

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9754

**JEAN SHEPHERD**  
reads poems of  
**ROBERT SERVICE**



ALASKAN COAST—GOLD PROSPECTORS PILE GEAR ON BEACH AT EDGE OF TOWN

PS  
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Performed by Jean Shepherd  
Produced by Leigh Brown  
Mastered by Herbert Squires

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9754

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**JEAN SHEPHERD Reads**

**POEMS of ROBERT SERVICE**

TEXT AND INTRODUCTION by Jean Shepherd

Robert Service was one of the few poets who ever wrote about religious fanaticism, and up in the Far North when a man was in his cabin all winter long, he saw all kinds of visions, and this is a poem - it's called THE BALLAD OF PIOUS PETE - about religious fanaticism, and cabin fever, and loneliness, and madness. As a matter of fact, it's probably the only poem that I've ever heard of that's written from the point of the fanatic himself, in the first person. THE BALLAD OF PIOUS PETE:

THE BALLAD OF PIOUS PETE

I tried to refine that neighbor of mine,  
honest to God, I did.  
I grieved for his fate, and early and late  
I watched over him like a kid.  
I gave him excuse, I bore his abuse  
in every way that I could;  
I swore to prevail; I camped on his trail;  
I plotted and planned for his good.  
By day and by night I strove in men's sight  
to gather him into the fold,  
With precept and prayer, with hope and  
despair, in hunger and hardship and cold.  
I followed him into Gehennas of sin, I sat  
where the sirens sit;  
In the shade of the Pole, for the sake of  
his soul, I strove with the powers of the  
Pit.  
I shadowed him down to the scrofulous town;  
I dragged him from dissolute brawls;  
But I killed the galoot when he started to  
shoot electricity into my walls.

God knows what I did he should seek to be  
rid of one who would save him from shame.  
God knows what I bore that night when he  
swore and bade me make tracks from his claim.  
I started to tell of the horrors of hell,  
when sudden his eyes lit like coals;  
And "Chuck it," says he, "don't persecute me  
with your cant and your saving of souls."  
I'll swear I was mild as I'd be with a child,  
but he called me the son of a slut;  
And, grabbing his gun with a leap and a run,  
he threatened my face with the butt.  
So what could I do (I leave it to you)?  
With curses he harried me forth;  
Then he was alone, and I was alone, and  
over us menaced the North.

Our cabins were near; I could see, I could  
hear; but between us there rippled the creek;  
And all summer through, with a rancor that  
grew; he would pass me and never would speak.  
Then a shuddery breath like the coming of  
Death crept down from the peaks far away;  
The water was still; the twilight was chill;  
the sky was a tatter of gray.

Swift came the Big Cold, and opal and gold  
the lights of the witches arose;  
The frost-tyrant clinched, and the valley  
was cinched by the stark and cadaverous snows.  
The trees were like lace where the star-beams  
could chase, each leaf was a jewel a gleam.  
The soft white hush lapped the Northland  
and wrapped us round in a crystalline dream;  
So still I could hear quite loud in my ear  
the swish of the pinions of time;  
So bright I could see, as plain as could be,  
the wings of God's angels ashine.

As I read in the Book I would oftentimes look  
to that cabin just over the creek.  
Ah me, it was sad and evil and bad, two  
neighbors who never would speak!  
I knew that full well like a devil in hell  
he was hatching out, early and late,  
A system to bear through the frost-spangled  
air the warm, crimson waves of his hate.  
I only could peer and shudder and fear -  
'twas ever so ghastly and still;  
But I knew over there in his lonely despair  
he was plotting me terrible ill.  
I knew that he nursed a malice accurst,  
like the blast of a winnowing flame;  
I pleaded aloud for a shield, for a shroud -  
Oh, God! then calamity came.

Mad! If I'm mad then you too are mad;  
but it's all in the point of view.  
If you'd looked at them things gallowantin'  
on wings, all purple and green and blue;  
If you'd noticed them twist, as they mounted  
and hissed like scorpions dim in the dark;  
If you'd seen them rebound with a horrible  
sound, and spitefully spitting a spark;  
If you'd watched it with dread, as it hissed  
by your bed, that thing with the feelers  
that crawls-  
You'd have settled the brute that attempted  
to shoot electricity into your walls.

Oh, some they were blue, and they slithered  
right through; they were silent and squashy  
and round;  
And some they were green; they were wriggly  
and lean; they writhed with so hateful a sound.  
My blood seemed to freeze; I fell on my knees;  
my face was a white splash of dread.  
Oh, the Green and the Blue, they were gruesome  
to view; but the worst of them all were the Red.

They came through the door, they came through  
the floor, they came through the moss-  
creviced logs.  
They were savage and dire; they were whisker-  
ed with fire; they bickered like malamute  
dogs.  
They ravined in rings like iniquitous things;  
they gulped down the Green and the Blue.  
I crinkled with fear whene'er they drew near,  
and nearer and nearer they drew.

And then came the crown of Horror's grim crown,  
the monster so loathsomely red.  
Each eye was a pin that shot out and in, as,  
squidlike, it oozed to my bed;  
So softly it crept with feelers that swept  
and quivered like fine copper wire;  
Its belly was white with a sulphurous light,  
its jaws were a-drooling with fire.  
It came and it came; I could breathe of its  
flame, but never a wink could I look.  
I thrust in its maw the Fount of the Law;  
I fended it off with the Book.  
I was weak - oh, so weak - but I thrilled  
at its shriek, as wildly it fled in the night;  
And deathlike I lay till the dawn of the day.  
(Was ever so welcome the light?)

