

BOOK XX. BY THE ROADSIDE

A Boston Ballad [1854]

To get betimes in Boston town I rose this morning early,  
Here's a good place at the corner, I must stand and see the show.

Clear the way there Jonathan!  
Way for the President's marshal--way for the government cannon!  
Way for the Federal foot and dragoons, (and the apparitions  
copiously tumbling.)

I love to look on the Stars and Stripes, I hope the fifes will play  
Yankee Doodle.

How bright shine the cutlasses of the foremost troops!  
Every man holds his revolver, marching stiff through Boston town.

A fog follows, antiques of the same come limping,  
Some appear wooden-legged, and some appear bandaged and bloodless.

Why this is indeed a show--it has called the dead out of the earth!  
The old graveyards of the hills have hurried to see!  
Phantoms! phantoms countless by flank and rear!  
Cock'd hats of mothy mould--crutches made of mist!  
Arms in slings--old men leaning on young men's shoulders.

What troubles you Yankee phantoms? what is all this chattering of  
bare gums?

Does the ague convulse your limbs? do you mistake your crutches for  
firelocks and level them?

If you blind your eyes with tears you will not see the President's marshal,  
If you groan such groans you might balk the government cannon.

For shame old maniacs--bring down those toss'd arms, and let your  
white hair be,  
Here gape your great grandsons, their wives gaze at them from the windows,  
See how well dress'd, see how orderly they conduct themselves.

Worse and worse--can't you stand it? are you retreating?  
Is this hour with the living too dead for you?

Retreat then--pell-mell!  
To your graves--back--back to the hills old limpers!  
I do not think you belong here anyhow.

But there is one thing that belongs here--shall I tell you what it  
is, gentlemen of Boston?

I will whisper it to the Mayor, he shall send a committee to England,  
They shall get a grant from the Parliament, go with a cart to the

royal vault,  
Dig out King George's coffin, unwrap him quick from the  
graveclothes, box up his bones for a journey,  
Find a swift Yankee clipper--here is freight for you, black-bellied clipper,  
Up with your anchor--shake out your sails--steer straight toward  
Boston bay.

Now call for the President's marshal again, bring out the government cannon,  
Fetch home the roarers from Congress, make another procession,  
guard it with foot and dragoons.

This centre-piece for them;  
Look, all orderly citizens--look from the windows, women!

The committee open the box, set up the regal ribs, glue those that  
will not stay,  
Clap the skull on top of the ribs, and clap a crown on top of the skull.  
You have got your revenge, old buster--the crown is come to its own,  
and more than its own.

Stick your hands in your pockets, Jonathan--you are a made man from  
this day,  
You are mighty cute--and here is one of your bargains.

Europe [The 72d and 73d Years of These States]

Suddenly out of its stale and drowsy lair, the lair of slaves,  
Like lightning it le'pt forth half startled at itself,  
Its feet upon the ashes and the rags, its hands tight to the throats  
of kings.

O hope and faith!  
O aching close of exiled patriots' lives!  
O many a sicken'd heart!  
Turn back unto this day and make yourselves afresh.

And you, paid to defile the People--you liars, mark!  
Not for numberless agonies, murders, lusts,  
For court thieving in its manifold mean forms, worming from his  
simplicity the poor man's wages,  
For many a promise sworn by royal lips and broken and laugh'd at in  
the breaking,

Then in their power not for all these did the blows strike revenge,  
or the heads of the nobles fall;  
The People scorn'd the ferocity of kings.

But the sweetness of mercy brew'd bitter destruction, and the  
frighten'd monarchs come back,

Each comes in state with his train, hangman, priest, tax-gatherer,  
Soldier, lawyer, lord, jailer, and sycophant.

Yet behind all lowering stealing, lo, a shape,  
Vague as the night, draped interminably, head, front and form, in  
scarlet folds,  
Whose face and eyes none may see,  
Out of its robes only this, the red robes lifted by the arm,  
One finger crook'd pointed high over the top, like the head of a  
snake appears.

Meanwhile corpses lie in new-made graves, bloody corpses of young men,  
The rope of the gibbet hangs heavily, the bullets of princes are  
flying, the creatures of power laugh aloud,  
And all these things bear fruits, and they are good.

