whatever else you can to get publicity!

Join the Party which is sure to win, and get the Leader's nod;
To the gullible electorate, be a little less than God;
Have a conscience that's elastic, and some day the voters may
Engineer your safe election as an honoured M.H.A.!

1960

BITS and PIECES: One

I've wallowed in the doldrums of neglect
Because I chose to pamper intellect;
But had I pampered ignorance instead
I might have worn a halo round my head.

1966

AFTER A CERTAIN NEWS TELECAST

Last week the Leader spoke, and lo,
The kilowatts began to flow
To homes which previously had been
Lit by old-fashioned kerosene.
"Let there be light", the leader said,
And, like the wine from water made,
A miracle was wrought when he
Changed oil to electricity!

Then was the leader glorified
By those who shivered at this side:
(I marvel that they shivered there,
Surrounded by so much hot air!)
Such is the great magician's fame
That those who call upon his name-
Not once, not twice, but thrice may get
(Uriah says) more blessings yet!

So now, Dear Leader, may we ask
That you perform your greatest task:
Just grant to those of us who toil
The golden touch of John C. Doyle.
We're sure, for us you'd do as much
As you have done for him and such,
So with this plea we end our poem:

Please, Leader, keep our millions home!
Please, Leader, keep our millions home!
Please, Leader, keep our millions home!

TERM TWENTY-NINE

(Lines for an Anniversary Award written at one sitting after Diefenbaker threatened to cancel or revoke Term 29)

Disgraceful, unethical,
Purely political;
(Mainly symbolic
Of spleen vitriolic)

Inadequate, trifling,
Provincially stifling;
Unjust and satanic,
Boorish, tyrannic;

Mean, parsimonious,
Stern and erroneous;
Spiteful, pernicious,
Illegal, capricious;

Contemptible, dastardly,
That some and niggardly;
Unscrupulous, scandalous,
Tactless and infamous;

Ungen'rous, aggressive,
Offensive, oppressive;
Most reprehensible,
Quite indefensible;

Shocking, deplorable,
Hostile and horrible;
Vicious, vexatious,
Outrageous, ungracious;

Harsh and unreasonable,
Traitorous, treasonable:
Must these be the adjectives used to define
Ottawa's treatment of Term Twenty-Nine?

LINES ON THE LIBERAL CONVENTION, 1969

Since Barbour chose to quit the field
And wisely to his betters yield,
John Crosbie now may slacken pace
And jog with others in the race.
No longer does he have to go
At breakneck speed – but cautious, slow
Just keep abreast of Doctor Rowe!

Unless of course Don Jamieson comes
With skirl of pipes and fife and drums,
And with his diction steals the show,
Egged on by benefactor Joe!

Aye, "there's the rub", as Shakespeare said,
Which must "give pause" to John and Fred:
For should the last Wesleyan state,
To each and every delegate,
That "this is my beloved son
In whom I am well-pleased", then Don
Would win the Leadership hands down,
And take from Joe the victor's crown!

Today the Premier made it plain
He'd changed his mind, will run again.
In just the twinkling of his eye
He's made the fifteenth of July
A rubric in the Book of State
And sealed John Crosbie's bitter fate!

Then Alex Hickman (much too late)
Became the hopeful candidate;
Sincere and just and most inclined
The shattered Party's rifts to bind.
But Alex subsequently knew
He'd been deluded by a few
Who thought that certain delegates
Would not be bound by Joey's slates –

(Sadder, wiser men were they
When, on that fateful Saturday,
They learned how many they could sway!
Though Newfoundlanders may be green,
Their sense of loyalty is keen,
And Alex's judgment badly erred
For at the polls they kept their word!

They voted as their pledge implied;
And Joey's faith was justified.)
And then, with curious accent, Joyce
To fellow-students lent his voice
He argued logically and slow
Against the past mistakes of Joe.
Supporters cheered his notes and quotes
But thirteen only gave him votes . . .
So Mr. Joyce was, more or less,
Abandoned in the Wilderness!

But what's the use to criticize
The past regime with facts or lies,
When Joe and John with verbal fists
Became the prime antagonists?
Misled were they who vented hate
'Gainst any worthy candidate.
The final ballot showed the score,
And Joe was pleased, and John was sore!

For not-with-standing critics' darts
Joe won the delegations' hearts!
But Joey's day was surely done.
The antis had him on the run
And Moores became the favourite son . . .
Had Crosbie led in seventy-one
(For either side) he would have won!

So Moores and Peckford won their laurels
Because of Smallwood-Crosbie quarrels.
They've basked in anti-Smallwood glories,
As willing pawns of hard-nosed Tories!

LIBERAL LEADERSHIP 1977

The race is on for Leadership
And Ed's the man to beat:
Bill Rowe has sprinted long and hard,
And runs with nimble feet;
While Neary's rugged stamina
May cause them both defeat!