I loaded my gun at the rise of the sun;  
to his cabin so softly I slunk.  
My neighbor was there in the frost-freighted  
air, all wrapped in a robe in his bunk.  
It muffled his moans; it outlined his bones,  
as feebly he twisted about;  
His gums were so black, and his lips seemed to  
crack, and his teeth all were loosening out.  
'Twas a death's head that peered through the  
tangle of beard; 'twas a face I will never  
forget;  
Sunk eyes full of woe, and they troubled me so  
with their pleadings and anguish, and yet  
As I rested my gaze in a misty amaze on the  
scurvy-degenerate wreck,  
I thought of the Things with the dragon-fly wings,  
then laid I my gun on his neck.  
He gave out a cry that was faint as a sigh,  
like a perishing malamute,  
And he says unto me, "I'm converted," says he;  
"for Christ's sake, Peter, don't shoot!"

They're taking me out with an escort about,  
and under a sergeant's care;  
I am humbled indeed, for I'm 'cuffed to a Swede  
that thinks he's a millionaire.  
But it's all Gospel true what I'm telling to  
you - up there where the Shadow falls -  
That I settled Sam Noot when he started to shoot  
electricity into my walls.

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Robert Service was one of the first poets, at least in modern times, to recognize that hair and ego go hand in hand. And back in the early days of the frontier, men were just as proud of their hair as they are today, if not even more so, although you don't hear much about that except in the works of Robert Service.

And this is a ballad of a man who had the worst thing that could happen to a man who is proud of his flowing locks. This is the ballad of Chewed-ear:

#### THE BALDNESS OF CHEWED-EAR

When Chewed-ear Jenkins got hitched up to Guinneyveer McGee,  
His flowin' locks, ye recollect, wuz frivolous an' free;  
But in old Hymen's jack-pot, it's a most amazin' thing,  
Them flowin' locks jest disappeared like snow-balls in the Spring;  
Jest seemed to wilt an' fade away like dead leaves in the Fall,  
An' left old Chewed-ear balder than a white-washed cannon ball.

Now Missis Chewed-ear Jenkins, that wuz Guinneyveer McGee,  
Wuz jest about as fine a draw as ever made a pair;  
But when the boys got joshin' an' suggested it was she  
That must be infloeshul for the old man's slump in hair —  
Why! Missis Chewed-ear Jenkins jest went clean up in the air.

"To demonstrate," sez she that night,  
"the lovin' wife I am,  
I've bought a dozen bottles of Bink's Anty-Dandruff Balm.  
'Twill make yer hair jest sprout an' curl like squash-vines in the sun,  
An' I'm propose to sling it on till every drop is done."  
That hit old Chewed-ear's funny side,  
so he lays back an' hollers:  
"The day you raise a hair, old girl,  
you'll git a thousand dollars."

Now, whether 'twas the prize or not 'tis mighty hard to say.  
But Chewed-ear didn't seem to have much comfort from that day.  
With bottles of that dandruff dope she followed at his heels,  
An' sprinkled an' massaged him even when he ate his meals.  
She waked him from his beauty sleep with tender, lovin' care,  
An' rubbed an' scrubbed assiduous,  
yet never sign of hair.

Well, naturally all the boys soon tumbled to the joke,  
An' at the Wow-wow's Social 'twas Cold-deck Davis spoke:  
"The little woman's working mighty hard on Chewed-ear's crown;  
Let's give her for a three-fifth's share a hundred dollars down  
We stand to make five hundred clear — boys, drink in whiskey straight.  
'The Chewed-ear Jenkins Hirsute Propagation Syndicate."

The boys wuz on, an' soon chipped in the necessary dust;  
They primed up a committy to negotiate the deal;  
Then Missis Jenkins yielded, bein' rather in disgust,  
An' all wuz signed an' witnessed, an' invested with a seal.  
They rounded up old Chewed-ear, an' they broke it what they'd done;  
Allowed they'd bought an interest in his chance of raisin' hair;  
They yanked his hat off anxiouslike, opinin' one by one  
Their magnifyin' glasses showed fine prospects everywhere.  
They bought Hairlene, an' Thatchem, an' Jay's Capillery Juice,  
An' Seven Something Sisters, an' Macassar an' Bay Rum,  
An' everyone insisted on his speshul right to sluice  
His speshul line of lotion onto Chewed-ear's cranium.  
They only got the merrier the more the old man roared,  
An' shares in "Jenkins Hirsute" went sky-highin' on the board.

The Syndicate wuz hopeful that they'd demonstrate the pay,  
An' Missis Jenkins laboured in her perseverin' way.  
The boys discussed on "surface rights", an' "out-crops" an' so on,  
An' planned to have it "crown" surveyed, an' blue prints of it drawn.  
They ran a base line, sluiced an' yelled, an' everyone wuz glad,  
Except the balance of the property, an' he wuz "mad."  
It gives me pain," he interjects, "to squash yer glowin' dream,  
But you wuz fools when you got in on this here 'Hirsute' scheme.

"You'll never raise a hair on me," when lo! that very night,  
Preparin' to retire he got a most onpleasant fright:  
For on that shinin' dome of his, so prominently bare,

He felt the baby outcrop of a second growth of hair.

A thousand dollars! Sufferin' Caesar!  
Well, it must be saved!  
He grabbed his razor recklesslike, an' shaved an' shaved an' shaved.  
An' when his head was smooth again he gives a mighty sigh.  
An' sneaks away, an' buys some Hair Destroyer on the sly.  
So there wuz Missis Jenkins with "Restorer" wagin' fight.  
An' Chewed-ear with "Destroyer" circumventin' her at night.  
The battle wuz a mighty one; his nerves wuz on the strain,  
An' yet in spite of all he did that hair began to gain.

The situation grew intense, so quietly one day,  
He gave his share-holders the slip, an' made his get-a-way.  
Jest like a criminal he skipped, an' aimed to defalcate  
The Chewed-ear Jenkins Hirsute Propagation Syndicate.  
His guilty secret burned him, an' he sought the city's din:  
"I've got to get a wig," sez he, "to cover up my sin.  
It's growin', growin' night an' day;  
Its most amazin' hair!"  
An' when he looked at it that night, he shuddered with despair.  
He shuddered an' suppressed a cry at what his optics seen —  
For on my word of honour, boys,  
that hair wuz growin' green.