Those corpses of young men,  
Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets, those hearts pierc'd by  
the gray lead,  
Cold and motionless as they seem live elsewhere with unslaughter'd vitality.

They live in other young men O kings!  
They live in brothers again ready to defy you,  
They were purified by death, they were taught and exalted.

Not a grave of the murder'd for freedom but grows seed for freedom,

in its turn to bear seed,  
Which the winds carry afar and re-sow, and the rains and the snows nourish.

Not a disembodied spirit can the weapons of tyrants let loose,  
But it stalks invisibly over the earth, whispering, counseling, cautioning.  
Liberty, let others despair of you--I never despair of you.

Is the house shut? is the master away?  
Nevertheless, be ready, be not weary of watching,  
He will soon return, his messengers come anon.

#### A Hand-Mirror

Hold it up sternly--see this it sends back, (who is it? is it you?)  
Outside fair costume, within ashes and filth,  
No more a flashing eye, no more a sonorous voice or springy step,  
Now some slave's eye, voice, hands, step,  
A drunkard's breath, unwholesome eater's face, venerealee's flesh,  
Lungs rotting away piecemeal, stomach sour and cankerous,  
Joints rheumatic, bowels clogged with abomination,  
Blood circulating dark and poisonous streams,  
Words babble, hearing and touch callous,  
No brain, no heart left, no magnetism of sex;

Such from one look in this looking-glass ere you go hence,  
Such a result so soon--and from such a beginning!

## Gods

Lover divine and perfect Comrade,  
Waiting content, invisible yet, but certain,  
Be thou my God.

Thou, thou, the Ideal Man,  
Fair, able, beautiful, content, and loving,  
Complete in body and dilate in spirit,  
Be thou my God.

O Death, (for Life has served its turn,)  
Opener and usher to the heavenly mansion,  
Be thou my God.

Aught, aught of mightiest, best I see, conceive, or know,  
(To break the stagnant tie--thee, thee to free, O soul,)  
Be thou my God.

All great ideas, the races' aspirations,

All heroisms, deeds of rapt enthusiasts,  
Be ye my Gods.

Or Time and Space,  
Or shape of Earth divine and wondrous,  
Or some fair shape I viewing, worship,  
Or lustrous orb of sun or star by night,  
Be ye my Gods.

### Germs

Forms, qualities, lives, humanity, language, thoughts,  
The ones known, and the ones unknown, the ones on the stars,  
The stars themselves, some shaped, others unshaped,  
Wonders as of those countries, the soil, trees, cities, inhabitants,  
    whatever they may be,  
Splendid suns, the moons and rings, the countless combinations and effects,  
Such-like, and as good as such-like, visible here or anywhere, stand  
    provided for a handful of space, which I extend my arm and  
    half enclose with my hand,  
That containing the start of each and all, the virtue, the germs of all.



## Thoughts

Of ownership--as if one fit to own things could not at pleasure enter  
upon all, and incorporate them into himself or herself;  
Of vista--suppose some sight in arriere through the formative chaos,  
presuming the growth, fulness, life, now attain'd on the journey,  
(But I see the road continued, and the journey ever continued;)  
Of what was once lacking on earth, and in due time has become  
supplied--and of what will yet be supplied,  
Because all I see and know I believe to have its main purport in  
what will yet be supplied.

## When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much  
applause in the lecture-room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

### Perfections

Only themselves understand themselves and the like of themselves,  
As souls only understand souls.

O Me! O Life!

O me! O life! of the questions of these recurring,  
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,  
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I,  
and who more faithless?)  
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean, of the  
struggle ever renew'd,  
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see  
around me,  
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,  
The question, O me! so sad, recurring--What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here--that life exists and identity,

That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

To a President

All you are doing and saying is to America dangled mirages,

You have not learn'd of Nature--of the politics of Nature you have

not learn'd the great amplitude, rectitude, impartiality,

You have not seen that only such as they are for these States,

And that what is less than they must sooner or later lift off from

these States.

