

The Windy City

The lean hands of wagon men
put out pointing fingers here,
picked this crossway, put it on a map,
set up their sawbucks, fixed their shotguns,
found a hitching place for the pony express,
made a hitching place for the iron horse,
the one-eye horse with the fire-spit head,
found a homelike spot and said, 'Make a home',
saw this corner with a mesh of rails, shuttling
people, shunting cars, shaping the junk of
the earth to a new city.

The hands of men took hold and tugged
And the breaths of men went into the junk
And the junk stood up into skyscrapers and asked:
Who am I? Am I a city? And if I am what is my name?
And once while the whistles blew and blew again
The men answered: Long ago we gave you a name,
Long ago we laughed and said: You? Your name is
Chicago.

Early the red men gave a name to a river,
the place of the skunk,
the river of the wild onion smell,
Shee-caw-go.

Out of the payday songs of steam shovels,
Out of the wages of structural iron rivets,
The living lighted skyscrapers tell it now as a name,
Tell it across miles of sea blue water, gray blue land:
I am Chicago, I am a name given out by the breaths of
working men, laughing men, a child, a belonging.

So between the Great Lakes,
The Grand De Tour, and the Grand Prairie,
The living lighted skyscrapers stand,
Spotting the blue dusk with checkers of yellow,
streamers of smoke and silver,
parallelograms of night-gray watchmen,
Singing a soft moaning song: I am a child, a belonging.

How should the wind songs of a windy city go?
Singing in a high wind the dirty chatter gets blown
away on the wind—the clean shovel,
the clean pickax,
lasts.

It is easy for a child to eat breakfast and pack off
to school with a pair of roller skates,
buns for lunch, and a geography,
Riding through a tunnel under a river running backward,
to school to listen . . . how the Pottawattamies . . .
. . . and the Blackhawks . . . ran on moccasins . . .
between Kaskaskia, Peoria, Kankakee, and Chicago.
It is easy to sit listening to a boy babbling
of the Pottawattamie moccasins in Illinois,

how now the roofs and smokestacks cover miles
where the deerfoot left its writing
and the foxpaw put its initials
in the snow . . . for the early moccasins . . . to read.

It is easy for the respectable taxpayers to sit in the
street cars and study the faces of burglars,
the prison escapes, the hunger strikes, the cost of
living, the price of dying, the shop gate battles of
strikers and strikebreakers, the strikers killing
scabs and the police killing strikers—the strongest,
the strongest, always the strongest.

It is easy to listen to the haberdasher customers hand
each other their easy chatter—it is easy to die
alive—to register a living thumbprint and be dead
from the neck up.
And there are sidewalks polished with the footfalls of
undertakers' stiffs, greased mannikins, wearing up-to-
the-minute sox, lifting heels across doorsills,
shoving their faces ahead of them—dead from the
neck up—proud of their sox—their sox are the last
word—dead from the neck up—it is easy.

Lash yourself to the bastion of a bridge
and listen while the black cataracts of people go by,
baggage, bundles, balloons,
listen while they jazz the classics:

"Since when did you kiss yourself in
And who do you think you are?
Come across, kick in, loosen up.
Where do you get that chatter?"

"Beat up the short change artists.
They never did nothin' for you.
How do you get that way?
Tell me and I'll tell the world.
I'll say so, I'll say it is."

"You're trying to crab my act.
You poor fish, you mackerel,
You ain't got the sense God
Gave an oyster—it's raining—
What you want is an umbrella."

"Hush baby—
I don't know a thing.
I don't know a thing.
Hush baby."

"Hush baby,
It ain't how old you are,
It's how old you look.
It ain't what you got,
It's what you can get away with."

"Bring home the bacon.
Put it over, shoot it across.
Send 'em to the cleaners.

What we want is results, re-sults
And damn the consequences.

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You can fix anything
If you got the right fixers."

"Kid each other, you cheap skates.
Tell each other you're all to the mustard—
You're the gravy."

"Tell 'em honey.
Ain't it the truth, sweetheart?
Watch your step.
You said it,
You said a mouthful.
We're all a lot of damn fourflushers."

"Hush baby!
Shoot it,
Shoot it all!
Coo coo, coo coo"—
This is one song of Chicago.

It is easy to come here a stranger and show the whole
works, write a book, fix it all up—it is easy to come
and go away a muddle-headed pig, a bum and a bag
of wind.

Go to it and remember this city fished from its
depths a text: "independent as a hog on ice."
Venice is a dream of soft waters, Vienna and Bagdad
recollections of dark spears and wild turbans;
Paris is a thought in Monet gray on scabbards,
fabrics, façades; London is a fact in a fog
filled with the moaning of transatlantic
whistles; Berlin sits amid white scrubbed quad-
rangles and torn arithmetics and testaments;
Moscow brandishes a flag and repeats a dance
figure of a man who walks like a bear.
Chicago fished from its depths a text: Independent
as a hog on ice.

Forgive us if the monotonous houses go mile on mile
Along monotonous streets out to the prairies—
If the faces of the houses mumble hard words
At the streets—and the street voices only say:
"Dust and a bitter wind shall come."