At first he guessed he'd get some dye, an' try to dye it black;  
An' then he saw 'twas Nemmysis wuz layin' on his track.  
He must jest face the music, an' confess the thing he done.  
An' pay the boys an' Guinneyveer the money they had won.  
An' then there came a big idee — it thrilled him like a shock.  
Why not control the Syndicate by buyin' up the Stock?  
An' so next day he hurried back with smoothly shaven pate,  
An' for a hundred dollars he bought up the Syndicate.  
'Twas mighty frenzied finance an' the boys set up a roar,  
But "Hirsutes" from the market wuz withdrawn for evermore.  
An' to this day in Nuggettsville they tell the tale how slick  
The Syndicate sold out too soon, and Chewed-ear turned the trick.

This is one of Robert Service's most famous poems. In fact, there were three or four Vaudeville performers who made a career of performing Robert Service on stage, complete with miners' coonskin caps, and parkas, and artificial snow and stuffed malamute dogs howling in the wings. Oh yes, they really did it. And this is one that was really a tear-jerker and one that brought down the house. There was one performer who performed this wearing full clerical robes. It is a story told in the first person, and remember Service came out of the tradition of Melodrama. He was a 19th Century man, and the theater was very melodramatic in those days, and Good and Evil and Redemption and Sin; the Devil was very close to everybody. And this is the story of the Parson's Son, told in the first person. And it is called THE PARSON'S SON:

#### THE PARSON'S SON

*This is the song of the parson's son,  
as he squats in his shack alone,  
On the wild, weird nights, when the  
Northern Lights shoot up from the frozen  
zone,  
And it's sixty below, and couched in the snow  
the hungry huskies moan:*

"I'm one of the Arctic brotherhood, I'm an old-time pioneer.  
I came with the first - O God! how I've cursed this Yukon - but still I'm here.  
I've sweated athirst in its summer heat,  
I've frozen and starved in its cold;  
I've followed my dreams by its thousand streams, I've toiled and moiled for its gold.

"Look at my eyes - been snow-blind twice;  
look where my foot's half gone;  
And that gruesome scar on my left cheek,  
where the frost-fiend bit to the bone.  
Each one a brand of this devil's land,  
where I've played and I've lost the game,  
A broken wreck with a craze for 'hooch',  
and never a cent to my name.

"This mining is only a gamble; the worst is as good as the best;  
I was in with the bunch and I might have come out right on top with the rest;  
With Cormack, Ladue and Macdonald - O God!  
but it's hell to think  
Of the thousands and thousands I've squandered  
on cards and women and drink.

"In the early days we were just a few,  
and we hunted and fished around,  
Nor dreamt by our lonely camp-fires  
of the wealth that lay under the ground.

We traded in skins and whiskey,  
and I've often slept under the shade  
Of that lone birch tree on Bonanza,  
where the first big find was made.

"We were just like a great big family,  
and every man had his squaw,  
And we lived such a wild, free, fearless life  
beyond the pale of the law;  
Till sudden there came a whisper, and it maddened us every man,  
And I got in on Bonanza before the big rush began.

"Oh, those Dawson days, and the sin and the blaze,  
and the town all open wide!

(If God made me in His likeness, sure He let the devil inside.)  
But we all were mad, both the good and the bad,  
and as for the women, well-  
No spot on the map in so short a space  
has hustled more souls to hell.

"Money was just like dirt there, easy to get and to spend.  
I was all caked in on a dance-hall jade,  
but she shook me in the end.  
It put me queer, and for near a year  
I never drew sober breath,  
Till I found myself in the bughouse ward  
with a claim staked out on death.

"Twenty years in the Yukon, struggling along its creeks;  
Roaming its giant valleys, scaling its god-like peaks;  
Bathed in its fiery sunsets, fighting its fiendish cold -  
Twenty years in the Yukon...twenty years - and I'm old.

"Old and weak, but no matter, there's 'hooch' in the bottle still.  
I'll hitch up the dogs to-morrow, and mush down the trail to Bill.  
It's so long dark, and I'm lonesome - I'll just lay down on the bed;  
To-morrow I'll go...to-morrow...I guess I'll play on the red.

"...Come, Kit, your pony is saddled.  
I'm waiting, dear, in the court...  
...Minnie, you devil, I'll kill you if you skip with that flossy sport...  
...How much does it go to the pan, Bill?  
...play up, School, and play the game...  
...Our Father, which art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name...."

*This was the song of the parson's son,  
as he lay in his bunk alone,  
Ere the fire went out and the cold crept in,  
and his blue lips ceased to moan,  
And the hunger-maddened malamutes had  
torn him flesh from bone.*

All of his life, Robert Service was a dedicated atheist; in fact he wrote much about Atheism, and like most atheists he was always writing about religion. He always seemed to be very much torn by this problem. He grew up in a Victorian home in Scotland, and it was a very religious home. And then later as he began to roam all over the country, he became a bum and a hobo and a crop-picker out on the West Coast, and he finally wound up prospecting up in the Far North. And all the while he moaned about the fact that he had lost his religion, and this is a tiny short poem, very early in his career, and in fact what it says is a very early piece of, I suppose you might say is 'atavistic atheistic' poetry. It's called THE SCEPTIC:

#### THE SCEPTIC

My Father Christmas passed away  
When I was barely seven.  
At twenty-one, a lack-a-day,  
I lost my hope of heaven.

Yet not in either lies the curse:  
The hell of it's because  
I don't know which loss hurt the worse -  
My God or Santa Claus.