Hold on! What's wrong with Simmons there?
His backers are aghast!
Oh no! Defying Einstein's law,
His shadow he has passed!
So Roger's now disqualified.
Too bad he ran so fast!

The others, not worth mentioning,
Are running just for fun.
So keep your eyes on Billy Rowe
And Neary, Ed me son!
For one, or both, can make you king –
Or else your day is done!

BITS and PIECES: Two

May the Christmas spirit fill our hearts
With such good-will and cheer
That its influence will bless our souls
Throughout the coming year.

1960

THE LOST LEADERSHIP (LIBERAL)

Poor Edward lost the Leadership, alas!
And William won by shrewd manoeuvring!
Now people wonder what shall come to pass
When Frank calls his election (say) next spring?

Will all poor Edward's workers switch allegiance
And fight for William in the coming fray?
Or will they spurn political expedience
And leave bold William's troops in disarray?

Aye, there's the question on the faithful lips
Of Liberals champing at the bit of Power-
The pros and cons of many a cocktail hour
Provoking argument and witty quips ...

Let's not be bitter over Edward's loss:
What William won was just Ed's heavy cross!

PS.

*Poor Edward should be happy – Holy Moses!
The premiership sure ain't a bed of roses!*

1977

HOW SHAKESPEARE MIGHT HAVE WRITTEN A T.V. SPEECH
FOR MR. PICKERSGILL ON TERM 29, 1962.

Friends, Baymen, and Townies, lend me your votes!
I come to bury Billy, not to praise him.
The mischief that men do lives after them,
And in the end defeats them at the polls.
So let it be with Billy!

Hath told you Billy's made some grave mistakes
And grievously should Billy pay for them.
Here, under leave of Pearson and the rest
Come I to launch a Liberal Crusade.
From coast to coast let's vent our indignation
'Gainst those who have abused Term Twenty-Nine,
Joey's my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Billy says he's dang'rously ambitious –
(And Billy's yet an Honourable man
Although, if Cashin wins, Bill's title's lost!)

Joe brought Confederation to this land,
Whose baby-bonuses increased his votes.
Did this in Joey seem ambitious?
When fishermen complained of NAFEL's Laws,
He said he'd "kick their teeth in", but he didn't.
(Ambition should be made of sterner stuff)
Yet Billy says he is ambitious –
And Billy's yet an Honourable man!

But here must I disprove what Billy says:
I'm sworn to vindicate Term Twenty-Nine.
You know, the Diefenbaker Government
Have sentenced it to death in Sixty-two,
And that's unconstitutional, you know.
Now Billy says that after Sixty-two
The Act provides a promise of review,
And so doth Malcolm and his colleague Jim,

And Jimmy Greene is surely Honourable
As long as Joe is pleased to keep him so!

Term Twenty-nine was framed not without cause,
And none, not even mighty Diefenbaker,
Can tear it up and throw it in your faces.
He cannot unilaterally revoke
A solemn contract signed by sovereign heads
Without arousing nationwide alarm.
O what delinquent Liberal policies
Caused such a P.C. landslide last election?

It left us in the lurch. But bear with me:
My heart is in the Cabinet with Pearson's,
And we must fret till we return to power!
Five years ago that Term called Twenty-nine
Could stand against the world: now doomed it lies,
With few in Ottawa to reverence it.

O, T.V. friends, were I disposed to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I might do Billy wrong and Jimmy wrong-
And they, you know, are honourable men.
But have you read the Term? I have it here -
Which cunningly I do not mean to read.
Were you to see what Crosbie wouldn't sign
Because of its inadequate demands
It might inflame your minds against our cause
And nullify our flimsy arguments.

You see, I know the law, and even though
The stipulations in that Term were vague,
The Courts should know what Joe had in his mind;
The P.C.s think he used invisible ink!

O judgement! Thou art fled to Tory spleen,
And Diefenbaker must have lost his reason!
But if you knew the spirit of the Term
Then you would go and kiss the feet of Joe
And beg an egg of him from Russwood ranch
To leave it in your wills in memory
Of all the cash he squeezed from Ottawa!
You Newfoundlanders are not stones or wood

(Though most are classified "too green to burn")
You're mostly honest and God-fearing men,
And being such, were you to read the spirit,
'Twould madden you to think that Diefenbaker
Would desecrate its solemn implications.

Rise, therefore, Liberals, ev'ry mother's son,
And march with us until the battle's won!
I care not what your motto: this be mine:
Restore inviolate Term Twenty-nine!

SATIRE

When truth is recorded in stanzas ironic,
On humourous natures it acts like a tonic;
But when one receives the come-uppance that's due him,
Like Ex-Lax, it hastens his excrement through him.
But when someone delivers an able lampoon
To curb the conceit of a bumptious buffoon;
There's never a sword so sharp and so keen
As a satirists's pen dipped in venomous spleen!