Forgive us if the lumber porches and doorsteps
Snarl at each other—
And the brick chimneys cough in a close-up of
Each other's faces—
And the ramshackle stairways watch each other
As thieves watch—
And dooryard lilacs near a malleable iron works
Long ago languished
In a short whispering purple.

And if the alley ash cans
Tell the garbage wagon drivers
The children play the alley is Heaven
And the streets of Heaven shine
With a grand dazzle of stones of gold
And there are no policemen in Heaven—
Let the rag-tags have it their way.

And if the geraniums
In the tin cans of the window sills
Ask questions not worth answering—
And if a boy and a girl hunt the sun
With a sieve for sifting smoke—
Let it pass—let the answer be—
"Dust and a bitter wind shall come."

Forgive us if the jazz timebeats
Of these clumsy shadows
Moan in saxophone undertones,
And the footsteps of the jungle,
The fang cry, the rip claw hiss,
The sneak-up and the still watch,
The slant of the slit eyes waiting—
If these bother respectable people
with the right crimp in their napkins
reading breakfast menu cards—
forgive us—let it pass—let be.

If cripples sit on their stumps
And joke with the newsies bawling,
"Many lives lost! many lives lost!
Terrible accident! many lives lost!"—
If again twelve men let a woman go,
"He done me wrong; I shot him"—
Or the blood of a child's head
Spatters on the hub of a motor truck—
Or a 44-gat cracks and lets the skylights
Into one more bank messenger—
Or if boys steal coal in a railroad yard
And run with humped gunnysacks
While a bull picks off one of the kids
And the kid wriggles with an ear in cinders
And a mother comes to carry home
A bundle, a limp bundle,
To have his face washed, for the last time,
Forgive us if it happens—and happens again—
And happens again.

Forgive the jazz timebeat
of clumsy mass shadows,
footsteps of the jungle,
the fang cry, the rip claw hiss,
the slant of the slit eyes waiting.

Forgive us if we work so hard
And the muscles bunch clumsy on us
And we never know why we work so hard—
If the big houses with little families
And the little houses with big families
Sneer at each other's bars of misunderstanding;
Pity us when we shackle and kill each other
And believe at first we understand
And later say we wonder why.

Take home the monotonous patter
Of the elevated railroad guard in the rush hours:
"Watch your step. Watch your step. Watch your step."
Or write on a pocket pad what a pauper said
To a patch of purple asters at a whitewashed wall:
"Let every man be his own Jesus—that's enough."

The wheelbarrows grin, the shovels and the mortar
hoist and exploit.

The stone shanks of the Monadnock, the Transportation,
the People's Gas Building, stand up and scrape
at the sky.

The wheelbarrows sing, the bevels and the blue prints
whisper.

The library building named after John Crerar, naked
as a stock farm silo, light as a single eagle
feather, stripped like an airplane propeller,
takes a path up.

Two cool new rivets say, "Maybe it is morning,"
"God knows."

Put the city up; tear the city down;
put it up again; let us find a city.

Let us remember the little violet-eyed
man who gave all, praying, "Dig and
dream, dream and hammer, till your
city comes."

Every day the people sleep and the city dies;
every day the people shake loose, awake and
build the city again.

The city is a tool chest opened every day,
a time clock punched every morning,
a shop door, bunkers and overalls
counting every day.

The city is a balloon and a bubble plaything
shot to the sky every evening, whistled in
a ragtime jig down the sunset.

The city is made, forgotten, and made again,
trucks hauling it away haul it back
steered by drivers whistling ragtime
against the sunsets.

Every day the people get up and carry the city,
carry the bunkers and balloons of the city,
lift it and put it down.

"I will die as many times
as you make me over again,"
says the city to the people,

"I am the woman, the home, the family,
I get breakfast and pay the rent;
I telephone the doctor, the milkman, the undertaker;
I fix the streets
for your first and your last ride—
Come clean with me, come clean or dirty,
I am stone and steel of your sleeping numbers;
I remember all you forget.
I will die as many times . . .
as you make me over again."

Under the foundations,
Over the roofs,
The bevels and the blue prints talk it over.
The wind of the lake shore waits and wanders.
The heave of the shore wind hunches the sand piles.
The winkers of the morning stars count out cities
And forget the numbers.

At the white clock-tower
lighted in night purples

over the boulevard link bridge
only the blind get by without acknowledgements.

The passers-by, factory punch-clock numbers,
hotel girls out for the air, teameoes,
coal passers, taxi drivers, window washers,
paperhangers, floorwalkers, bill collectors,
burglar alarm salesmen, massage students,
manicure girls, chiropodists, bath rubbers,
booze runners, hat cleaners, armhole basters,
delicatessen clerks, shovel stiff, work plugs—

They all pass over the bridge, they all look up
at the white clock tower
lighted in night purples
over the boulevard link bridge—

And sometimes one says, "Well, we hand it to 'em."

