RHYMES OF REASON

BY
ROSS D. BROWN

PRICE
TWENTY-FIVE CENTS
Ross D. Brown spoke on the street corner the other night. He was logical, passionate and witty. The crowd stood fixed in their tracks as this colored man spoke words of wisdom. He appeals to all workers, regardless of race, creed or color. He is spreading the light of Socialism. He is quiet and unassuming, but he is powerful and effective.

PITTSBURG NEW ERA (Editorial).
INTRODUCTORY

HE author of these verses, Ross D. Brown, a young comrade, has won renown as the "unbleached orator" of the Socialist movement. He is widely known, this gifted young colored revolutionist, as a speaker and propagandist of rare versatility and remarkable power. He is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of loyalty to his race and to his class, and the earnestness and sincerity which animate him are so apparent, even to the most prejudiced, that he is listened to with respect if not with admiration and approval by the many thousands who gather to hear him.

The colored people have, in this eloquent young comrade, a champion worthy of their cause, and the same is true of the working class. Ross D. Brown knows by his own painful experience the wrongs suffered by his race and his class, and in voicing his protest against these wrongs and pleading for the rights to which they are justly entitled, he grows eloquent and convincing, and his message goes straight to the hearts of his hearers.

The title the author has given to this little volume is "Labor Among the Lowly, and Other Poems." It makes its appearance at an opportune time, and its passionate protest against the brutality and horror of war will strike a responsive chord in the breast of every class-conscious workingman in the world.

The author lays no claim to poetic polish or to the mastery of technique. He is no graduate of a college where "pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed." He is one of the innumerable children of poverty, and such education as he has was gained after the day's work or while looking for a job.

But there is a heart-pulse in every line and a throbbing aspiration in every verse he has written. He sees clearly and feels keenly that which moves him to write and to speak for the struggling poor among whom he was born, with whom he toiled and suffered and to whom he has consecrated his services with all his heart.

EUGENE V. DEBS.

December, 1916.
TO ROBERT G. INGERSOLL

The dogs snapped at his heels
   As he kept the world in doubt;
He drained the vats of reason
   And put the hell fire out.
He thought more of Fred Douglass
   And the lectures that he gave,
Than of the christian master
   Who robbed and whipped the slave.
He thought more of the Mother
   With a baby on her lap,
Than of the lying Preacher
   Who kept Jesus Christ on tap.
The church upheld the system
   That used the chastening rod,
And he could not believe
   In their slave-driving God.
He thought more of the Man
   With a true agnostic heart,
Than of the christian beast
   Who kept the human mart.
They robbed their helpless slaves
   Then prayed upon their knees —
He lectured and hell cooled off
   At least ninety-five degrees.
Voltaire, and Ernest Heackel
   Helped to glorify his brain;
Bruno, Dunbar, and Magellan,
   Abe Lincoln and Thomas Paine —
They fought for the under-dog,
   Like Walt Whitman and Hugo.
He said, "If there be a God,"
   But he confessed he didn’t know.
He thought more of the slave,
   Who wrought the cotton bale,
Than of the rich sky-pilot
   Who kept holy ghost on sale.
He read Shakespeare and Darwin;
   And he read the Bible, too;
Then took the Preacher’s power
   And mixed it with the pew.
He heard applause and hisses,
Then threw the gauntlet down—
He would not trade his Reason
For the slippers and the Crown.
Hypocrites lied on Ingersoll,
Their friendship turned to hate
When he defeated Doctor Talmage
In their memorable debate.
Too narrow to read his books,
They misquoted what he said;
From their frescoed windows
They emptied slops upon his head.
But through the countless ages,
From the lips of man will fall
The gems and golden verses
From the brain of Ingersoll.
They laid him down to rest
Amid the flowers and ferns,
To sleep with Wendell Phillips,
John Brown, and Robert Burns.
He smiled just before he died,
With his reason still aglow—
He didn't say there was no God,
But he said he didn't know.

—R. D. B.

A PRAYER FROM DIXIE

God, I am way down in Dixie,
Working and bending my back,
Where it's treason to ask for justice,
And a crime to be born black.
Schools are closed to my people,
We pay tax, but cannot vote;
God, where is the constitution
That our brave forefathers wrote?