1983

HOW NOW? BROWN COW?

Or, What's the Cost of Screech in Jamaica?

The Premier's recent Press tirade
Condemned the Fish-Exporters' Trade,
And threatened, in a fateful swoop,
To liquidate the NAFEL group.

On salted Cod, he's very wise:
No wool is pulled across his eyes:
He knows how much each sunburnt yaffle
Enriches profiteers of NAFEL!

But will the Premier please explain –
(We hope the question's not in vain)
Why Screech is more expensive here
Than on the isle of St. Pierre?

We're sure he could enlighten us –
Unless he fears 'twould frighten us –
To learn what profiteering's made
On Board of Liquor's stock-in-trade!

In language smooth as boiled molasses,
Perhaps he'll tell the toiling masses
What profits are expected from
Diluted Demarara rum!

He's told us what is made on Fish
Before it reaches plate or dish:
But, tell us Premier, we beseech –
How much is made on watered Screech?

JAMIESON DEFEATED BY PECKFORD

(Newfoundland Provincial Election June 18/79)

The Liberals thought they "had it made"
When Rowe and Jamieson made "the trade"
Of Leadership - but sadly, they
Got soundly trounced on Polling Day!

Despite Don's famous eloquence,
Young Peckford used uncanny sense
By showing, to the old and young,
He could out-talk the fastest tongue.
And talk he did, from morn to night,
Waving his arms in verbal fight (flight?);
And while he spread his Peckforditis,
Poor Don developed laryngitis!

So Peckford now, for good or ill,
Is Premier by the voters' will;
While Jamieson, some supporters fear,
Has anti-climaxed his career!

P.S.

*But since he retired from political games
He found his reward at the court of St. James.*
Don's cherished dream of fame came true
November Nineteen Eighty-Two-
(And well-deserved the honour too!)*

**Jamieson was appointed Canadian High Commissioner to London,
November 1982.*

AMBITIONS

Ambitious egos always scheme
To realize some cherished dream;
And trusting souls (like me and you)
With ballots make their dreams come true.

The history-books perpetuate
The tragic stories of the great,
Inspiring followers to make,
Repeatedly, the same mistake.

Why emulate unwise fanatics
Who end their lives with automatics?
(Though power-struggles may be trendy,
They proved disastrous for Allende!)
Perhaps it's best we choose the one
Who's seeking office just for fun;
For when fanatics win control
The sin is on the voter's soul!

BITS and PIECES: Three

Although I know it is in vain
To wish myself a child again,
I do, and you cannot deny
You sometimes think the same as I.

1948

SONNET: FALSE LEADERS

Whoever cheers the rebel's fiery speech
Incites the mob to bloody consequence:
Loud mouths are rarely crammed with common-sense;
They threaten, boast, and rant, but seldom teach
Constructive truths which Christian leaders preach.
Inflammatory eloquence foment
Bad moods which culminate in violence.
Whom, then, but us the mob, should we impeach?

Rave all we may, fight all the wars we want!
No peace will come to earth until we find
A universal law for all mankind.
While hatred, pride and prejudice we flaunt,
The Son of Man will have His Calvary,
And modern Spartans their Thermopylae!
But man has always bravely tempted Fate
And dared the worst calamities of Life.

THE MODERN OZYMANDIAS REPLIES TO HIS PARLIAMENTARY
DETRACTORS*

"Defame me not with insolence and lies:

"Our modern Ozymandias replies: -

"Look on my works, you parliamentary bore:

"I'm still producing books at eight-four!

"And though I'm not a David, in your eyes,

"I fear no man of Philistine size!

"My weapons are my tongue, my pen, my brain:

"Renowned for all Goliaths I have slain!

"Accomplishments establish my repute:

"That fact no ancient pistols shall refute,

"Nor fisticuffs, nor legal argument:

"(Confederates regard me heaven sent!)

"Though bitter Tories fight their envious quarrels,

"I'll rest on my accumulated laurels!"

**An imagined reply J.R. Smallwood might have made to P.C. back-bencher
John Carter, M.H.A., who questioned Joey's ownership of ancient duelling
pistols during Joey's last term.*

HOW SHAKESPEARE MIGHT INVITE FRIENDS TO CELEBRATE
HIS FOURTH DIVORCE!

(these days)

Come, celebrate with me my Fourth divorce!
Four times have I endured a married life!
Four times I've wed for better, but got worse!
Four times I've had to ditch a nagging wife.
Four times hath Venus proved a venomed spouse;
Four times I've proven love is surely blind;
Four times have I revoked my marriage vows
Expecting to restore my peace of mind!