Robert Service wrote what turned out to be, without a doubt, the most famous frontier poem of all. As a matter of fact, this poem is world-famous and has been translated in almost all the known languages, and made Robert Service instantly world famous. It was performed in Vaudeville, and in fact, since it was written in the early 1890's, it practically set the whole tone of all the movie Westerns to come. Many movie directors just before World War One admitted that they based their Westerns on this particular poem, because it has all the elements: the saloon, the lady of easy virtue, the lone stranger from out of the dark and the evil man sitting at the card table, obviously cheating at cards; ancient wrongs that have to be avenged. And this poem, this poem is probably more performed than any poem ever in the history of the English language. It's Robert Service's absolutely unique THE SHOOTING OF DAN MCGREW:

## THE SHOOTING OF DAN MCGREW

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up  
in the Malamute saloon;  
The kid that handles the music-box was  
hitting a jag-time tune;  
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat  
Dangerous Dan McGrew.  
And watching his luck was his light-o'-  
love, the lady that's known as Lou.

When out of the night, which was fifty below,  
and into the din and the glare,  
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks,  
dog-dirty and loaded for bear.  
He looked like a man with a foot in the grave  
and scarcely the strength of a louse,  
Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar,  
and he called for drinks for the house.  
There was none could place the stranger's  
face, though we searched ourselves for a clue;  
But we drank his health, and the last to  
drink was Dangerous Dan McGrew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes,  
and hold them hard like a spell;  
And such was he, and he looked to me  
like a man who had lived in hell;  
With a face most hair, and the dreary stare  
of a dog whose day is done,  
As he watered the green stuff in his glass,  
and the drops fell one by one.  
Then I got to figgering who he was, and  
wondering what he'd do,  
And I turned my head - and there watching  
him was the lady that's known as Lou.

His eyes went rubbering round the room,  
and he seemed in a kind of daze,  
Till at last that old piano fell in the  
way of his wandering gaze.  
The rag-time kid was having a drink;  
there was no one else on the stool,  
So the stranger stumbles across the room,  
and flops down there like a fool.  
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with  
dirt he sat, and I saw him sway;  
Then he clutched the keys with his talon  
hands - my God! but that man could play.

Were you ever out in the Great Alone,  
when the moon was awful clear,  
And the icy mountains hemmed you in  
with a silence you most could hear;  
With only the howl of a timber wolf,  
and you camped there in the cold,  
A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world,  
clean mad for the muck called gold;  
While high overhead, green, yellow and red,  
the North Lights swept in bars?  
Then you've a hunch what the music meant...  
hunger and night and the stars.

And hunger not of the belly kind, that's  
banished with bacon and beans,  
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men  
for a home and all that it means;  
For a fireside far from the cares that are,  
four walls and a roof above;  
But oh! so cramful of cosy joy, and  
crowned with a woman's love -  
A woman dearer than all the world, and  
true as Heaven is true -  
(God! how ghastly she looks through her  
rouge, - the lady that's known as Lou.)

Then on a sudden the music changed,  
so soft that you scarce could hear;  
But you felt that your life had been looted  
clean of all that it once held dear;  
That someone had stolen the woman you  
loved; that her love was a devil's lie;  
That your guts were gone, and the best for  
you was to crawl away and die.  
'Twas the crowning cry of a heart's despair,  
and it thrilled you through and through -  
"I guess I'll make it a spread misere,"  
said Dangerous Dan McGrew.

The music almost died away...then it burst  
like a pent-up flood;  
And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay,"  
and my eyes were blind with blood.  
The thought came back of an ancient wrong,  
and it stung like a frozen lash.  
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill...then  
the music stopped with a crash,  
And the stranger turned, and his eyes  
they burned in a most peculiar way;  
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt  
he sat, and I saw him sway;  
Then his lips went in in a kind of grin,  
and he spoke, and his voice was calm,  
And "Boys," says he, "you don't know me,  
and none of you care a damn;  
But I want to state, and my words are  
straight, and I'll bet my poke they're true,  
That one of you is a hound of hell...and  
that one is Dan McGrew."

Then I ducked my head, and the lights  
went out, and two guns blazed in the dark,  
And a woman screamed, and the lights went up,  
and two men lay stiff and stark.  
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead,  
was Dangerous Dan McGrew,  
While the man from the creeks lay clutched  
to the breast of the lady that's known as Lou.

These are the simple facts of the case,  
and I guess I ought to know.  
They say that the stranger was crazed with  
'hooch', and I'm not denying it's so.  
I'm not so wise as the lawyer guys, but  
strictly between us two -  
The woman that kissed him and - pinched  
his poke - was the lady that's known as Lou.

## THE CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE

*There are strange things done in the  
midnight sun  
By the men who toil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee,  
where the cotton blooms and blows.  
Why he left his home in the South to roam  
'round the Pole, God only knows.  
He was always cold, but the land of gold  
seemed to hold him like a spell;  
Though he'd often say in his homely way  
that "he'd sooner live in hell."

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way  
over the Dawson trail.  
Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold  
it stabbed like a driven nail.  
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze  
till sometimes we couldn't see;  
It wasn't much fun, but the only one  
to whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight  
in our robes beneath the snow,  
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead  
were dancing heel and toe,  
He turned to me, and "Cap" says he,  
"I'll cash in this trip, I guess;  
And if I do, I'm asking that you  
won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no;  
then he says with a sort of moan:  
"It's the cursed cold, and it's got right  
hold till I'm chilled clean through to the  
bone.  
Yet 'tain't being dead - it's my awful dread  
of the icy grave that pains;  
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair,  
you'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed,  
so I swore I would not fail;  
And we started on at the streak of dawn;  
but God! he looked ghastly pale.  
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved  
all day of his home in Tennessee;  
And before nightfall a corpse was all  
that was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death,  
and I hurried, horror-driven,  
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get  
rid, because of a promise given;  
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed  
to say: "You may tax your brawn and brains,  
But you promised true, and it's up to you  
to cremate those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid,  
and the trail has its own stern code.  
In the days to come, though my lips were  
dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load.  
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight,  
while the huskies, round in a ring,  
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows —  
O God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay seemed to  
heavy and heavier grow;  
And on I went, though the dogs were spent  
and the grub was getting low;  
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad,  
but I swore I would not give in;  
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing,  
and it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge,  
and a derelict there lay;  
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a  
trice it was called the "Alice May".  
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit,  
and I looked at my frozen chum;  
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry,  
"is my cre-ma-tor-eum."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor,  
and I lit the boiler fire;  
Some coal I found that was lying around,  
and I heaped the fuel higher;  
The flames just soared, and the furnace  
roared — such a blaze you seldom see;  
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal,  
and I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like  
to hear him sizzle so;  
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies  
howled, and the wind began to blow.  
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled  
down my cheeks, and I don't know why;  
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak  
went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow  
I wrestled with grisly fear;  
But the stars came out and they danced about  
ere again I ventured near;  
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said:  
"I'll just take a peep inside.  
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"  
...then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm,  
in the heart of the furnace roar;  
And he wore a smile you could see a mile,  
and he said: "Please close that door.  
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear  
you'll let in the cold and storm —  
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee,  
it's the first time I've been warm."