God, we are hungry for knowledge;
Our ignorance they like to prolong.
No liberty here for black people —
   How can we help but go wrong?
God, they keep us superstitious,
   They paralyze the unfertile mind;
And when one becomes a criminal,
   He is what the environment designed.

If a white woman has been insulted,
   They lynch the first darkey they meet,
And cut off his fingers for relics
   And drag his body down the street.
God, the courts are against us,
   We have no lease on our lives —
Where white men use our daughters
   And force themselves on our wives.

God, that's why we're veri-colored —
   They mix their blood with our own;
These crimes white men have committed,
   The thousands will never be known.
They hang the ignorant black brute,
   And laugh at his mother's tears,
For trying to commit the crime
   That they have committed for years.

God, they won't educate our children,
   But they sell us whiskey and gin;
They take our character from us
   And still expect us to be men.
For fifty years we have prayed,
   With our bodies writhing in pain —
O, God, are they keeping us back
   For the crime committed by Cain?

We have separate parks and jails,
   We're divided in the hospital ward;
Also in graveyards and churches,
   In order to serve the same Lord.
God, if you want peace in heaven,
   Please listen to my feeble prayer,
And build a high stone partition
   Before Southern Christians get there.
LABOR AMONG THE LOWLY

After the election is over
   And the workers again are beat,
They must pay double prices
   For the things they wear and eat.

The food kings in America
   Keep millions of eggs on ice,
Locked up in cold storage,
   So they can guage the price.

They buy up fields of pumpkins,
   Out doors to lay and decay,
That prices might soar up higher
   For the poor, hungry man to pay.

They let car loads of potatoes
   Wither and spoil on the switch.
To keep the prices from falling—
   No wonder the masters are rich!

The working men who voted
   To put these thieves in power
Are paying the highest prices
   For the food they daily devour.

They export the very best wheat,
   The sugar-cured hams and beans,
To the Nations that are fighting
   To amuse the Kings and Queens.

When the price of food gets lower
   Than they think it ought to be,
They ship it from the market
   And dump it out on the sea.

The wage slaves who have voted
   Themselves to hell once more,
Curse, and growl, and grumble
   Because they still are poor.

They voted the capitalist ticket
   To be overworked like the ox;
They organize in the factory,
   Then scab at the ballot box.
THE TRUTH ABOUT WAR

The heartless capitalist system,
That fights for markets and land,
Poisons with vulgar orations
To induce the poor, heavy hand.
First, a fair flag is insulted,
Then brainless muscles relax,
Then comes the cough of the cannon,
The misery, the tears and the tax.

After the war is over
And the battle is won or lost,
The countries are poverty stricken,
The Workers pay the cost.
Some rich men once were soldiers,
And served in the depth of the ditch,
But now they stay home and reason,
For wars are not fought by the rich.

They write powerful editorials,
And entice with sweet bugle calls —
The workers to join the army
And face the hot rifle balls.
When our markets are congested
With a large surplus unsold,
The masters want foreign trade,
Then war for these gluttons of gold.

They vote for war in the capitol,
And pray for victories in the pew;
If war is good enough to pray for,
It is good enough for them to go, too.
Imagine a cold stormy winter,
When troops have begun to engage —
Think of old Andrew Carnegie
Eating hardtack with Russel Sage!

Where men are praying and pleading,
Hear young Morgan groan in the dark;
Think of rich Thomas F. Ryan
Bravely charging with Senator Clark!
See J. Ogden Armour of Chicago,
And James P. Duke, of the South —
A regiment of rich millionaires
Up close to the gattler's mouth.

On the firing line where men famish,
Think of great Henry C. Frick
With breast exposed to the bullets,
Where shrapnell victims lay thick.
Imagine Rockefeller in the open,
Digging a trench with his gun;
Think of George Gould, as a private,
Drilling with Hettie Green's son!

Fancy our great, rich statesmen,
The men who have nothing to do,
Fighting and bleeding and dicing
To defend the red, white and blue.
These men won't go to the front,
Nor bloody a tender, white fist —
The Workers do their fighting;
The rich are too wise to enlist.

The ignorant, poor man can go,
But not Mister Norman B. Ream,
Where sabers clash and glisten,
Where bullets whistle and scream.
The meek under-dog can go,
It's no place for a rich man's son,
Where blood spurts in short jets
At the business end of a gun.