"What fools we mortals be", indeed, to wed!
Why get entangled with a shrewish mate?
Best practice promiscuity instead,
And foist the Issue on the Welfare State!
For lustful lads like me, there's no restraint!
Polygamy's the cure for our complaint!

PECKFORD CHALLENGES BARRY 1979

The Tory chief goes forth to war
A hero's crown to gain
Exhorting voters near and far
To suffer short-term pain!

He dares the Feds to do their worst
Quebec to do the same;
Quite arrogant and all athirst
To win undying fame.

The Liberal chief wants work, not war,
A man of peace is he
Who'll test how many Liberals
Decide to vote P.C.

And had he Peckford's orat'ry
The turncoats may be shown
That they have chosen foolishly
The shadow for the bone!

* * *

Reality would then begin
To shatter voters' dreams
When they observe the mess they're in
From Peckford's crazy schemes!

DISCORD IN HEAVEN: A DREAM

All tranquil were the courts of heaven,
When at St. Peter's portals,
Arrived a jaded Michael Starr
To join the great immortals.

For years as Labour's Minister,
He'd been with problems pestered;
But now he hoped he might enjoy
Eternity sequestered!

St. Peter, dignified, serene,
Held Heaven's Gate ajar,
And at his pearly station stood
To welcome Mr. Starr.

As any cultured person might
Address a friendly neighbour,
St. Peter greeted what was once
A Minister of Labour.

"You're very tired, my son," he said:
"Your hell on earth doth merit
"Eternal rest. Here, sign your name,
"And Heaven's bliss inherit!"

Just then another form appeared
Upon the golden landing.
Before the Pearly gates, they saw
Ross Barbour proudly standing!

Immaculate, in Homburg hat,
Bow-tie, and tailored suit,
Stood Rossie, smiling happily: -
St. Peter thought him cute!

"Behold," said he, "that winning smile:
"No brighter has been worn
"By all the cherubim! Come in,
"And Heaven's courts adorn!"

"We know how loyal you have been
"To your constituents;
"Accept your heavenly reward!
"You've earned your recompense!"

With studied charm and courtly grace,
Ross bowed - of bows his best -
And said he was entranced to be
Thus numbered with the blest .
That did it! Michael's short-lived bliss
In Paradise had ended
The very moment that the Saint
This M.H.A. befriended.

(For Ross had harassed Starr so much
With "Unemployed Insurance",
That living anywhere with Ross
Was quite beyond endurance!)

"Hey, let me out of here!" roared Starr,
In tones enraged and bossy:
"I'd rather suffer Hell below,
"Than stay in Heav'n with Rossie!"

But Ross secured the Saint's support-
At least, by word of mouth,
To have the name of Heaven changed
To Bonavista South!

BITS and PIECES: Four

I've drunk the bitters of Sorrow;
I've worn depression's drab dress;
But I cheerfully face tomorrow,
Having faced today's happiness.

1939

SNOW BUSINESS

If Newfoundland could market snow
Like Texas markets oil,
We'd all be millionaires, me son:
As rich as Johnny Doyle.

From late November on through March,
We'd work while snow was here;
Then on our fannies we could sit
The balance of the year.

Our surplus cash we could donate
To Christmas Seals and CARE;
The Cancer Fund and March of Dimes
Would also get a share.

Collectors, in their hordes, could then
Descend in glee upon us –
Like Rotary and Lions' Clubs,
The Kinsmen and Kiwanis.

We'd help the underprivileged-
Wherever they might be:
Buy garments for the Ladies' Aid
To give some refugee.

But refugees aren't all the folk
Who, need some extra clothes:
There's underclad performers on
Our Television Shows!

Yes, son, if we could only find
A market for our snow,
There'd never be a naked maid
On any T.V. show!

1960

MYSTERY SOLVED

O golly Gee!

What next I wonder will we see?

'Tis scandalous: such goings on

Between our Brian and Big John!

"Hammer and tongs", and boots and all:

Driving the Tories "up the wall"

Trying to figure the problem out:

Wondering what it's all about:

What hidden motive could there be

In all the animosity?

"Is Brian going to retire?

Not run again?" his friends enquire.

Who knows what fat is in the fire?

What's rousing Crosbie's recent ire?

"How blind are they who cannot see!"

Good gosh! "What fools we mortals be."

Just when we thought the NDP

Would swamp both Liberal and PC

Along comes John with one desire;

To pull our chestnuts from the fire,

And realize his great ambition:

The Premiership, his sacred mission!

When Brian quits, he'll take his place

And win the next election race!

The next election has begun

And John has jumped the starter's gun

The strategy is very clear

John aims to be our next Premeer!

PS.

Unless of course, John's buddy Clyde

With honesty can turn the tide!

PPS.

Or will the next election leave

Them high and dry like Tom and Steve.