I Sit and Look Out

I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all

oppression and shame,

I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men at anguish with

themselves, remorseful after deeds done,

I see in low life the mother misused by her children, dying,

neglected, gaunt, desperate,  
I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the treacherous seducer  
of young women,  
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love attempted to be  
hid, I see these sights on the earth,  
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs and  
prisoners,  
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who  
shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,  
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon  
laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;  
All these--all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon,  
See, hear, and am silent.

To Rich Givers

What you give me I cheerfully accept,  
A little sustenance, a hut and garden, a little money, as I  
rendezvous with my poems,  
A traveler's lodging and breakfast as journey through the States,--  
why should I be ashamed to own such gifts? why to advertise for them?  
For I myself am not one who bestows nothing upon man and woman,  
For I bestow upon any man or woman the entrance to all the gifts of

the universe.

### The Dalliance of the Eagles

Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest,)  
Skyward in air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagles,  
The rushing amorous contact high in space together,  
The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce, gyrating wheel,  
Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight grappling,  
In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight downward falling,  
Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a moment's lull,  
A motionless still balance in the air, then parting, talons loosing,  
Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their separate diverse flight,  
She hers, he his, pursuing.

### Roaming in Thought [After reading Hegel]

Roaming in thought over the Universe, I saw the little that is Good  
steadily hastening towards immortality,  
And the vast all that is call'd Evil I saw hastening to merge itself

and become lost and dead.

#### A Farm Picture

Through the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,  
A sunlit pasture field with cattle and horses feeding,  
And haze and vista, and the far horizon fading away.

#### A Child's Amaze

Silent and amazed even when a little boy,  
I remember I heard the preacher every Sunday put God in his statements,  
As contending against some being or influence.

#### The Runner

On a flat road runs the well-train'd runner,

He is lean and sinewy with muscular legs,  
He is thinly clothed, he leans forward as he runs,  
With lightly closed fists and arms partially rais'd.

### Beautiful Women

Women sit or move to and fro, some old, some young,  
The young are beautiful--but the old are more beautiful than the young.

### Mother and Babe

I see the sleeping babe nestling the breast of its mother,  
The sleeping mother and babe--hush'd, I study them long and long.

### Thought

Of obedience, faith, adhesiveness;

As I stand aloof and look there is to me something profoundly  
affecting in large masses of men following the lead of those who  
do not believe in men.

Visor'd

A mask, a perpetual natural disguiser of herself,  
Concealing her face, concealing her form,  
Changes and transformations every hour, every moment,  
Falling upon her even when she sleeps.

Thought

Of justice--as If could be any thing but the same ample law,  
expounded by natural judges and saviors,  
As if it might be this thing or that thing, according to decisions.



## Gliding O'er all

Gliding o'er all, through all,  
Through Nature, Time, and Space,  
As a ship on the waters advancing,  
The voyage of the soul--not life alone,  
Death, many deaths I'll sing.

## Hast Never Come to Thee an Hour

Hast never come to thee an hour,  
A sudden gleam divine, precipitating, bursting all these bubbles,  
fashions, wealth?  
These eager business aims--books, politics, art, amours,  
To utter nothingness?

## Thought

Of Equality--as if it harm'd me, giving others the same chances and  
rights as myself--as if it were not indispensable to my own

rights that others possess the same.

### To Old Age

I see in you the estuary that enlarges and spreads itself grandly as  
it pours in the great sea.

### Locations and Times

Locations and times--what is it in me that meets them all, whenever  
and wherever, and makes me at home?  
Forms, colors, densities, odors--what is it in me that corresponds  
with them?

### Offerings

A thousand perfect men and women appear,

Around each gathers a cluster of friends, and gay children and youths, with offerings.

To The States [To Identify the 16th, 17th, or 18th Presidentiad]

Why reclining, interrogating? why myself and all drowsing?

What deepening twilight-scum floating atop of the waters,

Who are they as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol?

What a filthy Presidentiad! (O South, your torrid suns! O North, your arctic freezings!)

Are those really Congressmen? are those the great Judges? is that the President?

Then I will sleep awhile yet, for I see that these States sleep, for reasons;

(With gathering murk, with muttering thunder and lambent shoots we all duly awake,

South, North, East, West, inland and seaboard, we will surely awake.)