Why don't the wealthy enlist
A month for fifteen bucks,
Under iron-shod horses hoofs
And steel-bound cannon trucks?
They scoff at the penniless widow,
And the little orphans that yearn
And wait for the battle-scarred father
Who has gone, never to return.
They display wonderful judgement,
With pink skin, tender and fat;
They are too shrewd to enlist
And get in the range of a gat.
They paint tame pictures of war—
A green field without any mud,
Omittings the entrails and rags
Glued with brains and with blood.

They don't describe the longing
Within the dark confines,
Where troopers kill each other,
And powder burns and blinds.
They know that war is a glutton—
They dare not put it on the bills;
It's not to the rich man's interest
Who own the factories and mills.

On in the hurricane's thunder,
Where cannon balls whistle and shriek.
They sleep with the doomed and damned—
The ignorant, the poor, and the meek.
They cannot sculpture the grieving,
Where mad horses stampede and snort—
A war is no more of a picnic
Than hell is a summer resort.

GENE DEBS

It was a pleasant summer day
In Muncie's Wysor Grand,
When Gene Debs held full sway,
With no room left to stand.

The house was packed from door to door
With men, and women, too—
An audience of rich and poor
Applauded his speech all through.

He flayed the System as being wrong,
And bent closer to the crowd.
A tear-choked voice, true and strong,
Of which the Socialists are proud.
“Is this the man Capitalism jailed?”
A fellow asks while standing near.
“In crushing him have they not failed
To prejudice this audience here?”
Yes, his words were wet with tears,
His temple wet with sweat.
Though I may live a hundred years
But never, never, will I forget
How he made the class struggle plain,
So plain that I could understand;
His speech, I know, was not in vain,
That day at the Wysor Grand.

With the oppressed in peace and strife.
A big-hearted Rebel, through and through,
The smaller chance you have in life
The more his heart goes out to you.

AT THE SPEEDWAY

The first great Motor Speedway
Was packed from fence to fence;
They were lined upon the bleachers
Long before the race commenced.
It was on Decoration Day,
The hot sun was beaming down—
We could smell the scorching rubber
That was pounding on the ground.

Bill Endicott was in the race,
So was fearless Caleb Bragg;
Germany, France and England—
Every country had its flag.
Each driver cranked and started—
Hear their engines pop and bang,
Going, perhaps, to meet their doom.
Like Bruce Brown and Lewis Strang.
With nerves of iron and steel,  
The fuel went through the feed.  
Louis Disbrow set the pace  
And sped with unknown speed.  
Goux drove his Peugeot Special,  
The Stutz bear-cat hugged the post,  
Isotta, battling with the Mercer,  
Passed the grandstand like a ghost.

Spencer Wishart and Ralph Mulford  
Rode the saucer way up high.  
Applause came from the bleachers  
As Barney Oldfield thundered by.  
Wild Bob Burman drove a Keeton  
(\textit{Wind pressure broke his goggle lense}),  
He drove his car even faster  
Than he drove old Blitzen Benz.

By this time the track was oily  
And they skid when tires were cast.  
Then the danger was so dazzling  
Every moment seemed the last.  
One car turned completely over,  
A cloud rose up, thick and black;  
I saw two unconscious pilots  
Lying helpless on the track.

Dawson tried to dodge the wreckage,  
\textbf{But} his Marmon would not halt—  
Speeding like a mad tornado,  
His car turned summersault.  
Death seemed to hover near,  
As the champion lay there alone,  
Bleeding from his mouth and ears,  
With a broken collar bone.

The Sunbeam and the Beaver Bullet,  
Faster still these cars were sent—  
Drivers seemed to go speed mad  
After Joe Dawson's accident.  
Mason chasing after Burman,  
Gray Fox fighting with the Case,  
And the crowd cheered Ralph DePalma,  
Who was a hero in the race.
The dust rose again in anger
   As the dare-devils hit and spilled;
Then the word was circulated
   That Gill Anderson was killed.
Before Rene Thomas won the race
   He drove his car up to the pit,
Changed his tires in twenty seconds,
   Took on gas and out he lit.

On around the track they thundered
   With a burst of flame and power,
With their shirts torn to ribbons,
   A hundred nineteen miles an hour.
The speedway has its fascination,
   A grip that drivers can't resent;
They love the game of thrills and spills —
   They go the way Bob Burman went.