GOOD ADVICE

or

Be impartial and detached before being critical

Learn to see your fellow being
With an understanding eye;
See why now he's disagreeing,
What his motives underlie!

There are many conflicts raging
In his complex state of mind;
Unseen foes he's now engaging,
Making thought and logic blind!

Give to his decisions patience;
Answer with a kindly, friendly phrase;
For, with sympathetic accents,
You may cheer his gloomy days!

TO THE ENVIOUS

O envy not the fortune of the fellow richly dressed,
But study hard the character of which he is possessed;
And if you would be like him, remember this: You can
Providing you've the wisdom and metal of that man!

For Envy gets us nowhere; 'tis action gives us power.
A man must use his talents every minute of the hour
If he expects to equal his clever, prosperous friend:
Hence, seize each opportunity; and on yourself depend!

Remember too, young feller, there's not a boss in town
More suited than your conscience to the task of
calling down;
And the best design for progress – if you would let me tell –
Is to keep both ears a-listening to hear the warning bell!

So envy not the prosperous, but set a firm resolve.
To fit yourself for any trust which may on you devolve;
For Envy wastes the spirit in unproductive spite,
And leaves us sadly groping with a mediocre light!

January 1945

ON READING A HEADLINE SAYING KING PAUL OF GREECE WAS
"LAID TO REST"

Interred in the word
More frequently heard,
But, if you're inclined to be hurried,
'Twere better expressed
By the word which is best
Symbolic of funerals: buried.

When we lie on our bed
Asleep – but not dead –
We're then laid to rest, are we not?
But when, 'neath the clover,
They cover us over,
We're laid – not to rest – but to rot!

March 1964

SUGGESTED BY FIRST APPEARANCE ON T.V. APRIL 1960

As now we cringe beneath the T.V. lamps
Protect, O Lord, thy servant from the cramps!
"Just be relaxed!" advises Don
Before the signal flashes "On!"
But as I listen to his dictum
Relaxed already is my rictum!

BITS and PIECES: Five

Man misusing science
May be rendered void:
But the God of atoms
Cannot be destroyed.

His the frightful fission:
His the blinding glare:
His the lethal gases
Poisoning the air.

FAME AND POWER

Fame and power occupy
A most precarious perch:
The halo which we burnish now,
We later may besmirch!
The hero mounts his pedestal
By public approbation;
But very few remain there long
With stainless reputation.
The wisest man dismounts before
The masses can disown him;
Then friends enshrine him in their hearts
Where no one may dethrone him.

Northern Seascapes

*Impressions of Newfoundland's Northern Ports as seen from the S.S.
Springdale, 1960, written in Winter 1961.*

PROLOGUE

These lines are penned for all who love the sea;
All coastal-born whose sea-legs long to feel
The ceaseless undulation of the ocean:
Whose nostrils never take offense at scents
Surrounding steamships: those who take delight
In ling'ring near the aromatic galleys
Where cooking-odours whet their appetites . . .
What robust stomach can't assimilate
The oatmeal, cream of wheat, and ham and eggs;
Corned beef and cabbage; cod-tongues; fish and brewis;
Roast beef and fresh-caught salmon, – when such food
Is spiced with North Atlantic's salty tang?
What more can one desire then wholesome meals
Served courteously by starched-white-coated stewards
In modern, air-conditioned ships' saloons?
(All this of course, in pleasant summer weather;
For when the wintry storms enrage the sea
And ships react with equal violence,
'Twould be absurd to take an ocean voyage.)

CANTO 1

No sound of hissing surf against the shore
Disturbed the tranquil stillness of the scene
When, shortly after midnight, we embarked
So calm the mirrored surface of the bay,
That, at their moorings, motor-vessels lay
Completely motionless. A brilliant moon,
In full, unclouded circularity,
Arose above the silhouetted hills
Which flanked the level town of Lewisporte.
Before departure-time, the whistle blew
To call the crew aboard: its piercing note,
High-pitched, sustained, re-echoed round the Arm.
And scared the sleeping birds along the shore.

Soon, in response to telegraphic bells,
Our stateroom pulsed to pistons in reverse;
Whilst churning blades, beneath the throbbing stern,
Turned sluggish tide to foaming violence.
Thus, outward-bound, the Springdale swung her bows,
Commencing one more trip to Northern ports.
Like twinkling stars reflected in the sea,
Commingled flares of sparkling phosphorescence
Illumined our wake with lamps of flameless fire.
Too thrilled to sleep, we strolled the upper deck,
And steeped our souls in rare experience:
Experience which, because of dull routine,
A weary seaman can't appreciate.
We cleansed our lungs with briny atmosphere;
Swayed rhythmic'ly with Ocean's gentle swells;
And later, when we lay upon our berths,
Our senses-drugged by Neptune's sedative-
Salubriously relaxed in slumber sound.
I knew these waters well, for when a youth,
In holidays, I worked with Robert Primmer.
(He ran a boardinghouse at Twillingate,
And weekly, in his motorboat John Bull,
Transported passengers to Lewisporte).
At fourteen years of age 'twas my delight
To take the wheel at Middle Tickle Point,
And keep the Bull on course against the waves,
Across her bow the stinging spray would fly
As bucking, pounding, crushing headwind lops,
We'd slowly make the lee of Western Head . . .
No pilothouse protected then our faces,
And salt-caked cheeks proclaimed a stormy trip.