Mention proud things, catalogue them,
The jack-knife bridge opening, the ore boats,
the wheat barges passing through.
Three overland trains arriving the same hour,
one from Memphis and the cotton belt,
one from Omaha and the corn belt,
one from Duluth, the lumberjack and the iron range.
Mention a carload of shorthorns taken off the valleys
of Wyoming last week, arriving yesterday, knocked on
the head, stripped, quartered, hung in ice boxes today,
mention the daily melodrama of this humdrum,
rhythms of heads, hides, heels, hoofs hung up.

It is wisdom to think the people are the city.
It is wisdom to think the city would fall to pieces
and die and be dust in the wind
If the people of the city all move away and leave no
people at all to watch and keep the city.
It is wisdom to think no city stood here at all until
the working men, the laughing men, came.
It is wisdom to think tomorrow new working men, new
laughing men, may come and put up a new city—
Living lighted skyscrapers and a night lingo of lanterns
testify tomorrow shall have its own say-so.

Night gathers itself into a ball of dark yarn.
Night loosens the ball and it spreads.
The lookouts from the shores of Lake Michigan
find night follows day, and ping! ping! across
sheet gray the boat lights put their signals.
Night lets the dark yarn unravel, Night speaks and
the yarns change to fog and blue strands.

The lookouts turn to the city.
The canyons swarm with red sand lights
of the sunset.
The atoms drop and sift, blues cross over,
yellows plunge.
Mixed light shafts stack their bayonets,
pledge with crossed handles.
So, when the canyons swarm, it is then the
lookouts speak
Of the high spots over a street . . . mountain language
Of skyscrapers in dusk, the Railway Exchange,
The People's Gas, the Monadnock, the Transportation,
Gone to the gloaming.

The river turns in a half circle.
 The Milwaukee Avenue bridge curves
 over the river curve.
 Then the river panorama
 performs for the bridge,
 dots . . . lights . . . dots . . . lights,
 sixes and sevens of dots and lights,
 a lingo of lanterns and searchlights,
 circling sprays of gray and yellow.

. . . .

A man came as a witness saying:
 "I listened to the Great Lakes
 And I listened to the Grand Prairie,
 And they had little to say to each other,
 A whisper or so in a thousand years.
 'Some of the cities are big,' said one.
 'And some not so big,' said another.
 'And sometimes the cities are all gone,'
 Said a black knob bluff to a light green sea."

. . . .

Winds of the Windy City, come out of the prairie,
 all the way from Medicine Hat.
 Come out of the inland sea blue water, come where
 they nickname a city for you.

Corn wind in the fall, come off the black lands,
 come off the whisper of the silk hangers,
 the lap of the flat spear leaves.

Blue water wind in summer, come off the blue miles
 of lake, carry your inland sea blue fingers,
 carry us cool, carry your blue to our homes.

White spring winds, come off the bag wool clouds,
 come off the running melted snow, come white
 as the arms of snow-born children.

Gray fighting winter winds, come along on the tearing
 blizzard tails, the snouts of the hungry
 hunting storms, come fighting gray in winter.

Winds of the Windy City,
 Winds of corn and sea blue,
 Spring wind white and fighting winter gray,
 Come home here—they nickname a city for you.

. . . .

The wind of the lake shore waits and wanders.
 The heave of the shore wind hunches the sand piles
 The winkers of the morning stars count out cities
 And forget the numbers.

CARL SANDBURG.

Hopes and Fears As Regards America

II

BEFORE embarking upon controversial topics, I wish to say once more, with the utmost emphasis that I consider the American government the best (i. e. the least harmful) of the Great Powers in its international relations, and that I have the profoundest admiration for the American people. The American government is in the van of progress among governments; but, perhaps for that very reason, American radicals (if I am not mistaken) are somewhat less radical than those of some other countries. In Tsarist days, the radicals of Russia were the most thorough-going in the world; and it would seem that bad governments are a necessary condition of good oppositions.

There is one other preliminary point that I wish to make clear. I do not believe in the application of moral epithets in politics, whether of praise or blame. In a former communication, my love of monosyllables led me to speak of "knaves and fools," in a passage which you quite justly criticize. Instead of "knaves" I should have said "men who judge correctly as to their own interests"; and instead of "fools," "men who judge mistakenly as to the public interests." Moral epithets represent, I believe, an insufficient analysis and under-

standing; when men's actions are understood, they appear inevitable, and therefore no more worthy of praise or blame than sunshine or a thunder-storm.

European radicals for the most part believe that the Liberal ideals which prevailed in Europe in the sixties, and survived in England down to the death of Gladstone, are no longer applicable to the modern world. These old ideals, so far as economics are concerned, may be summed up in free competition. In America they retain a hold over advanced political thought which they have lost in Europe. We observe that free competition within a nation tends to be extinguished by the formation of trusts, and is then transferred to the international sphere. In that sphere, it is one of the most potent causes of modern wars; especially when it takes the more recent form of competition for the possession of raw materials rather than for markets. Since the end of the war, the competition for oil between America and Great Britain must have caused anxiety to every friend of peace; I understand that it is now happily ended, as a part of the general settlement exemplified at Washington. The new tendency is towards international agreements among the financiers and industrialists. The London Times of January 10th tells how a