———

TENTH CAVALRY

Tenth Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry,
    You gallant sons of Ham,
You helped to kill the Indians
    For Wall Street and Uncle Sam.
You charged up San Juan hill,
    The air was streaked with lead —
They forgot about your valor,
    They scarcely mentioned your dead.

Tenth Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry,
    You black boys decked in blue —
Why fight for a commonwealth
    That gives no credit to you?
You famished in the Philippines.
    You felt the gattler crack,
While they Jim-crowed your mother
    Because her face was black.

Tenth Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry,
    They always put you ahead,
To die upon the battlefield,
    To face the steel and lead.
You fight and joke and die,
Your bodies fill the wake;
They hang you without trial,
And burn you at the stake.

Tenth Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry,
You defend the stripes and stars,
While they bar you from the parks,
The hotels and Pullman cars.
While you fought in Mexico,
The picture shows in Cheyenne
Welcomed all the foreigners
And barred the colored man.

Tenth Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry,
Why wear the gray and blue?
Why not lay the carbine down
'Till they stop lynching you?
Look the captain in the face
And bravely tell him why—
If you cannot get a chance to live,
You won't take a chance to die.

Tenth Cavalry, Tenth Cavalry,
Get off the pony's back;
Don't make a target of yourself
Because your face is black.
They deny you equal promotion,
So give them back their reins;
Come home and fight the system
That keeps your race in chains.

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SWEAT, DOGGONE YOU ,SWEAT

Sweat, doggone you, sweat!
Voting the Republican ticket yet.
Your master, he keeps cool,
While you keep overheat;
So sweat, doggone you, sweat!
Sweat, doggone you, sweat!
Your jeans pants are ringing wet;
You like to work and grunt,
No use now to fume and fret;
So sweat, doggone you, sweat!

Sweat, doggone you, sweat!
Still you are a Democrat yet.
Then talk about grub being high
The capitalist holds the net,
So sweat, doggone you, sweat!

Sweat, doggone you, sweat!
Your match I haven’t met;
And you work and grumble—
In your head there’s rooms to let,
So sweat, doggone you, sweat!

Sweat, doggone you, sweat!
You ain’t never woke up yet.
Quails fly before your eye,
But you keep your powder wet,
So sweat, doggone you, sweat!

FOOD INSPECTOR WILEY

Food inspector Wiley
Lost out on his job
For asserting two percent
Of most corn syrup was but cob.
Wiley divulged the secret
Why so many babies died—
Because bad milk contained
Acid and formaldehyde.

He flayed the present system
And lost the rich man’s favor;
He found poison alcohol
Mixed in vanilla flavor.
He found brands of honey
That didn’t come from bees,
And maple-flavored syrup
That never came from trees.
He smashed cold-storage eggs
    That lived for many moons,
And southern sorghum molasses
    Colored with rotten prunes.
Long hours make dull brains,
    When working in the heat,
And Wiley found no cure
    In grape nuts and shredded wheat.

He examined rotten tomatoes
    Pickled in red sauce,
And sold cheap to the workers
    To enrich the hoarding boss.
And decomposed dill pickles
    Ground up in chow-chow,
And yellow country butter
    That never saw a cow.

He told about the trademarks
    And italics on the label,
How capitalism poisons
    From the factory to the table.
With three percent of solids
    And a little butter fat
They make evaporated cream
    Not fit for an old tom cat.

Vesuvius brand macaroni
    Looks good to the longing eye,
But Wiley said they made it
    From poison cold tar dye.
They advertise their products
    In cheap monthly magazines—
Benzote of soda noodles
    And embalmed pork and beans.

When going into the grocery
    You look along the shelf—
You'll find a thousand poisons
    With which to kill yourself.
We die an early death,
And hawk along the street
Because food is fixed for profit—
They don’t make it fit to eat.

They put rock in black pepper,
And poison the cake and pie,
Then they have the nerve and gall
To blame God when we die.

Overworked, and fed on poison,
Health to man is but a joke.
Cotton seed lard, and rag weed tea—
Wiley knew about what he spoke.

Cold storage beef, and cholera hogs
Made into New England ham;
Oleomargarine, and pig’s feet jelly
Labeled “pure”—just for sham.