CANTO 2

The longer, high swells around Long Point,
Where Roberts keeps the Light, as did his sire,
Awoke me gently from my cradled sleep.
When through the starboard porthole shone the beam
Of that great beacon flashing in the dawn,
Nostalgia swept my drowsiness away.
Long Point: where once I helped to haul a trawl,

And fought, in youthful shame, the nausea
Which plagued my duodenum: where but once,
In all my life, I felt a seasick pain.
(Thank God, I won the contest, otherwise
I might have missed the magic inspiration
Imparted unto those who ride the sea).
Had I then yielded to the queasiness,
Henceforth, my future had been dispossessed
Of coastal thrills - a bayman's heritage.
Burnt Island, on the left, looked just the same
As it had been when, thirty years ago,
In boyhood sport, we trekked across the ice
To scan its Eastern shore for straying seals.
Those were adventurous days when boys were men;
When legends of courageous deeds inspired
Audacious youths to emulate their heroes:

A twenty-two was all that stood between
My safety and a polar bear; and yet
If one appeared – which happily did not –
I think I should have tried a fatal shot!
Now on the starboard side was Cuckhold's Cove:
A place I well remember for the kelp
Which, with the tide, swayed slowly back and forth
Like octopi, upon the ocean floor.
One summer day we jigged for codfish there.
I still recall how sluggishly they'd weave
Between the kelpy tentacles which snagged
Our jiggers quicker than the glutted fish . . .
I've never seen the Atlantic more transparent
Than t'was that day we jigged at Cuckhold's Cove.
Off Wild Cove where sea-pigeons once we chased,
The whistle blew to wake the wharfinger
And any folk who had to meet the ship.
'Twas scarcely daylight then, but fishing-boats
Were chugging to their morning rendezvous:
A rendezvous with panting wooden buoys
Which bobbed above familiar trawling-grounds.

CANTO 3

The purser with his pencil in his cap
Approached the forward hatch and placed one foot
Upon the combing, stationed there to check
Out-going cargo. Meanwhile, at the winch,
The mate manipulated valves and gears,
As clakety-clack the hoisting drum revolved –
Ahead and then reverse – in trial runs.
The sailors with their heaving-lines in hand,
Stood fore and aft as we approached the pier;
Then, at the proper distance, hurled their knots
With dang'rous accuracy to men ashore.
(In wintertime when knots, encased in ice,
Are hard as iron and fall like cannonballs
Upon the wharf, the catchers keep away).

As soon as lines are looped around the bollards,
The winch secures the ship against the pier;
The out the gangplank goes, and people throng
To gaily greet their relatives or friends.
Regardless of the hour the boat arrives,
The ritual of greeting or farewell
Is something outport people rarely miss.
There's more of gladness than of sadness then –
Although the terror of a gale-lashed sea
Is ever-present, and a constant risk
To those who tempt its fickle temperament.
With motor-vessels plying to and from
The distribution-centres every day,
We landed little freight at Twillingate.
thus, when the passengers had come aboard,
And outward freight was stowed beneath the hatch,
The whistle blew again for casting off.
Again the Springdale sliced the silent sea
Upon her course to Islands four hours hence,
Called Little Bay. (The time was Five A.M.)
What better therapy could soothe the nerves
Than sleeping in a smoothly swaying berth?
A luxury indeed, and one in which
I blissfully indulged till breakfast-call!

CANTO 4

Halfway to Little Bay, the steward's gong
Awoke us to the appetizing smell
Of ham and eggs, and fresh-cooked fish and brewis.
We flicked aside the curtains of the port
To let the sunbeams, sea-reflected, dance
Across the ceiling of our cosy cabin;
Then thanked the Lord for such a glorious day.
Impatient for the food awaiting us,
We washed and dressed as quickly as we could,
Considering the motion of the ship.

