

WORK 1

EARLY POEMS

THE SINGING PLAINS
NOTES FOR HYMN TUNES
VESSELS OF TRANSIT

by

FRANCIS BRABAZON



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In Avatar Meher Baba's Love
Complimentary Copy
from
Meherazad Family

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

Our first venture, the publication of Francis Brabazon's "Proletarians-Transition" which we published earlier this year, met with such encouraging response that we now plan to publish the whole of this new poet's work, as finally selected by him and submitted to us, in chronological sequence in a series of small volumes, beginning with the present volume which contains his early work.

Acknowledgments are due to Ern Malley's Journal, which has recently printed "Morning" and "Victoria Market" from Vessels of Transit; and to A Comment, which printed "Man Standing before the Rising Sun" and "Discipline is a Cover for the Weakness of the Flesh" at the time these two pieces were written (1941).

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ERRATA

- On page 16, line 2, read dawn for drawn.
 „ „ 26, „ 4, of Evening, read richer for rich.
 „ „ 37, last line, read starlit for starlight.
 „ „ 39, line 3, read place for plan.

THE SINGING PLAINS

02257.

MANIFESTO.

The density of the heat haze
is left inviolate by our passage across the plains.
We have come across bones, human and animal,
but there is no suspicion that the mulga clumps
hold any beast of prey;
but overhead soars an eagle
and nearby the cry of a crow is answered by others.

In the distance are fairy palaces
and arbours of refreshment which we never reach.

The immense fecundity of this land
where no life has yet flourished!

It is here that we who have been born out of time of the old
 gods and traditions
must find our new beliefs.

PRE-VIEW.

These figures, these lovely emanations
of the earth, as they cross the plains
bow to each other with heroic gestures
born from the holy womb of the search
and the knowledge of their ancient lineage.
They walk in twos and threes,
until they reach the horizon, and there
on the bridge of eyes and still held in the sweet bondage of hands
they melt into the blue shadows of the sunset.

DIRECTION.

Sanctified by the touch of our eyes,
the intimate song of our hands,
once more we begin our journey
across this landscape of dream and hope.
Our feet know the grasses and the flowers
and they converse on ancient tendernesses.
Jesus they knew, and wept at the glory of his compassion,
and they marked the disciples' progress, one by one,
(the sands of time! the Earth reneweth herself
and the blood of these pure ones worships her).
They sang the kirtan of Krishna, honouring in place
Shiva's austerities. In the fastness of the desert
they whispered to Isis, pointing the search,
and in the nights of the saints
they were the harbingers of the new dawns.
They also to us—our way, our love, our immortality.

THE SINGING PLAINS.

(1)

On this our journey across the plains,
on our pilgrimage to establish the holy places,
your eyes have sought mine in questioning despair,
but your feet knew, and always led us to that place
where we plighted our love afresh,
where we planted another shrine.
And as the vision cleared after the oblation of tears,
your eyes were tender to behold—they were once more
those stars I remember thousands of years ago,
they were once more that light I shall realize a hundred lives
hence.

(2)

Weaving our song, spinning our tale of love,
this journey passes as in a dream where there is
no remembrance of the past and no thought of the future.
Unseen eyes follow our footsteps, and unseen faces break
into smiles at our approach. Each morning is a praise,
and each night a consummation of thanksgiving.

(3)

Along the roads which diverge and meet across the plains,
the army of pilgrims winds toward God.

There are men begrimed with the dirt of cities,
and women with worn faces from lonely farmsteads;
there are men from the borderlands of habitation
and women with child at breast who have come up from the
slums;
there are ones who have cast away civilization,
and ones whom civilization has cast out from its recognition;
and at every crossroad, at every camp at evening,
is the singing fool—the one chosen to show the way.
And this land who has waited so long
to be delivered of her burden, smiles,
for in the tramp of these feet
and in the sound of these voices
she hears the return of the Bridegroom and Physician for her ease.

