

V E R S E

The House With the Marble Steps

He built the house to show his neighbors
That decent thrift could lead to this,
A giddy reason for his labors,
A bright brick apotheosis.

He was not one to be bulldozed
By sentiment, and he had planned
Past whispered sneers when he foreclosed
The mortgage on this very land.

He'd forced his way with prudent greed
While they at best remained the same.
He gauged the folly of a creed
Which keeps a lame purse always lame.

Well, here it was, and in the road
He stood and tallied beam and rafter.
The cost would be a heavy load
He'd tell you, twisting into laughter.

The window-edges were of stone,
A soapy limestone smooth and fair.
The floors were all hard wood and none
Tailed off to pine beneath a stair.

If he were old and quite infirm,
His house was very fresh and young,
And envy is a winding worm—
These thoughts were pepper to his tongue.

And so he watched it grow and grow,
And jotted down the things he heard,
Scheming to balance by the blow
His house should deal as final word.

To crown the whole and go beyond
Whatever yet had been attempted.
In his small town, he signed a bond
Which would most certainly have emptied

The pockets of quite half his friends,
Even to him it was a point,
But when a man aims at such ends
He must keep stiff in every joint.

He bought a quarry's good half year
Of first-class, fine-grained marble output,
He paid a mason very near
As much again to have it cut.

The sharp white polished steps were grand
Descending from the stucco porch.
They glittered like a marching band,
They mounted upward like a torch.

But he had taken to his bed
Before the last was set in place,
And one week later he was dead
With a slow smile upon his face.

The marble flashed beneath the fall
Of undertakers' feet who carried
His coffin to the funeral
Within the house. And there he tarried

For fifteen minutes more or less,
And "dust to dust" they read above him.
Now who had gained in bitterness—
For not one soul was there to love him?

They gaped upon the shining floors,
Their eyes scanned ceiling heights and blocked them.
When all was done, they shut the doors
And shrugged their shoulders as they locked them.

The house is charming now with weeds
Sprung all about, the steps are mellow
With little grass and flower-seeds
Drifting across their sun-stained yellow.

Empty it stands and so has stood
More years than the town clerk can tell.
No legend has it he was good,
No tale reports that he did well.

They've tried to sell it, off and on,
But not a person wants to buy,
Though visitors who've come and gone
Remember it against the sky
In shrewd and sweet proportions glowing
Above a flight of marble steps where grass is growing.

AMY LOWELL.

A Grave Song

I've a pocketful of emptiness for you, my Dear.
I've a heart like a loaf was baked yesteryear,
I've a mind like ashes spilt a week ago,
I've a hand like a rusty, cracked corkscrew.

Can you flourish on nothing and find it good?
Can you make petrification do for food?
Can you warm yourself at ashes on a stone?
Can you give my hand the cunning which has gone?

If you can, I will go and lay me down
And kiss the edge of your purple gown.
I will rise and walk with the sun on my head.
Will you walk with me, will you follow the dead?

AMY LOWELL.

Texas

I went a-riding, a-riding,
Over a great long plain.
And the plain went a-sliding, a-sliding
Away from my bridle-rein.

Fields of cotton, and fields of wheat,
Thunder-blue gentians by a wire fence,
Standing cypress, red and tense,
Holding its flower rigid like a gun,

Dressed for parade by the running wheat,
 By the little bouncing cotton. Terribly sweet
 The cardinals sing in the live-oak trees,
 And the long plain breeze,
 The prairie breeze,
 Blows across from swell to swell
 With a ginger smell.
 Just ahead, where the road curves round,
 A long-eared rabbit makes a bound
 Into a wheat-field, into a cotton-field,
 His track glitters after him and goes still again
 Over to the left of my bridle-rein.

But over to the right is a glare—glare—glare—
 Of sharp glass windows.
 A narrow square of brick jerks thickly up above the cotton
 plants,
 A raucous mercantile thing flaring the sun from thirty-six
 windows,
 Brazenly declaring itself to the lovely fields.
 Tram-cars run like worms about the feet of this thing,
 The coffins of cotton-bales feed it,
 The threshed wheat is its golden blood.
 But here it has no feet,
 It has only the steep ironic grin of its thirty-six windows,
 Only its basilisk eyes counting the fields,
 Doing sums of how many buildings to a city, all day and
 all night.