*There are strange things done in the  
midnight sun*

*By the men who toil for gold;  
The Arctic trails have their secret tales  
That would make your blood run cold;  
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge  
I cremated Sam McGee.*

The best of Service's poetry told stories. He was a storyteller in almost everything he did, and oddly enough, almost every one of the stories he told in his poems were based on people he knew. These were actual miners, and some of their descendants still live up in the Yukon territory, and almost all of the names he used were names of actual miners. They certainly still, to this day, have names of that type that they use up there. And this is one of the funniest of his stories and it's typical of vintage Service. This poem, by the way, is one that to this day many sailors in the Merchant Marine recite and when you hear it you'll know why the merchant mariners recite this poem, because they've gotten many a Dear John letter in their time. This is THE BALLAD OF HARD-LUCK HENRY.

#### THE BALLAD OF HARD-LUCK HENRY

Now wouldn't you expect to find a man  
an awful crank  
That's staked out nigh three hundred claims,  
and every one a blank;  
That's followed every fool stampede,  
and seen the rise and fall  
Of camps where men got gold in chunks,  
and he got none at all;  
That's prospected a bit of ground  
and sold it for a song  
To see it yield a fortune to some fool  
that came along;  
That's sunk a dozen bed-rock holes,  
and not a speck in sight,  
Yet sees them take a million from the  
claims to left and right?  
Now aren't things like that enough  
to drive a man to booze?  
But Hard-Luck Smith was hoodoo-proof —  
he knew the way to lose.

'Twas in the fall of nineteen four —  
leap-year I've heard them say —  
When Hard-Luck came to Hunker Creek  
and took a hillside lay.  
And lo! as if to make amends  
for all the futile past,  
Late in the year he struck it rich,  
the real pay-streak at last  
The riffles of his sluicing-box were  
choked with speckled earth,  
And night and day he worked that lay  
for all that he was worth.  
And when in chill December's gloom  
his lucky lease expired,  
He found that he had made a stake  
as big as he desired.

One day while meditating on the  
waywardness of fate,  
He felt the ache of lonely man to find  
a fitting mate;  
A petticoated pard to cheer his  
solitary life,  
A woman with soft, soothing ways,  
a confident, a wife,  
And while he cooked his supper on  
his little Yukon stove,  
He wished that he had staked a claim in  
Love's rich treasure-trove:  
When suddenly he paused and held aloft  
a Yukon egg,  
For there in pencilled letters was  
the magic name of Peg.

You know these Yukon eggs of ours —  
some pink, some green, some blue —  
A dollar per, assorted tints,  
assorted flavors too.  
The supercilious cheechako might  
designate them high,  
But one acquires a taste for them  
and likes them by-and-by.  
Well, Hard-Luck Henry took this egg  
and held it to the light,  
And there was more faint pencilling  
that sorely taxed his sight.  
At last he made it out, and then  
the legend ran like this —  
"Will Klondike miner write to Peg,  
Plumhollow, Squashville, Wis.?"

That night he got to thinking of this  
far-off, unknown fair;  
It seemed so sort of opportune,  
an answer to his prayer.  
She flitted sweetly through his dreams,  
she haunted him by day,  
She smiled through clouds of nicotine,  
she cheered his weary way.  
At last he yielded to the spell;  
his course of love he set —  
Wisconsin his objective point;  
his object, Margaret.

With every mile of sea and land  
 his longing grew and grew.  
 He practised all his pretty words,  
 and these, I fear, were few.  
 At last, one frosty evening,  
 with a cold chill down his spine.  
 He found himself before her house,  
 the threshold of the shrine.  
 His courage flickered to a spark,  
 then glowed with sudden flame -  
 He knocked; he heard a welcome word;  
 she came - his goddess came.  
 Oh, she was fair as any flower, and  
 huskily he spoke:  
 "I'm all the way from Klondike,  
 with a mighty heavy poke.  
 I'm looking for a lassie, one whose  
 Christian name is Peg,  
 Who sought a Klondike miner,  
 and who wrote it on an egg."

The lassie gazed at him a space,  
 her cheeks grew rosy red;  
 She gazed at him with tear-bright eyes,  
 then tenderly she said:  
 "Yes, lonely Klondike miner,  
 it is true my name is Peg."

It's also true I longed for you  
 and wrote it on an egg.  
 My heart went out to someone  
 in that land of night and cold;  
 But oh, I fear that Yukon egg  
 must have been mighty old.  
 I waited long, I hoped and feared;  
 you should have come before;  
 I've been a wedded woman now  
 for eighteen months or more  
 I'm sorry, since you've come so far,  
 you ain't the one that wins;  
 But won't you take a step inside -  
 I'll let you see the twins."