(4)

In the flow of the evening, in the movement of your hand
before we plunge into the ocean of night
from whence the thunder of morning will waken us to our
new day

let us pause on the brink of eyes—wells of love foaming
towards the heavens
(which is our draught, which is the song we will pour on
arising);

let us cast our glance backward over the road we have travelled
dropping a skein of thought for the weary—for our own hands
should we miss our direction

before we plunge into the ocean of night
from whence the thunder of morning will waken us to our
new day.

(5)

From the caverns under the rocks of our forefathers
our melodies of ascension

move out toward the horizons of bliss. The air
which is like a red glass screen strains our laughter,
and the freed note rises in ever-widening circles.

Translucent palaces float upon the plains,
(Oh the tiny peaks teeming on top of the highlands
where formerly our thought wandered),
and a minaret growing from the bottom of the lake,
scatters its petals on top of the water.

As we pass the eager crowds cry, Hosanna!

Hosanna! to the Lord! the Bridegroom
returneth for the comfort of his Bride.

(6)

In the line where the day merges into the night,
and the night sings the ascension of the day;
in the line where our lips meet for this land's comfort,
for the easement of her travail;
in the line of our hearts' flow,
where its melody changes its key; in the line
whose horizons widen into our dream of God, and we weep
because of the night, because of the morning song.

(7)

By the spring of devotion, before the altar of their faith,
the pilgrims have assembled for a wedding.
Their hearts are glad because two more of the children
are about to enter into the second joy—
that a man and woman shall cleave together
for the body's light and the fulfilment of the soul.
The bridegroom is upborne by the rhythm
of the dancing feet, and the bride is sustained
by the measure of the singing hands
(oh backward glance to the childhood of dream
and the memory of the bud-womb blossoming).
They advance to the flower-decked altar
and the night of consummation
with chants of praise, and their winged glances
solace the hearts of the elders,
and prepare the younger children for their day.

(8)

Under these arches, the lovely edifices
of our brotherhood, we pause and sing.
We recall the heroic past—the lost victories,
and the blessing of defeat; the fulfilment of empty vigils,
and of the trust learned through broken vows;
our towers of Babel whence we learned
new songs of praise, and our voyages of fear
in which our hearts were opened to the first words of love.
And praising our past, we step forward

into our future, where our works will be transmuted
into pure song, where our hands
will be as lilies opening in the Sun,
and our eyes our only passport for the way.

EPILOGUE.

At the ever opening doors of welcome and departure
where we greet under moons of strange delicate lustre,
the sea's clangor within the bells
over the doors of the cathedrals
echoes our aspiration
awakens our loins (oh salt of the sea-spray)
to our new day
to our new projects
built out of our cast off bones,
so that in future arrivals we may congregate in worship
until we rejoice under the final arch
where no door swings
and no key turns against the cry of the pilgrim.

Then will the children, dancing in the greenness of the plains
sing: Glory to the Lamb! Glory to the lamb of our endeavour,
who is released at last and ascendeth to the heaven of his reward.

NOTES FOR HYMN TUNES

MORNING.

Over the wheat field
voluble in the drawn breeze
the morning comes.

The trees shake out their leaves,
the small birds cry to each other in quick excited tones,
and the jackass flings forth his salutation to the morn:

Presently the East,
her last bright garment flung back across the sky
stands clear and naked before the rising sun.

THE DREAM.

The wheat sweeping in a dream up to the golden sunset sky;
the tops of the further hills are tipped with light
and they slope down to the greenness of springs;
the intermediate land rests after its deliverance from its burden,
and the little house set on the edge of the dream—
how cool are its walls, how its doorways sing of peace.

HARVEST.

The smoke of the sunset witnesses another day.
Little eddies of dust run along the roads and over the
fallowed lands,
and a few sheep wander complainingly down to the water.
Through the heavy wheat runs the whispered prayer, "Tomorrow,
oh tomorrow."
And the man, the woman and the child,
group themselves in the doorway of their house, and sing.