People say God called him home,
When a worker’s lamp goes out—
Wiley knew they died from poison,
Eating canned corn and sauerkraut.

THE BLACK SCAB

The master chased the slave
With a hungry hound;
Now the slave gets up early
To run the master down.

He stands outside the factory
And pleads with all his vim,
And goes away sad and hungry
When no one employs him.

Our attitude toward him
Will make him friend or foe—
He will go with the capitalist
If there’s nowhere else to go.

And often barred from the Union,
For being a negro, dark and grim,
The reason why he scabs on you
Is because you scab on him.
He don't want social equality—
   Don't get that in your head;
He wants equal opportunity
   In his fight for daily bread.
You'd better let him in the Union,
   Let him vote for delegate;
Let him help solve the problem,
   Let him work as well as wait.

He always laughs and whistles,
   Though in poverty to the brim,
But he only scabbed on you
   After you had scabbed on him.
He never messed with science,
   Because science seemed too deep.
He was satisfied with corn bread,
   And a trundle bed for sleep.

The white man layed the brick,
   The black man carried the hod—
Believing that his status
   Was so ordained by God.
Don't think you are immune
   Because he has a curly head—
His poverty breeds diseases
   That germinate and spread.

His low wages breed consumption,
   And germs from his screenless doors
Are carried by the housefly
   To that little child of yours.
He wants class solidarity,
   With the many and the few.
As you measure to the Negro
   It will be measured back to you.

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MASTER AND SLAVE

When the icy winds of winter
   Are sullen, cold and bleak,
And the smitten lips of labor
   Have no forum where to speak,
The masters, who own the mills,
    Are drinking cocktails and wine—
Their slaves live from hand to mouth
    On food not fit for swine.

—At charity balls they dance,—
    The workers pine and sweat.
Whenever labor has been stabbed,
    Their dagger has been wet.
They are robbers, pure and simple,
    Their game is graft and greed;
Our bones bleach on the highway
    Where these vultures roost and feed.

These politicians and bankers,
    The robbers that gloat on gore,
They gouge the souls of the masses,
    And grind the face of the poor.
Capitalism means unemployment,
    With poverty that starves and blinds.
Socialism means industrial freedom
    In the factories, mills, and mines.

HENRY DUBB

No wonder Ryan Walker
    Invented Henry Dubb —
The worker who is satisfied
    With the cheapest grub
Gets the mis-meal scraps;
    Thinks he has the blues.
Satisfied with bib-overalls
    And heavy, hob-nail shoes.

Existing in a little shack,
    No library or bath tub,
Then votes for Mr. Grab-it-all —
    That's certainly Henry Dubb.
He makes the automobiles,
    And sweats his ignorant hide;
On election day he votes to walk,
    And lets his master ride.

When starving he goes on strike
    And is beaten with a club;
In jail, for six long months
    They diet poor Henry Dubb.
Satisfied with low wages,
    To buy taters and liver to fry,
He tries to drown his troubles
    In the vats of rock and rye.

He goes to war with two good arms
    And comes back with a nub;
Thinks he's fighting for his country —
    That's certainly Henry Dubb.
He votes for the capitalist class,
    Then wonders why he's poor;
He never gets a vacation
    Till the crepe hangs on his door.

A poor wage slave for forty years,
    In debt his life was spent,
Trying to feed the little Dubbs
    And pay the landlord rent.
Until he falls beneath the load
    And is buried beneath a shrub
Out in the county potters' field —
    The unsung Henry Dubb.

THE EVOLUTION OF MACHINERY

The automatic machine
    Has taken the glass blower's pipe;
Like the poor hand-printer
    Who cursed the linotype.
The all-around boiler maker,
    The bricklayer with his trow,
Are driven out by machinery,
    Like the farmer with his plow.
The ditcher with his shovel,
The waiter with his tray,
Have had their ranks invaded—
They have all had their day.
The blacksmith with his hammer,
The machinist with his wrench,
Have had their colors lowered
Like the cobbler at the bench.

The cotton gin, by Whitney,
And the printing press, by Hoe,
Have not shortened the journey
The wage slave has to go.
We beg and look for work
Where warehouses choke with grain;
We let them own the tools
Then grumble and complain.