Our neighbours in the cabin next to ours,
Throughout the trip became our table-friends.
(Theirs names I shall disguise as T. & O.
With O. the very devil in disguise
And every day some mischievous event
Was planned by His Satanic Majesty!).
The frolic started when, at breakfast-time,
We met two friendly tourists from the States;
And, having introduced ourselves, we found
The male to be a former Newfoundlander:
At thirteen years of age he left these shores,
And, though he'd passed his three score years and ten,
Remembered much about his native land.
The obvious lack of wild life he deplored,
And, thinking of a sea-bird widely known
For succulence, remarked: "Where are the turrs?"
"Turrs?", "Turrs?", rejoiced his wife excitedly:
"What's that? What's Turrs? – What are they? Esquimaux?"
At that enquiry, mirthful chuckles broke
The proper social etiquette of strangers;
But O., the prankster, kept a poker face
And said: "O, Madam! such comparison
Makes serious slander of the Esquimaux!
I fear their wrath may only be appeased
By publishing a full apology
Signed by yourself and witnessed by us four!"
Our chuckles then increased to bell-laughs

Which Mr. K. (her husband) also shared.
Thereafter every menu featured fun
Because of such acquaintanceship begun.
What at our table, some new guests appeared,
We challenged their linguistic aptitude,
By asking then the meaning of such words
As crannick, kinkhorn, spudgell, killick, dwoi,
Moldow, snarbuckle, starrigan, and glutch –
Words foreign to this generation's ear,
But words which gave vernacular its name!

CANTO 5

We now approached the isles of Little Bay,
The sheltered town where Lady Squires was born:
Who then became distinguished as the first
Elected lady representative
To sit in parliament in Newfoundland.
Steep, round-topped hills protect the harbour there.
The water's deep, with many mooring-rocks
Conveniently situated near
Th sloping shore; and in these mooring-rocks,
Immovably ebedded, may be seen
The rusty ring-bolts of a former day.
Here, where the merchants made and lost a fortune
Investing in the fishing industry,
Dilapidated buildings tell their tale
Of bad debts written off and profits lost.
Here, too, we see the relics of the Past:
A schooner's hulk, half-sunken in the sand;
A barking pot half-buried in the beach;
A killick, kelp-encased and barnacled;
A capstan warped and fissured out of shape,
Whose broken spokes once creaked to chantey tunes;
A splintered spar; a soggy anchor-stock;
All mute reminders of departed days;
Not only of this port but ev'ry place
Whose destiny declined with salted cod.
At Nipper's Harbour not a beach is seen;
The hills around show little vegetation;
A barren, bleak terrain arrests the sight

But motivates an admiration strong
For hardy folk who pioneered the place.
Whose robust sinews first erected there
The fishing-stage and flake, and later framed –
Upon these rocks – a home to call their own?
None but the fittest fishermen could build
Such homesteads perched above the threat'ning surf
Such Herculean feats repeat themselves
A thousand times around our rugged coast.
What urged those settlers to gigantic tasks?
What laws unjust? What love of liberty?
What spirit of adventure spurred them on
To carve an independent livelihood
From coves too cheerless for a polar bear?
Whate'er their origin, their pedigree
Must indicate a dauntless sea-dog race!

CANTO 6

While rounding Partridge Point at dawn, we scanned
The long, unbroken, hilly Western Shore
Of White Bay. Harbour Deep lay straight across–
A couple hours' run, but which, by route
Circuitous, took all our time to reach
By night-fall. Many scenic ports-of-call
Within the Bay, were served before our ship
Tied up to spend the night at Harbour Deep.
That night, we sang some good old-fashioned hymns:
Revival songs with rousing choruses:
Throw out the Life-line; Lower Lights and such:
Familiar tunes to Newfoundlanders' throats.
And how they sang! Those glory-gladdened souls:
They felt the words, believed the promises
In unashamed admission of their faith.
The love of God in some mysterious way
Transformed their hearts with mystic influence;
Elated them above the humble chorus
Of simple outport life . . . Perhaps, like Blake,
They built Jerusalem with hymns of praise
With their our serene environment.
Next morning we enjoyed the scenic run

Up Chimney Bay, enroute to Roddickton,
The seascape there delights the tourists' eyes
With sloping beaches, loud with plovers' cries;
There, sanderlings invade the shore in flocks
And search for food among kelp-covered rocks;
There gulls and terns incessantly patrol
And scavenge every tidal flat or shoal;
There, nervous yellow-legs disturb the peace
More noisily than cormorants or geese.
Before we reached Main Brook, our ship had been
At Conch, Groais Islands and St. Julien;
And Goose Cove in the morning had to be
Serviced before we reached St. Anthony:
The City of the North where Grenfell's name
Is now emblazoned in undying fame.
A radar station dominates the scene
With sunlit domes reflecting silvery sheen;
Whilst, on the southern Point, with lenses bright
The light-house dominates the scene by night.
A spacious concrete pier accomodates,
In summertime, the ships and sundry freights
Which vitalize a seaport such as this
Important, picturesque metropolis.
'Twas here, with youthful missionary zeal,
The dedicated doctor came to heal
Not only broken bones but broken hearts
And raised his own memorial in these parts.
By sled and dog-team often he would go
On risky mission over ice and snow;
On one occasion this intrepid man
Became marooned upon a floating pan
Of Arctic ice and drifted far offshore
Where North Atlantic's vicious billows roar.
A lonely vigil through the frosty night
He kept, until the morning's precious light
Revealed the fearful nature of his plight.
At daylight, many watchers, on the land,
With anxious eyes the wide horizon scanned;
But hope within despairing bosoms died
When they no reassuring signal spied.