AUTUMN.

Sleeps the granary
within the sheltering arms
of this tree, whose cool planes
hide the delight of rarer noons than ours.

The fields, dreaming into the sunset
prepare the burden of another year,

And from the farmer's house
rises the smoke of the sacrifice to the labourers' hands.

O JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM.

Evening

closing the day's vigil.

The sunset in answer to our prayers,

and lighting with glory the little cities on the plains.

Wells of song! wells of blue

wherein burns the star of tomorrow's direction.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

From these wells of blue

the fountains of song toss up flowers whose forms

burst into a moment

of iridescent glory

in the midst of which blossom

human faces whose lips murmur

the song and whose eyes

drop the flowers which are tossed

up from the blue wells

by the fountains of pure song.

SEASIDE.

Over the sands, which the sea has loved
for so long, the setting sun
is throwing the groups of the holiday crowd
into the stained-glass windows of old churches:

Grandmothers sit in indecorous postures,
and their eyes hold a distance
where no memory stirs. Old men
having trotted up from the water,
stand with their legs apart vigorously
rubbing themselves; and there is the mother and child
the centre of an admiring group.

Young people are leaping into the molten sea,
and as they emerge again
they stand for a moment on the top of the waves
aurioled in the western flame. At this moment
they know death and are unafraid.

TRAVELLERS.

In glory with the finger posts of the risen sun:
the myriad greetings, and that small idiot who keeps
saying 'Tu-whit, tu-whit';
the labourers in the fields keeping the tryst,
and in the sunlight the old man reaping the reward of the years.

Along the paths the woman with the spontaneous laugh—the
travellers greeting—
This is a covenant in the beyond time—
we will meet again in the light of remembered eyes
and the gentle hands of the labourers will rock our marriage bed.

THE MARRIAGE OF FLOWERS.

Blow away the dew from the faces of the flowers,
the Bridegroom comes:

The angelic air recites the marriage song, and the
forest life quickens in expectancy.

Quick, quick! open your heart—this is our secret time—
By noon the world will acknowledge His glory.

THE FINGERS OF DAWN.

The fingers of dawn
The hand of night
The immense body of noon
Singing the eternal praises.

The breath of the worshipper
The pulse of the lover
The eyes of the loved-one
Singing the eternal praises.

NIGHT.

The night wind has folded the flocks away
 into the corners of the fields,
The orchard rests after its labours of the hot midday,
 and the wheat field sways in its dream of pure love;

The housewife has raked out the fire, and has set
 the table in readiness for the morning,
And the farmer returning from the night feeding
 pauses a moment in silent thanksgiving to the earth;

The sky spreads out—
The hand of God reaches down, blessing the sacrifices of the
 bed, the labour of eyes—
Faintly on my ears the hymnic stars.

VESSELS OF TRANSIT

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

This calm morning, this quiet affirmation—
wherein each wandering sense sits in delight and in
reward for labour,
And the love of my friends is like a gentle breeze
caressing the sunlight.

EVENING.

The wind from the sea
weaving our auriolos—our bridal wreaths

Beneath our tender feet
blossoms a rich verdure than the spring

And the setting sun
urges a soft complaint among the birds.

BRIDE SONG.

Where we walk

Where we walk

trailing the words of our love song

The shadows caress them

folding them away in their night of dreams:

Where we walk

Where we walk

spilling the tones of our glances

The quiet pools receive them

wrapping them round in their sea of blessedness.

THRESHOLD.

We, standing in this doorway beginning our song—
the ancient timbers know us well
and our home-coming brings them quietude again.

Without, the evening wind through the trees—
your maiden sigh to the past.

Above the sunset gleams the first star.

Our pure eyes—
which will enrich and dedicate our bridal night.

BENEVOLENT SHAPES.

As we ascend from the river bed,
as we emerge from the waters,
your feet tread gracefully the tree lengths
like some delicate creature
descending from heaven.

