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JOHN MASEFIELD

English poet laureate, reads his
"The Western Hudson Shore (The Palisades)"
and "To The Great Friends in Lifetime"

Produced by Corliss Lamont



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Side 1

The Western Hudson Shore

JOHN MASEFIELD
Reads His Poem
THE WESTERN HUDSON SHORE
(The Palisades)

John Masefield, O.M. (Order of Merit) was born in 1878 and died at the age of 89 in 1967. His first book, *Salt-Water Ballads*, was published in 1902 and contained his well-known poem "Sea Fever." Other poems, plays, novels and prose works followed in quick succession. Masefield will be especially remembered by his great narrative poems, such as "The Everlasting Mercy," "Dauber," "Reynard the Fox" and "Right Royal." He also wrote many distinguished sonnets. In 1930 King George V appointed Masefield Poet Laureate of England to succeed Robert Bridges. During his youth Masefield spent almost two years working in a carpet factory at Yonkers, N.Y., with its splendid view of the Palisades of the Hudson. Friends of John Masefield agree as to his gracious, sparkling, ennobling personality.

Side 2

To The Great Friends In Lifetime

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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THE WESTERN HUDSON
SHORE

by John Masefield

*Verses in the noble memory of Thomas W. Lamont
and his Wife, Florence Corliss Lamont.*

In a long life's first independent day,
As a Septembral mistiness grew bright,
I saw the Hudson River where it lay*
Westward, all silver in the windless light.
There, like a giant guard,
Ranked as a rampart, proud yet battle-scarred,
Were precipices silent in array.
Endurance in eternity grown gray,
Sentinel in implacable regard,
Watching the ending of another night.

"What is the cliff?" I asked. "The Palisades."
Thereafter, daily, I would look across
And watch the silences of their brigades,
Enduring their eternity of loss,
The sun, the wind, the cold.
Often I watched the setting sun glow gold
Down to their summit at a day's decline.
I saw no dwelling in the rocky line,
No lighted window starred the dusking shades.
Sombre the fort, from rampart-top to fosse.

Often I wondered what the rampart hid.
What was it that the cruising eagle saw
Below the forest tree-tops as he glid
Searching the rock for quarry for his claw?

*In his early manhood Masefield came to the United States and worked for two years in a carpet mill at Yonkers, New York, on the east bank of the Hudson and opposite the Palisades.

Was it the West, untamed?
Manless, as yet, with creatures yet un-named,
With ashes of the Indian camp-fires strown,
The earth as yet unploughed, the grass unmown,
Where nothing of adventure was forbid,
And knife and bullet gave the only law?

Whatever wonder or alarm might be
Beyond those clouds aflame as the sun sank,
I felt that something great awaited me,
Awaited all who sought beyond their rank.
There, in that haunted ground
By present search the future might be found . . .
The hardly-hoped, new, unexpected thing,
That must be sought-for, seeing naught would bring
The pearl within its nacre from the sea,
Or nuggets from the mountain torrent's bank.

Daily that solitude of frontier lured.
Before the winter struck I rowed to find
What people, by such rampart reassured,
Beyond such wall, were wonders of mankind.
I neared the rocks; I saw
The eagle and the cranny-nesting daw;
No sign of human life but screees and crags,
With scanty sumach showing scarlet flags,
An ebb that passed, an iron that endured,
In stony silence daunting to the mind.

But in a gully, as I came to land,
A couple, lad and lady, stared at me,
Seemed, for an instant, prone to lend a hand,
Then, doubting, changed their minds and let me be.
They seemed about to speak . . .
I made the boat secure within the creek,
I wished to speak to them, but did not dare,
(Myself a boy) and, wondering what they were,
I left them to the river and the strand,
And picked my way through boulders up the scree.

Above the cliff the timber scattered sparse
In land no coulter yet had made to yield.
All was untended waste, of unfenced grass,
An untamed naught, not forest and not field.
No sight of house, no farm,
No church-bell struck, no dog barked an alarm,
Save for the flies, no moving life at all.
Naught but the splendid silence of the Fall.

Whatever dangers lurked to see me pass,
None gave a symptom, nothing was revealed.

But, pushing on awhile, I found a track,
I followed as the latest hoof-marks led
(Hoofs going westward, that had not come back)
Into a grassy woodland just ahead.
I paused: I heard no sound.
I seemed alone upon a no-man's ground;
Saw nothing but October-coloured trees
From which, at times, a leaf, by slow degrees
Came rustling to the seepage rotted black
From branches still in blueness overhead.

But, the sun southing, it was time to go.
I meant to ask those friends, as I returned
What farms were westward; surely they would know.
But both had vanished thence I soon discerned.
All desolate the scene,
Rock to the sky in majesty of mien,
Rock above water, water below rock,
Waiting the dawn when destiny should knock.
I pulled into the trouble of the flow
Eyeing the patches where the sumach burned.

I travelled to that rocky coast no more,
But often thought about that vanished pair.
Seemingly sole possessors of the shore,
Often I wondered who and what they were.
Three ships about to speak
The strings of rolled-up signals at the peak,
But then, by impulse, never broken-out,
Their nation and their nature left in doubt,
For memory (regretting) to restore,
And fantasy (regretting) to make fair.