However, God, through agencies unguessed,
Has succoured souls who sought Him when distressed,
And God was very close to Grenfell there
When, on that pan of ice, he knelt in prayer.
(For faith and prayer were not – this Christian knew
Restricted to a pulpit or a pew.)
Thus did Almighty God, in mercy, guide
Until, with tears of thanks, they found their friend
And saved him from a sad untimely end.
Sir Wilfred lived to see his mission grow
From faith to fact; and northern people know
The value of the voluntary aid,
The philanthropic contributions made
To furnish him with those facilities
Required to combat sickness and disease.
Today adorning this important town –
Perpetuating Grenfell's great renown –
A modern healing edifice fulfills
The dream of him who battled human ills.

CANTO 7

Cape Bauld is gently contoured: polished smooth
By centuries of rafting Arctic ice:
Cleansed daily by the surf's incessant foam.
Its frontal features-creased by crevices –
Betray a legendary ruggedness.
Its sloping shoreline, void of vegetation,
Presents no massive buttress to the sea,
No awe-inspiring cliffs unscalable,
Nor craggy, jagged bluffs of dizzy heights.
This apex of our Island's triangle
Intrudes itself into the Straits and splits
The fog-creating Arctic Stream in two.
Its fog-alarm booms forth a warning sound
To fishermen when visibility
Is nil; and ocean-liners Westward-bound
On entering the Gulf, adjust their courses
When'er they hear the horn or see the light.
Cape Bauld has witnessed scores of sailing-ships
Each day migrating Northward late in may,

When-forty years ago – the fishing fleet
Invaded various parts of Labrador.
Then Henley Harbour, Grady, Turnavik,
Pack's Harbour, Indian Tickle, Domino,
Square Islands, Smokey, Cutthroat – all were names
Synonymous with Cod, and household words.
If Capes could think and feel, I'm sure this Cape
Would mourn with me the passing of the sails .
How gracefully the schooners rode the waves?
With canvas set boom-out before the breeze,
Like giant seagulls poised on open wings,
The brought enchantment to my boyhood dreams.
But now Cape Bauld salutes the lumb'ring tramps –
The shapeless cargo-ships which roll and pitch
Ungainly in the swells – gigantic hulls
Of ore-boats, tankers, paper-coats and such –
Whose half-afloat propellers, riding high,
Make thrashing thunder of a silent sea!
Bell Isle – a massive, sombre sentinel –
Stands guard before the gateway of the Straits:
Majestic, bluff, its stately cliffs arise
Abruptly from its dark, deep-fathomed base.
When seas are calm, one cove alone permits
A landing-craft safe access to its shore;
And there, supplies are brought to keep the Aids
To navigation working at their best.
Its fog-alarm and lighthouse may be seen
Securely built upon its Eastern height,
Together with a winch and derrick poised,
For hoisting duties, on its outer edge.
What dull routine must lighthouse keepers know
When winter's white coagulant congeals
The current of their shipping artery?
When navigation halts, they spend four months
In semi-solitude, like men marooned
Amid the sounds of Nature's symphony
Which punctuate the Northern silences.
A dazzling glare of white monotony
Encompasses their coast in Wintertime:
Ice, stretching far beyond the boundary

For human vision: here and there relieved
By scattered lakes (called swatches) where collect
The birds and seals in unmolested sport .
Apart from sun and moon and earth and sky,
Bell Isle sees little else in winter months.

EPILOGUE

Within these lines I've striven to depict
(As deftly as my talent will allow)
A few impressions of our Northern Scenes . . .
If, now and then, digressions interposed,
Upon this work, some salty over tones,
I beg no pardon: 'twas the sea which taught
My childhood heart respect for Nature's force.
Our deep appreciation we extend
To Captain French, the officers and crew,
Whose genial companionship we knew
Upon the trip whereof these lines are penned.
Each short acquaintanceship produced a friend
Of pleasant mem'ries; friends whose stature grew
With every recollection in review
And, unto all, our compliments we send.
Where'er I've roamed upon the Earth's expanse,
I've seen my share of soul-inspiring sights –
In England, Scotland, Italy and France –
But nothing beats our Island's rich delights . . .
Of all I've seen, our seascapes will remain
Indelibly inscribed within my brain.

THE END!

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