

By the Aurelian Wall

In Memory of John Keats

By the Aurelian Wall,
Where the long shadows of the centuries fall
From Caius Cestius' tomb,
A weary mortal seeking rest found room
For quiet burial,
Leaving among his friends
A book of lyrics.
Such untold amends
A traveller might make
In a strange country, bidden to partake
Before he farther wends;

Who slyly should bestow
The foreign reed-flute they had seen him blow
And finger cunningly,
On one of the dark children standing by,
Then lift his cloak and go.

The years pass. And the child
Thoughtful beyond his fellows, grave and mild,
Treasures the rough-made toy,
Until one day he blows it for clear joy,
And wakes the music wild.

His fondness makes it seem
A thing first fashioned in delirious dream,
Some god had cut and tried,
And filled with yearning passion, and cast aside
On some far woodland stream,--

After long years to be
Found by the stranger and brought over sea,
A marvel and delight
To ease the noon and pierce the dark blue night,
For children such as he.

He learns the silver strain
Wherewith the ghostly houses of gray rain
And lonely valleys ring,
When the untroubled whitethroats make the spring
A world without a stain;

Then on his river reed,
With strange and unsuspected notes that plead
Of their own wild accord
For utterances no bird's throat could afford,
Lifts it to human need.

His comrades leave their play,
When calling and compelling far away
By river-slope and hill,

He pipes their wayward footsteps where he will,
All the long lovely day.

Even his elders come.

"Surely the child is elvish," murmur some,
And shake the knowing head;
"Give us the good old simple things instead,
Our fathers used to hum."

Others at open door

Smile when they hear what they have hearkened for
These many summers now,
Believing they should live to learn somehow
Things never known before.

But he can only tell

How the flute's whisper lures him with a spell,
Yet always just eludes
The lost perfection over which he broods;
And how he loves it well.
Till all the country-side,
Familiar with his piping far and wide,
Has taken for its own
That weird enchantment down the evening blown,--
Its glory and its pride.

And so his splendid name,

Who left the book of lyrics and small fame
Among his fellows then,
Spreads through the world like autumn--who knows when?--
Till all the hillsides flame.

Grand Pré and Margaree

Hear it upbrought from the unresting sea;
And the small Gaspereau,
Whose yellow leaves repeat it, seems to know
A new felicity.

Even the shadows tall,

Walking at sundown through the plain, recall
A mound the grasses keep,
Where once a mortal came and found long sleep
By the Aurelian Wall.

About the Author

Bliss Carman (1861 - 1929) Born April 15, 1861 in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Son of William Carman and Sophia Mary Bliss (Sophia Mary Bliss was a descendent of Daniel Bliss of Concord, Massachusetts, the great-grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson; and was the aunt of...