Now this is a very odd poem, and its  
 really, in a sense, one of the reasons why  
 Robert Service was so tremendously popular  
 around the turn of the century, because he  
 wrote about Nature. He didn't write so  
 much about his soul and about his psyche -  
 he wrote about nature, and in the raw, too,  
 and about a Nature that many people didn't  
 even suspect existed. Since he was a poet  
 of the Far North, all of his poetry had  
 that curious implied danger in it at all  
 times. And this poem is called THE PINES.  
 THE PINES. And it's one of the very few  
 poems I've ever heard of written in the  
 first person - a tree speaking - and its  
 about a pine tree. In fact, it's about  
 all pines.

#### THE PINES

We sleep in the sleep of ages,  
 the bleak, barbarian pines;  
 The gray moss drapes us like sages,  
 and closer we lock our lines,  
 And deeper we clutch through the gelid  
 gloom where never a sunbeam shines.

On the flanks of the storm-gored ridges  
 are our black battalions massed;  
 We surge in a host to the sullen coast,  
 and we sing in the ocean blast;  
 From empire of sea to empire of snow  
 we grip our empire fast.

To the niggard lands were we driven,  
 'twixt desert and floes are we penned;  
 To us was the Northland given,  
 ours to stronghold and defend;  
 Ours till the world be riven  
 in the crash of the utter end;

Ours from the 'bleak beginning,  
 through the æons of death-like sleep;  
 Ours from the shock when the naked rock  
 was hurled from the hissing deep;  
 Ours through the twilight ages  
 of weary glacier creep.

Wind of the East, Wind of the West,  
 wandering to and fro,  
 Chant your songs in our topmost boughs,  
 that the sons of men may know  
 The peerless pine was the first to come,  
 and the pine will be last to go!

We pillar the halls of perfumed gloom;  
 we plume where the eagles soar;  
 The North-wind swoops from the brooding  
 Pole, and our ancients crash and roar;  
 But where one falls from the crumbling walls  
 shoots up a hardy score.

We spring from the gloom of the canyon's  
 womb; in the valley's lap we lie;  
 From the white foam-fringe, where the  
 breakers cringe, to the peaks that tusk  
 the sky,  
 We climb, and we peer in the crag-locked  
 mere that gleams like a golden eye.

Gain to the verge of the hog-back ridge  
 where the vision ranges free:  
 Pines and pines and the shadow of pines  
 as far as the eye can see;  
 A steadfast legion of stalwart knights  
 in dominant empery.  
 Sun, moon and stars give answer;  
 shall we not staunchly stand,  
 Even as now, forever,  
 wards of the wilder strand,  
 Sentinels of the stillness,  
 lords of the last, lone land?

Service often wrote in a curious  
 symbolic way. He used symbols to make  
 his statements, and he was a confirmed  
 sceptic on the one side of his writing -  
 he really was torn right down the middle -  
 on the other side he was unabashed romantic.  
 He was many things, but one of the things  
 he really was was a man who was against  
 all earthly ambitions. He thought that  
 all of Man's striving was ridiculous,  
 even though he strove all his life. So  
 this is a poem that captures this - a  
 very short quickie, and it's called  
 AMBITION:

#### AMBITION

They brought the mighty chief to town;  
 They showed him strange, unwonted sights;  
 Yet as he wandered up and down,  
 He seemed to scorn their vain delights.  
 His face was grim, his eye lacked fire,  
 As one who mourns a glory dead;  
 And when they sought his heart's desire"  
 "Me like'um tooth same gold," he said.

A dental place they quickly found.  
 He neither moaned nor moved his head.  
 They pulled his teeth so white and sound;  
 They put in teeth of gold instead.  
 Oh, never saw I man so gay!  
 His very being seemed to swell:  
 "Ha! ha!," he cried, "Now Injun say  
 Me heap big chief, me look like hell."

One of the things that runs through  
 Robert Service's poetry is the story of  
 the human being who is washed up in the  
 wilds of the frontier because he's run  
 away from the world, and he's been a  
 failure everywhere, and he confesses the  
 fact that he's just completely decadent  
 and a defeated man. And one of the  
 best of them all is the confession, which  
 again runs through Robert Service's  
 poetry, is the confession of the man who  
 has blown his life. And one of his,  
 probably, best of that particular type  
 is a poem that Robert Service calls  
 THE LOW-DOWN WHITE:

#### THE LOW-DOWN WHITE

This is the pay-day up at the mines,  
 when the bearded brutes come down;  
 There's money to burn in the streets to-night,  
 so I've sent my klooch to town,  
 With a haggard face and a ribband of red  
 entwined in her hair of brown.



And I know at the dawn she'll come reeling  
home with the bottles, one, two, three -  
One for herself, to drown her shame,  
and two big bottles for me,  
To make me forget the thing I am  
and the man I used to be.

To make me forget the brand of the dog,  
as I crouch in this hideous place;  
To make me forget once I kindled the light  
of love in a lady's face,  
Where even the squalid Siwash now  
holds me a black disgrace.

Oh, I have guarded my secret well!  
And who would dream as I speak  
In a tribal tongue like a rogue unhung,  
'mid the ranch-house filth and reek,  
I could roll to bed with a Latin phrase  
and rise with a verse of Greek?

Yet I was a senior prizeman once,  
and the pride of a college eight;  
Called to the bar - my friends were true!  
but they could not keep me straight;  
Then came the divorce, and I went abroad  
and "died" on the River Plate.

But I'm not dead yet; though with half a  
lung there isn't time to spare,  
And I hope that the year will see me out,  
and, thank God, no one will care -  
Save maybe the little slim Siwash girl  
with the rose of shame in her hair.

She will come with the dawn, and the dawn  
is near; I can see its evil glow,  
Like a corpse-light seen through a frosty  
pane in a night of want and woe;  
And yonder she comes by the bleak bull-  
pines, swift staggering through the snow.