Once they went a-riding, a-riding,
 Over the great long plain.
 Cowboys singing to their dogey steers,
 Cowboys perched on forty-dollar saddles,
 Riding to the North, six months to get there,
 Six months to reach Wyoming.
 "Hold up, paint horse, herd the little dogies.
 Over the lone prairie."
 Bones of dead steers,
 Bones of cowboys,
 Under the wheat, maybe.

The sky-scraper sings another way,
 A tune of steel, of wheels, of gold.
 And the ginger breeze blows, blows all day
 Tanged with flowers and mold.
 And the Texas sky whirls down, whirls down,
 Taking long looks at the fussy town.
 An old sky and a long plain
 Beyond, beyond, my bridle-rein.

AMY LOWELL.

Assault

I

I had forgotten how the frogs must sound
 After a year of silence, else I think
 I should not so have ventured forth alone,
 At dusk, upon this unfrequented road.

II

I am waylaid by Beauty. Who will walk
 Between me and the crying of the frogs?
 Oh, savage Beauty, suffer me to pass,
 That am a timid woman, on her way
 From one house to another!

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

CORRESPONDENCE

A Letter from France

M. Daniel Halévy has sent us a letter from which we translate the following passages:

SIR: Since the letter I wrote you last April, French affairs have taken one of the courses which I suggested to you was possible if not actually likely: the strikes have been broken, and the party of conservatism has been strengthened.

This is characteristic of French society generally. It is also characteristic of that body which in France as everywhere else exists apart and which forms our working class. It is in the throes of an active and ceaseless struggle: the outcome of this struggle is up to now on the whole unfavorable to the revolutionaries. The Russian revolution, and the example it affords of a bourgeoisie dispossessed, lures only the fanatics. The majority resist. What with this temptation and this resistance, the Socialist party is wasting its time and strength. Last July, two of its delegates, Cachin and Frossard, came back from Moscow filled with enthusiasm for what they had seen: a revolution, victory . . . At that time Poland seemed to have been crushed. Our revolutionaries are like all other men: any victory carries them away, and the success of the Red armies inflames their pacifist hearts. Cachin and Frossard brought from Moscow a paper which needed only to be signed: an acceptance of the principles and precepts of the Third International, arranged and numbered. I think the number was nineteen. . . .

The nineteen points of Cachin and Frossard presented a formidable appearance: statements of an extreme creed, painful exclusions . . . Perhaps they would have been agreed to by the Socialists had not two events intervened. First: the Red army managed to get beaten. Communist prestige suffered greatly from the defeat. Second: one of the Third International's conditions was directly aimed at our Confédération Générale du Travail, which corresponds roughly to your American Federation of Labor. It exacted, from those who were to sign it, a pledge to convert their economic organizations to communism. And, besides, the communists had already begun to form, within each union, nuclei for the purpose of "boring from within" and hastening this conversion by all possible means.

I fancy that your A. F. of L., your Gompers, if so threatened, would react energetically. Economic organizations in all countries are very jealous of their traditions and their independence. The C. G. T. reacted. "Hands off!" it said to the communists. It denounced these "borers-from-within" as traitors, and in this its loyal followers upheld it. At the Congrès at Orleans in September the moderate leaders of the C. G. T. were continued in power. The C. G. T. defended itself by attacking: its writers criticized Bolshevism itself, its destructive fanaticism, its nihilism, and its Slavic cruelty . . . What with all this Cachin and Frossard were brought to a halt, and the nineteen points still await the signature of the French Socialist party, weakened and worn out by its dissensions.

Nevertheless it was a political stroke of chance that put the finishing touch to the victory of French conservatism: I mean the illness and resignation of President Deschanel. His successor had to be chosen. Who was it to be?

With us the Presidential office is peculiar. It condemns to inactivity whoever fills it. Such is the tradition, and the fact. Yet in this tradition, this fact, there is something displeasing to old French ways, to the instinct, common to all countries, of domination, and at each vacancy of the Presidential chair, a powerful wave of opinion wishes to force "a strong man" into it. Last September the country clamored for Millerand. But was Millerand, wholly given to his tremendous diplomatic task, to abandon it for a throne in a golden niche? Among those who acclaimed him, who wished him elected, there were, mingled with his friends, wise, crafty enemies whose idea was very obviously: "Let us paralyze, neutralize Millerand by sending him to the Elysée. . . ."

Millerand parried this manoeuvre. He refused to leave his work, to allow himself to be elected, and he proposed other candidates. Parliament and public opinion would have none of them: it was Millerand they wanted. Then he declared his terms. I would remind you that he had always been in favor of a revision of the Constitution, that he always wanted to take