What could that couple, man and girl, have been?
Had they come fishing? Was their boat at hand?
Were they two lovers, being King and Queen
In two young hearts, supreme o'er sea and land,
Where, in that Jersey side,
(Seemingly peopleless) did they abide?
Had they but spoken, what would they have said?
If questioned, what reply would they have made?
Why should their apparition come to mean
Something too great for me to understand?

Long afterwards, I trod New York again,
Earth's loveliest, liveliest City, shining new:
And new friends asked, who never asked in vain:
"Come up the Hudson and enjoy the view . . .
Old Yonkers from the West."
They took me, straightway, to the very crest
Just where I once had climbed, but, oh, what change,
All the old waste was utterly made strange,
With traffic hooting onwards in a chain
And all the Sunday merry with ado.

There, underneath, the Hudson sought the sea,
Beyond, a miracle of city shone,
City, where only forest used to be,
The lovely New York City thrusting on . . .
All shining city now,
There Yonkers lay . . . I well remembered how.
I said, "I worked there, many years ago,
I rowed once, to the gully here below . . .
Two strangers saw, and almost spoke to me,
Later, I looked for them, but they were gone.

"Strange that that man and girl should haunt me so.
Say, could it possibly have been that you
Came, one October Sunday, just below,
And saw me pass . . . were you the very Two?"
They answered: "No . . . not we . . .
Though we were living near, it could not be.
Then we were still in Puritanic days,
Our Sunday mornings passed in holier ways.
Forget the couple that you didn't know,
Take us instead and try to make us do."

Friendship is sunlight scattering man's cloud,
Making a life a sunbeam's spangled dust,
Soon they were showing me, when time allowed,
How far the energies of Man had thrust
Bringing that shore to use,
Giving, and promising to give, no truce
To that unknown alluring Jersey shore.
The distance I had hungered to explore,
Was now inhabited, adorned, endowed,
Its Might-Be, brought to Being by Man's Must.

All, changed or not, those friends together showed.
Westward and northward, seeing all, we went,
Through forests where autumnal maples glowed,
Up golden miles of turbulent ascent;
Past West Point, flagged and fair:
By clearings that old pioneers laid bare,
And gave, or kept, the Dutch or Indian name,
Each having still its little touch of fame,
Its storied ferry, or remembered road,
Or, on the green, its laurelled monument.

After long years, those glad companions built
A woodland mansion near the rocky crest
That in my youth the setting suns had gilt.
I lived for days in that enchanted West,
Walked there, and came to know
The unknown country that had lured me so.
There, as the destinies decreed, I learned
The change that follows when a soul has earned
Leave to proceed . . . as earthly flowers wilt
So mortals change and enter into rest.

They died, but, dying, left that house of theirs
To be a seat of knowledge, home and shrine
To those who track the Hidden to its lairs
Down in the depth of cosmical design.
To probe beneath the crust

For ancient rocks that made the modern dust;
To bore beneath the bottom of the sea;
To learn the doings of eternity,
The frosts and fires of immense affairs,
Incalculable, splendid and divine.*

Still, therefore, now, my thought turns every eve
To that great wall of rock, with fancies fond,
Of what the Sun, in sinking, must perceive,
By me, unseen, undreamed of and unconned.
Thus far the search has gone:

* This stanza refers to the fact that the Lamont estate at Palisades, New York, was willed by my mother to Columbia University, which established the Lamont Geological Observatory there.

Second side:

TO THE GREAT FRIENDS IN LIFETIME

by John Masefield

This, I believe, that we remain in Time
Holding the purpose of a quest incurred
Outlasting Death, to struggle and to climb
Mountainous Life with living deed or word,
Achieving light (if lucky) out of grime.
So, when Life's breath has gone,
Aspiring spirit smiles, and ventures on.

Newly arrayed, the spirit re-assails
Despairs unconquered in the past, and longs
For fellow treaders on the ancient trails
Loved in the past's forgotten toils and songs,
Old friends, linked by old chain
Re-met, are welcomed and are friends again
Exultingly the old ship spreads her sails.

Over the River, into Jersey, on,
By bridge, by ferry and by multitude
Into the secrecies where none intrude,
Into realities where none can grieve
Feeling the certainty of Truth beyond.

Such are the links between the rocks and me,
The lure that seemed to promise, and the thrill
That what the promise seemed might come to be
Spite of all punishments that thwart us still,
Chains of old time, old lacks,
The stones in wallet on the pilgrims' backs;
Then, spite of all, the unexpected friends,
The widening of the scope that never ends,
The Sun forever sinking in the Sea
Lighting a path to consecrated will.

Naught that is living can the soul forget.
Companions now were helpers in the past
Erasing blottings, nullifying debt.
Lovely, all lacks secured,
Attended, recreated, reassured,
Manful, in life more hopeful than the last,
Onward the great soul goes to greater yet.

* * *

Never has such assumption seemed more true
Than now, when lovely spirits, lost to sight,
In memory return
Nearer than ever to the hearts that yearn,
Giving again the happiness they knew,
Reviving occupations of delight
And winning, all too late, the praises due.

That we are linked in long-established schemes
Is, still, my thought; and so
That we shall meet again I dearly know,
Under the tidal moon, swayed by the sun.
Darkness besets man's living with its dreams,
Eternity from mortal conquest streams,
Joy, Order, Peace and Wisdom's Justice done.