In your right hand, your right hand,
all our gifts (before our asking);
all our dreams and fairylands;
all our experiences and efforts;
and all our voyages returning upon us
before our setting out.

Thus it should be—
and the ever opening doors
closed by our own foreknowledge
against successive effort.

AFTERNOON.

This shade folding within its quietness
the ache of barren days,
This sea hiding within its blue
the memory of vacant nights,
These eyes announcing with their frankness
other nights' harvest, other singing dawns.

AFTER NIGHT.

Last night the lonely stars urged the caress of our hands
and the far voices befriended our timid breasts.
Quietly we chanted the night's beneficence
and she astonished, withdrew her terrors and revealed herself
in all her maternal beauty.
This morning, our eyes lighting the dawn
awake the amorous flowers to another day.

VESSELS OF TRANSIT.

(A memento for H.M. and N.B.)

This forest of spires
rising from the floor
above the covers of my bed
last night contained
the altars of our faith
where incense smoked
as each in turn
served the communicants

And through the wilderness
of our thoughts and words
wandered our fellowship
which paused in glades
acknowledging contentments
and desires fulfilled.

YOUR KNEES DREAMING.

Your knees dreaming towards the fire
Like two moons aspiring to the sun—
The speaker's words buzz in my ears like tiny
 wingless creatures.
I see God in your knees
I see the Beloved's smile in their tender grace and in
 the fierce strength of their knowledge.

WEDDING SONG FOR KATHLEEN.

Woman on the steps of glory
Your hair is golden sunlight glancing dawns
Your throat is an arch in the flow of the morning air—
I like the song of your eyes,
I, as a pilgrim rising in the dawn, behold in it
the high noon of my way.

GUEST HOUSE.

Here in this wilderness
where the air is a praise, and the mountains
mirror an eternal aspiration,
you have built your pleasure house
with its red gables and its pleasant lawns.

Here you sell your days and barter your nights
with a new zest born of the mountain air:
Sometimes one sings, striving to recall
forgotten melodies, but is instantly hushed
by the uneasy silence
and the memory of other martyrdoms.

ON THE MOUNTAINS.

At the end of the day, after the dusty roads,
I bathed in a river
that wound about the foot of a round naked mountain.

Leaving the water which was already over-crowded
with people, I tore off the last vestige
of the insignia of civilization and started up the slopes.
Tier after tier I mounted,
leaping with the ease of one born on heights.

Half way up I paused. Below me,
the chorus of fears. I laughed, and continued on.

At the top of the mountain, I worshipped
the setting sun in your name and mine.

BY THE SEASHORE.

Here where the kneeling waves fling up their song of adoration
(their fine song—the delicious whisper above the heartfelt roar)
we joined our hands and wandered along the shore,
singing our songs of love, our greetings and fellowship.

The sands are solaced because of the kiss of our feet
and the vigils of the rocks will be easier
because of our glance, and we have promised the hills
that we will return one day and sow their slopes with flowers.

And so we depart—stringing
lightly the hours, weaving the songs,
scattering the days behind in a golden wake.

MAN STANDING BEFORE THE RISING SUN.

Man standing before the dawn.
In his eye no hostile regard
In his hand no invocation—
The first projection of the circle
The gentle bursting of the Word, like a leaf breaking
along the bough.

Man before the morning:
The sunlight breaks along the bough—
His eyes are green buds suspended in the day,
His hands, long have forgotten their invocations
and desires
Burnish in love and all humility the sun's disc
Caressing his features
And wiping away the tears, even the tears from the sun's eye.

Man in the morning light—
The hour approaches noon—
He wears the sun like a jewel upon his brow;
The sun is the eye of God and is a mirror to Man of God's soul.
The man weareth the sun upon his brow:
The air is a thousand harpstrings in delight.

DISCIPLINE IS A COVER FOR THE WEAKNESS
OF THE FLESH.

(Bonegilla Military Camp.)