One of the things that Robert Service  
did best, probably, was describe Cold.  
Everything that he describes, when it comes  
to nature, is alive and really full of  
life, and very very frightening, as a  
matter of fact, and naturally, since  
Service himself at one time was a miner up  
in the Yukon Territory he saw many men  
freeze to death, which is something most  
of us have never seen. And his descrip-  
tion of men freezing to death comes back  
again and again in his poetry. And also  
not only men freezing to death, but men  
who were always yearning for civilization,  
even though they were in the middle of  
this great gold rush and mucking and  
moiling for the thing called gold. And  
one of his best poems that describes  
freezing, and it describes loneliness,  
and it describes the yearning of men for  
a different life was THE BALLAD OF  
BLASPHEMOUS BILL:

#### THE BALLAD OF BLASPHEMOUS BILL

I took a contract to bury the body of  
blasphemous Bill MacKie,  
Whenever, wherever or whatsoever the  
manner of death he die -  
Whether he die in the light o'day or under  
the peak-faced moon;  
In cabin or dance-hall, camp or dive,  
mucklucks or patent shoon;  
On velvet tundra or virgin peak, by  
glacier, drift or draw;  
In muskeg hollow or canyon gloom, by  
avalanche, fang or claw;  
By battle, murder or sudden wealth, by  
pestilence, hooch or lead -  
I swore on the Book I would follow and  
look till I found my tombless dead.

For Bill was a dainty kind of cuss, and  
his mind was mighty sot  
On a dinky patch with flowers and grass  
in a civilized boneyard lot.  
And where he died or how he died, it  
didn't matter a damn  
So long as he had a grave with frills  
and a tombstone "epigram."  
So I promised him, and he paid the price  
in good cheechako coin  
(Which the same I blowed in that very  
night down in the Tenderloin.)  
Then I painted a three-foot slab of pine:  
"Here lies poor Bill MacKie,"  
And I hung it up on my cabin wall and I  
waited for Bill to die.

Years passed away, and at last one day  
came a squaw with a story strange,  
Of a long-deserted line of traps 'way back  
of the Bighorn range,  
of a little hut by the great divide, and  
a white man stiff and still,  
Lying there by his lonesome self, and I  
figured it must be Bill.  
So I thought of the contract I'd made with  
him, and I took down from the shelf  
The swell black box with the silver plate  
he'd picked out for hisself;  
And I packed it full of grub and "hooch",  
and I slung it on the sleigh;  
Then I harnessed up my team of dogs and  
was off at dawn of day.

You know what it's like in the Yukon wild  
when it's sixty-nine below;  
When the ice-worms wriggle their purple heads  
through the crust of the pale blue snow;  
When the pine-trees crack like little guns  
in the silence of the wood,  
And the icicles hang down like tusks  
under the parka hood;  
When the stove-pipe smoke breaks sudden  
off, and the sky is weirdly lit,

And the careless feel of a bit of steel  
burns like a red-hot spit;  
When the mercury is a frozen ball, and the  
frost-fiend stalks to kill -  
Well, it was just like that that day when  
I set out to look for Bill.

Oh, the awful hush that seemed to crush  
me down on every hand,  
As I blundered blind with a trail to find  
through that blank and bitter land;  
Half dazed, half crazed in the winter  
wild, with its grim heart-breaking woes,  
And the ruthless strife for a grip on life  
that only the sourdough knows!  
North by the compass, North I pressed;  
river and peak and plain  
Passed like a dream I slept to lose and  
I waked to dream again.

River and plain and mighty peak - and  
who could stand un-awed?  
As their summits blazed, he could stand  
undazed at the foot of the throne of God.  
North, aye, North, through a land accurst,  
shunned by the scouring brutes,  
And all I heard was my own harsh word and  
the whine of the malamutes,  
Till at last I came to a cabin squat,  
built in the side of a hill,  
And I burst in the door, and there on the  
floor, frozen to death, lay Bill.

Ice, white ice, like a winding-sheet,  
sheathing each smoke-grimed wall;  
Ice on the stove-pipe, ice on the bed,  
ice gleaming over all;  
Sparkling ice on the dead man's chest,  
glittering ice in his hair,  
Ice on his fingers, ice in his heart,  
ice in his glassy stare;  
Hard as a log and trussed like a frog,  
with his arms and legs outspread.  
I gazed at the coffin I'd brought for him,  
and I gazed at the gruesome dead,  
And at last I spoke: "Bill liked his joke;  
but still, goldarn his eyes,  
A man had ought to consider his mates in  
the way he goes and dies."

Have you ever stood in an Arctic hut  
in the shadow of the Pole,  
With a little coffin six by three and a  
grief you can't control?  
Have you ever sat by a frozen corpse that  
looks at you with a grin,  
And that seems to say: "You may try all day,  
but you'll never jam me in"?

I'm not a man of the quitting kind, but  
I never felt so blue  
As I sat there gazing at that stiff and  
studying what I'd do.  
Then I rose and I kicked off the husky dogs  
that werè nosing round about,  
And I lit a roaring fire in the stove, and  
I started to thaw Bill out.

Well, I thawed and thawed for thirteen days  
but it didn't seem no good;  
His arms and legs stuck out like pegs,  
as if they was made of wood.  
Till at last I said: "It ain't no use -  
he's froze too hard to thaw;  
He's obstinate, and he won't lie straight,  
so I guess I got to - saw."  
So I sawed off poor Bill's arms and legs,  
and I laid him snug and straight  
In the little coffin he picked hisself,  
with the dinky silver plate,  
And I came nigh near to shedding a tear  
as I nailed him safely down;  
Then I stowed him away in my Yukon sleigh,  
and I started back to town.

So I buried him as the contract was  
in a narrow grave and deep,  
And there he's waiting the Great Clean-up,  
when the Judgment sluice-heads sweep;  
And I smoke my pipe and I meditate in the  
light of the Midnight Sun,  
And sometimes I wonder if they was,  
the awful things I done.  
And as I sit and the parson talks,  
expounding of the Law,  
I often think of poor old Bill -  
and how hard he was to saw.