THE PRISON

I saw the old turnkey,
With keys of every kind,
Within the mills of Mammon,
That punish, sweat and blind.
I saw the convicts dine
On spuds, and punk for bread,
Along the narrow table
With sheared, uncovered head.

I saw the small cell house
With narrow bunk for bed,
No carpets on the floor,
No pictures overhead.
We passed another cell house
With ceiling not so low—
They had carpets on the floor
For the thieves in bankers’ row.

I passed the drawn curtain,
Where the death watch was kept,
But I did not see the dungeon
Where the solitary wept.
Thus I followed the warden,
With 'ill and bated breath;
I beheld the electric chair
Where he put his man to death.

I saw the gray-haired forger,
Sentenced to prison for life;
He had a fond expression
That blossomed out of strife.
The lonely hours of labor,
Amid the gnashing gears
Where jailers mock at pity,
Where hangmen laugh at tear.

I heard the hot iron splatter,
I saw the victim sweat,
I smelt the black clay coffee
From the cups at Joliet.
An institution without pity,
As far as I could see;
A prison with rocks of ages
Which did not cleave for me.

THE NEEDLES EYE

The Titanic hit the ice,
She slowly, but surely, sank,
Taking our great millionaires
Of Wall Street fame and rank

A few poor Chinese coolies
Were murdered by the mate,
While rushing to the lifeboat
To save themselves from fate.

The senate investigation
Proved this, and nothing more:
That the lifeboats were lowered
For the rich—not the poor.

The passengers from the steerage
Were busy with their prayers;
The lifeboats soon departed
With the wives of millionaires.
“Nearer My God to Thee,”
They began to plead and cry,
And offer up their gold
To get through the needle’s eye.

WASHINGTON AND ROOSEVELT

Booker T. Washington was speaking
To an audience in the South—
The people all applauded him
As words fell from his mouth.

When he had finished his oration,
After a long two-hours’ run,
“Of all the speakers,” said a man,
“There is none like Washington.”

“But you must consider Bryan,”
Said Washington, with a smile.
“Bryan ain’t in it,” said the man,
“You have him beat a mile.”

“Have you considered Roosevelt,
You must give him his due.”
The man said, “I have hated him
Ever since he dined with you.”

PREPAREDNESS

“The Battle Cry of Peace”—
Did you ever see the show?
Financed by the Navy League
To help shoot up Mexico.
Gun makers spent their thousands
To make this lie immense,
To tell us about Preparedness
With battleships for defense.
It showed New York by night,
   After Broadway closed her eyes;
The enemy sent her aeroplanes
   And bombs rained from the skies.
The Flat Iron building fell,
   And submarines went on a spree;
I saw the Statue of Liberty fall
   And crumble into the sea.

An aviator dropped a bomb
   On the Singer building head —
The twisted girders tumbled down
   Like a million tons of lead.
The Woolworth building had collapsed
   Across the choked subway;
The Golden Gate was being smashed
   From San Francisco Bay.

The Brooklyn bridge had disappeared —
   I saw the cable snap:
The enemy was about to blow
   Long Island off the map.
The Capitol was battered down,
   The White House was not spared.
The horrible picture tried to show
   That America was unprepared.

When they called for volunteers
   The weak could not resist;
They hypnotized the working man
   And urged him to enlist.
Then Congress spent a million,
   And we swallowed hook and bait;
They ordered from Schwab and Morgan
   More defective armor plate.

They showed a hundred battleships
   Shelling the Panama canal —
They knew of no such danger,
   But they had armor plate to sell.
They passed a military law
   To draft men to be shot —
Now each worker is a soldier
   Whether he wants to be or not.
SHE GAVE ME SOME GREENS

I am getting sleepy and weary,
   But before I pull off my jeans
I must write the sweet dearie
   Who gave me a taste of greens.

She was so jolly and pleasant,
   Eating beneath the bright light;
I went up like a poor peasant
   And asked her to give me a bite.

She gave me a fork just heaping
   With greens, seasoned with jowel —
A friend that is worth keeping,
   I thanked the dear little soul.

It's great when clouds are hazy,
   When missing your pork and bean,
For a lady, as fair as a daisy,
   To give you a taste of greens.

Whenever I see victuals cooking
   I think of the cornbread and fish,
And the lady, very good-looking,
   Who treated me out of her dish.