Perfection of action is a glory,
it is a keen glance, and the tenderness of love
 is within its boundaries:
the air moved by the lover's arm is in gladness;
the ground trodden by his feet, adores—
but nature is violated by the demanded movement
because it is a created front against her most intimate desires.
The rhythm of grass is gentle, and seeks death through
 the elements
or the living breath of teeth;
earth is the bride of sun and the discreet ploughshare;
even the stones of the road cry out against the tread of companies.
It is only to love that nature yields herself—
the loving hands of the workman, and the glance of the saint
are her masters, and her womb is in joy with their seed.

LEAVE RETURN, Bonegilla.

The train pounded on into the dark.
Most of us drank and talked loud
against the silence in our hearts.
A few sang.
Those of us who did not drink enough
had to sit upon those who drank too much.
Finally we slept.
Then the train pulled into Bonegilla siding,
and we stumbled out into an enormous starlight night.

AT THE END OF THE WORLD, YOUR EYE.

At the end of the world
when the mists float away into
broad beams of sunlight
traversing your eye
sharper than any memories

you will remark your judgments
whether you have been kind to the least
of these (of yours), even the pot
grown leaky within your service
or the half eaten loaf, or the grateful threshold;

and with your eye
clustering images of requiting
you will consider the enormity of the Tear
which rose on His cheek like a jewel
like an emblem of love on the world's breast;

and you will suddenly see that these suns
which traverse your eye, sharper
than the pain of a friend's hand, are a mild setting
for the jewel on the breast of the world
at the world's end.

MORNING.

Morning carolling to Susannah under the pines
but a man planted the pines
and a man and a woman in the first plan made Susannah
and a man broke the sun into a thousand pieces
and made the crystalline grass

but a man who stands on the edge of his thought with no rope
and plucks a flower in that blue sea, a yellow flower
whose roots are diamond streams, is a morning

and his hand cupped backwards, his foot
the arch of his foot, is a noonday shade.

THE GOLDEN BOAT.

The edges of the tombs recoiled under the cypress trees
the youth and the girl glided along with long long strokes
accompanied by that great flower who stood over their heads
like a gay parasol

and the sun was busy turning over the roots
patching up a piece of earth that had come loose
attending to the grass, and putting a wayward leaf
back in its place on the tree stem

and the lovers glided along with long long strokes
and the chant rose from under the shrunken tomb-stones
where the grass was turning over the graves for the sun
who was also planting the vineyards against the day
against the betrothal Cup and the oblation poured in
remembering.

MORNING.

Man looks out into the scintillating forms of morning.
Beneath is the lush earth, grass, trees, and the warm
 turning in sleep of every living thing;
while in the high night still gleams the star, impersonal.
Man looks out, into his own high consciousness,
confident, superb—
ravished by the forms with which he clothes the day.

WHEN THE SUN ROSE.

The forms died
leaving the darkness of night,

The night died
leaving the void of dawn

From which a Sun rose bearing in its shining hand
a green bud trembling within the light.

CENTAUR.

A centaur is not so remarkable—

A man could easily grow a horse,
he could grow his legs fleet, and his body
to stay distances, and enlarge his eye and scent.

I can imagine such a superb horseman
of white looks and clear mind,
that he became manhorse,
and growing quiet and steady with new power, delighted
the valleys and mountain slopes.

Believe his immense joy!

He would go out into the morning completely
nothing remaining—
he would see the waterfall with a new eye.

VICTORIA MARKET.

I said to my companion, this is walking
I said to my companion, how my heart goes
out to all lovers

The darkness was still warm
but the fields were freshening beautifully
in the winter rain;
the market was full of little lights
and I remarked the ear of a sack
sleeping on top of a tyre like a cat
on the curbstone

I said to my friend stop falling on your knees
I have to keep pulling you onto your feet again—
then the dawn came down silently between
the rows of vegetables
and we passed out into the white star
rejoicing companionless in our love

As I crossed the square on my way home
the highest spires were ablaze with the movement
of feet.

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