ROBERT W. SERVICE (1874-1958)

Unquestionably "THE SHOOTING OF DAN  
MCGREW" is one of the best known and loved  
"poems" in the English language. Not far  
behind Dan McGrew in popularity is "THE  
CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE", "THE LAW OF THE  
YUKON", "THE CALL OF THE WILD" and "THE  
BALLAD OF BLASPHEMOUS BILL". They have  
been recited in countless bars, set to  
music; the ballet, cartoons, and yet not  
much is known about their writer.

Service was born in Scotland in near  
poverty and he emigrated to the United  
States, actually Canada, just after his  
twenty-first birthday. He there began a  
life which he himself described as that of  
a wanderer, a semi-hobo, picking oranges  
in California, doing menial jobs on farms,  
in the lumber camps of the Northwest, but  
always playing his banjo and guitar and  
actively seeking out adventure.

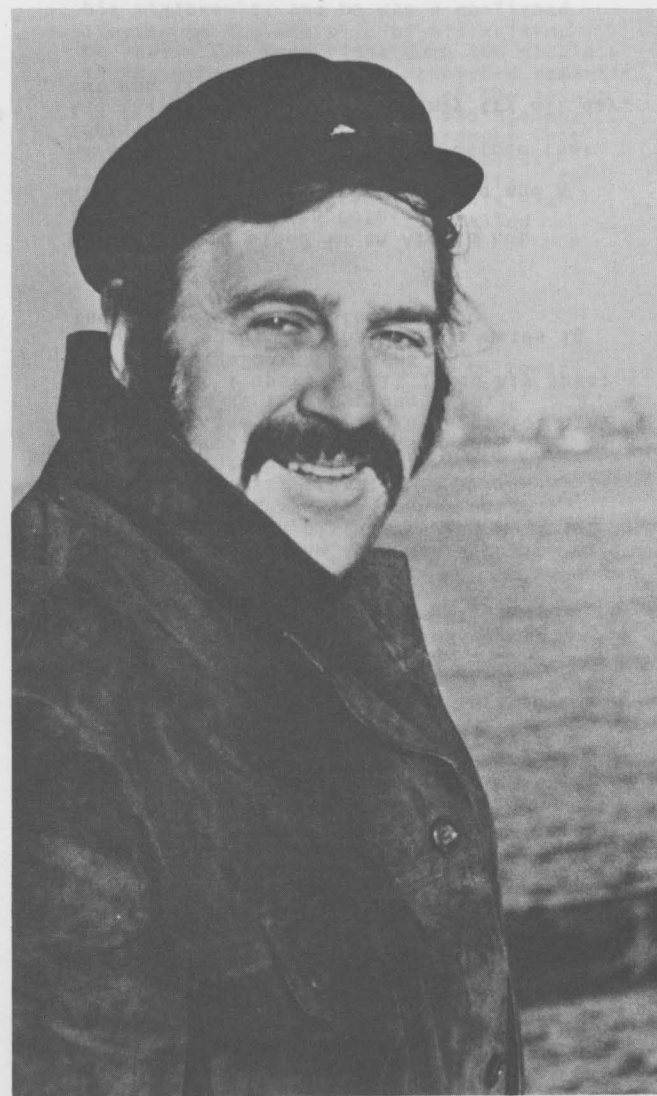
Just after the Gold Rush of 1898 swept  
the Klondike like a cyclone, he became a  
bank clerk in the frontier town of White-  
horse, Yukon Territory. It is there that  
he first knew the excitement of the Arctic  
and he was fascinated by the wild characters  
who had been drawn North searching for gold.

As a hobby he loved to recite for  
friends such classics as "GUNGA DIN" and  
"CASEY AT THE BAT", while accompanying him-  
self on the banjo. He decided to write  
his own recitation for delivery at a  
church social because he was bored with  
doing the same stories over and over. In  
one night he wrote "THE SHOOTING OF DAN  
MCGREW". Several weeks later he over-  
heard a story at a party that became "THE  
CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE", and in a space  
of less than three months he wrote the  
"poems" which would make him world famous  
as well as very wealthy.

Contrary to popular opinion, Robert  
Service never was a miner but he certainly  
saw his share of primitive frontier life  
and his writings put words like "sourdough",  
"Cheechako" and "malemute" into the lan-  
guage forever. Dangerous Dan McGrew,  
playing his solo game, is known to millions  
and will probably be known as long as  
English is spoken.

Jean Shepherd, author and performer,  
has won the "Playboy" Magazine Humor/Satire  
Award four times for his short stories.  
One of his novels, IN GOD WE TRUST, ALL  
OTHERS PAY CASH, was awarded the Indiana  
University Award as the most original fic-  
tion of the year 1967. His subsequent novel,  
WANDA HICKEY'S NIGHT OF GOLDEN MEMORIES, AND  
OTHER DISASTERS, and the collection of short  
stories and essays THE FERRARI IN THE BEDROOM  
were national best-sellers.

As an actor and humorist he has per-  
formed on countless college stages, night-  
clubs and solo concerts at Carnegie Hall  
and Town Hall. He has a television series,  
JEAN SHEPHERD'S AMERICA, and a nationally  
syndicated radio show. IN GOD WE TRUST,  
ALL OTHERS PAY CASH has been purchased by  
a major film company for movie release. His  
teleplay, THE GREAT INVERTED BOWL OF DARKNESS  
was selected for production by Public  
Broadcasting Service for its series devoted  
to original works by American playwrights.  
His column appears monthly in "Car & Driver"  
and his short stories and articles have  
appeared in over twenty national magazines  
including "Mademoiselle", "Harper's", "The  
Realist", "The Village Voice", "Argosy",  
"The New York Times" "Playboy" and count-  
less others.



JEAN SHEPHERD