If you ever missed your dinner,
   Then you know just what it means
For a girl to give a poor sinner
   A big fork filled with greens.

I'll never forget her sweet face
   While the sun continues to shine,
Until death begins to unlace
   These tangled heart-strings of mine.

When the workers begin to thrive,
   And own the productive machines,
May there be no master to drive
   The lady who gave me the greens.

— R. D. B.
ROCKEFELLER AND BOUCK WHITE

They were striking in Colorado
For more stale daily bread,
When Rockefeller's gunmen came
And shot them full of lead.

The King sat on his throne,
Stubborn hearted, glutton-like;
He said he'd spend millions
Before he'd loose the strike.

The next Sunday, in New York,
The people surged and thronged
In front of the cathedral
Where the oil master belonged.

Bouck White went into the church
To defend the homeless poor;
The detectives knocked him down
And dragged him from the door.

Six months on Blackwell's island —
They bowed his noble head
For saying for those miners
—What a minister should have said.

HEADS AND HANDS

The hoarding capitalist class
Have a system, cut and dried,
How to rob the workers
And then keep them satisfied.

This country with its classes,
With poverty north and south —
We sweat from morn till night,
And live from hand to mouth.

We fight and strike for dollars,
Then go vote for dimes, instead;
The capitalists call their gunmen
Who shoot us full of lead.
Why should the masters fear
The slave that will not fight?
No one respects the under dog
That will not bark and bite.

How long will the working class
Support their schemes and plans?
As long as they use their heads,
And we just use our hands.

WAR

War is the God of mammon,
War is the outlaw of stealth,
War is the dream of a savage,
War is the glutton of wealth.

War is the dungeon keeper,
War is the forger of chains,
War is the cunning assassin,
War is the poisoner of brains.

War is the prayer of the looter,
War is the bottomless well,
War is the base of the baseless,
War is the foundation of hell.

HEREDITY

The mob was burning its victim,
A delicate woman stood near by;
Her child was born half-witted,
And she often wondered why.

The embryo that is carried,
Assimulates each wish and vow;
The impression will develop,
Sometime, somewhere, somehow.
From the cradle to the coffin,  
All through life's vast unknown,  
More than all else, man is guided  
By the marrow of the bone.

THE BETTER WORLD

A world with more justice than charity,  
A world with its thinking cap on,  
A world with more brotherhood in it,  
A world with the brimstone gone.

A world without the penniless widow  
Weeping on a fresh-made grave;  
Without the millionaire and the begger,  
A world without master and slave.

THE UNION OF BRAZIL

Down in Brazil, Indiana,  
Where I lectured in a hall  
To clay workers then on strike,  
Mostly Socialists, but not all,  
Some union men turned traitor  
When bread and meat got slack —  
The few of them that scabbed,  
Not one of them was black.

Aunt Dinah took in washing  
To help encourage Ike,  
To keep him in good spirits  
And help him win the strike.  
But suppose this fighting union  
Of which I speak about,  
Would have been a scab union  
And kept the blackman out.

Would you not feel like scabbing,  
If you were in the negro's place,  
If a union turned you down  
Just for the color of your face?
When white men go on strike
The capitalist sends to Mobile
And get colored mechanics
With muscles hard as steel.

They come and take your job,
They work, and sing, and sweat;
You call them dirty scabs,
But maybe you forget
That they would join your union
And help you win your fight,
But you draw the color line—
You only take in white.

So when one takes your job,
Don’t curse his race and pout;
You belong to a scab union
Or it would not keep him out.
I am not seeking for equality,
For the races to wed and woo,
But I am fighting for his right
To make a living, same as you.

All day long he swings the hammer,
As sweat drips from his chin—
Employers know they cannot lose
If they import colored men.
The Negro will take your job
If you strike when times are hard—
He has knocked upon your door
And he could not get a card.

They have babies in their cradles,
They have many mouths to feed;
Should they let them starve
To maintain a job-trust greed?
They would help you win your strikes,
They would picket, and live on swill,
Were they admitted to your union
As they were down in Brazil.
CAPITAL AND LABOR

A million tongues are calling for my pen
To fight the foe that fills the earth with tears
By slick, soft-handed, robbing bucaneeers.
Daily I see them slave against their will,
With salt sweat ever oozing from each brow,—
They feel the pangs their ignorance did endow.

Whipped by hunger and driven to the mill —
Wages enough for grub it only buys;
Where no rest comes to sooth their weary eyes.
Driven by poverty in the damp and den,
Eyelids weighted down with fetid dust —
Deck hands on the ship of hope and trust.

A lifer serving in the endless strain —
Bovine contentment that overlooks the end,
Lips that twitch and backs— that ever bend;
A mind which shows only part of human care —
The sense that is appeased by food and clothes;
Invisibly chained, the contented toiler goes.

A tenement where the children cry and fret,
A neighborhood where weeds grow fat and choke,
The house tormented by the hammer's stroke;
Where the starved scotch collie comes and grieves.
The guy ropes of their minds are held by force
Until labor from its master gets divorce.

THE REBEL

Let the spot light penetrate
And watch the glutton flinch;
We won't retract a single word
Nor retreat a single inch.
The Rebel will say his say,
And fight, and take, and give,
To make this world a better place
For the working class to live.
THEATRES AND CHURCHES

Why are the churches empty?  
Why are the theatres full?
Has religion lost its power?
Has the preacher lost his pull?
Each city has its theatres—
They are crowded night and day,
And each one that enters
Has a small amount to pay.
They don't take up collections,
They don't ask you to kneel,
They don't beg for your money
For the trustee board to steal.
They don't dwarf your mind
And refuse to let it grow—
That's why so many people
Attend the picture show.
The theatres have pipe-organs
And their music is just as sweet,
But they don't have foolish people
Sobbing at the anxious seat.
They don't tell you the story
About the whale, and the goard-vine;
They don't pretend to save you
With a wafer soaked with wine.
They have no asbestos goblins,
No brimstone down below;
That's why thinking people
Like to attend the picture show.
They don't claim they are holy
While living the double life,
Nor sneak around your home
To take dinner with your wife.
When you leave the theatre
You wear no pagan chains;
They stuff no foolish creed
In the pockets of your brains.
They don't insult a man
Because he doubts and thinks,
Nor ask you to believe a lie
When it's so old it stinks.
They have no tall sky-pilot
To shake you over a hell
For refusing to buy the wings
That his church has to sell.
They have no petrified books
From the heathens' dusty shelves,
Nor ask you to believe something
That they really doubt, themselves.

Men are tired of paying preachers
To guess what they cannot know;
That's why Christian people
Like to attend the picture show.
While their films are censured,
They have their lies to weave,
But they don't threaten with hell
If your mind cannot believe.

Good people attend the theatres,
They are going more and more;
They are sick of a religion
That drives and starves the poor.
They are tired of hearing sermons
That encourage war and woe;
That's why they pass the church
And stop at the picture show.

JESUS
Jesus, the carpenter of Nazereth,
Deliberately committed the crime
Of blaspheming the popular creed
That ruled the slaves of his time.
That's why they hated him so,
The gluttons who stole the sheaves,
Their lickspitters made a cross
And hung him between two thieves.

He drove out the money changers
Who were robbing the underfed;
He was a class-conscious preacher,
With nowhere to lay his head.
If Jesus was on earth today,
And walked on the battle plains,
Where the buzzards grow fat
    By feasting on workingmen's brains,
He'd see the Christian nations
    All fighting, as mad-men will,
To gain the foreign markets
    In spite of, "Thou shalt not kill."
Grieving, with tears in his voice,
    He would say that Sherman was right,
When he saw all Christian nations
    Training their children to fight.
He would see his licensed preachers
    Giving out murderous commands;
He would take all the bibles
    Out of their blood-clotted hands;
He would leave the field, disgusted,
    As he heard their groans and yells,
And join the great peace movement
    With the Agnostics and Infidels.

MOTHER

When far away from home,
    And traveling on the road,
My mother sent me kisses
    To help me bear my load.

But now she's gone to rest—
    No friend like her I'll find,
As I wonder here and there
    In paths that wind and wind.

When the lightning shattered,
    And demolished east and west,
She trusted in her God
    And hugged me to her breast.

She made our happy home,
    Through poverty, wind and wave,
And only looked for rest
    Beyond the welcome grave.

If your mother is living,
    Make it pleasant for her now,
Before the crown of thorns
    Are pressed upon her brow.