

RHYMES OF THE ROCKIES

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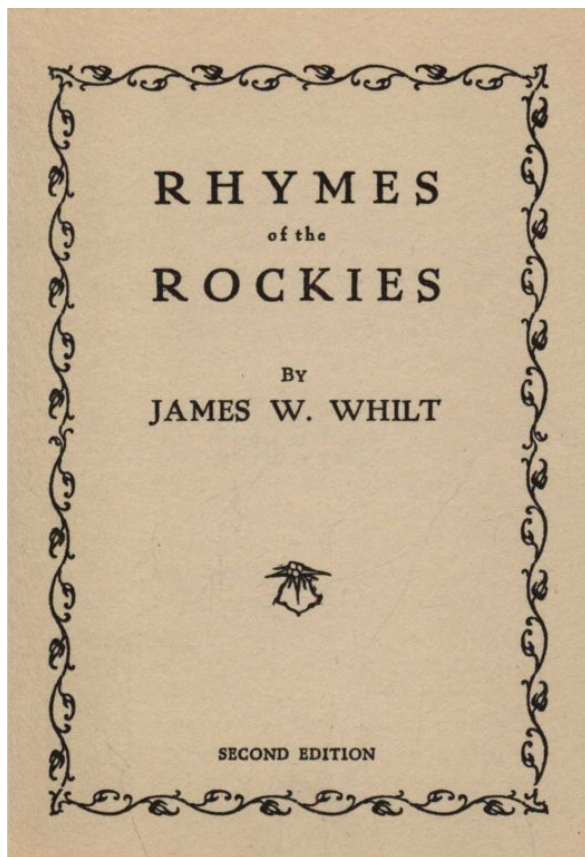
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RHYMES of the ROCKIES



Title page

BY
JAMES W. WHILT

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JAMES W. WHILT
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PREFACE

Having spent the major part of my life in the Rocky Mountains as timber cruiser, packer, trapper and guide, I have learned to love their beauty and grandeur; enjoy their solitude and feel that they are a part of me.

It is there one can breathe the air of the Great Out Doors and gaze on mountains and glaciers whose never ending chain stretches into space and to listen to the waterfall's laughter. Where the denizens of the wild roam unmolested as they did for ages past, when man first came to this Virgin Paradise. Where camp-fires still glow at eventide,—their smoke wreaths adding incense to the freshness of the air.

While my words cannot express even in one detail the beauty as I see it, I truly and sincerely hope these few humble rhymes will paint in your mind a mental picture that time itself may impair but not erase.

With these thoughts ever vividly before me, I dedicate this book to the Rocky Mountains and their "wonder child"—the Glacier National Park.

JAMES W. WHILT.

Eureka, Montana
May 25, 1922

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RHYMES OF THE ROCKIES

MY RHYMES

THE TRAPPER'S TRAIL

Only a scar on a sapling
That is almost overgrown;
A withered snag far up the stream
Where the ax marks still are shown.

This tells 'tis the trail of a trapper
Made many years ago,
So I take up the trail and follow,
And I care not where I go.

I follow the trail through the foothills,
To me 'tis as plain as a road,
For I've spent many years in the forest
And know me the trappers' code.

And I read as I follow this trapper,

That whoever trapped this line
Was a tried and true knight of the hills,
And I call him a friend of mine.

I knew where to look for his lynx sets,
And I found them, every one;
I found where he'd slept in his lean-to
When his day's long hike was done.

Then the trail led far up the mountain
Where the spruce grew dark and tall;
And there were his sets for the martin,
Using the old dead-fall:

For the traps were too heavy to carry
So far up that mountain's deep snow;
Then the trail dipped over the summit
And into the basin below.

Then my mind began to ponder
On this unknown friend of mine,
Who had sought the peace of the forest
And the whisp'rings of the pine.

Perhaps 'twas fate that led him
To seek a trapper's trade;
Perchance 'twas his love for the silence,
For a trapper is born—not made.

It takes men with hearts of iron
Who dare to face the wild;
Men with the hearts of warriors bold,
And the faith of an innocent child.

At last I came to his cabin,
Now mouldering to decay,
And there on some poles in a corner
The bones of the trapper lay;

His rusted gun beside him,

Reclined upon a log,
 And there on a moulded deer-skin
 Were the bones of his faithful dog.

Pals they had lived together
 And pals together had died;
 Let us hope they're still pals together,
 Across on the other side.

MY GARDEN

I have seen many beautiful gardens,
 Gardens that were tended with care,
 With roses, violets and tulips,—
 They each have their fragrance so rare.

But the garden most lovely to me
 Is one where few men have trod;
 'Tis a meadow high up in the mountains,
 And I call it the Garden of God.

Fenced in by mighty rock-walls
 And forests of evergreen pine,
 There is no one else to claim it,
 So I call this garden mine.

There are hair-bells, oh! so dainty
 Suspended on thread-life stem,
 And the blossoms full of mountain dew
 Makes each a perfect gem.

And such tiny lady-slippers,
 The kind the Fairies wear,—
 Me-thinks 'tis a sacred garden,
 There is such sweet incense there.

There the bear-grass plumes are waving

In the cool and fragrant breeze,
 And the wood's orchestra is playing
 Close by in the tall larch trees.

The partridges' drum is beating
 On a log so very near,
 And shy violets are peeping,—
 Me-thinks they came up to hear.

'Tis then I often wonder
 As I gaze on this garden so fair,
 How many a blossom's growing
 To be wasted upon the air.

But I see that the beautiful flowers
 That bloom on this mountain so high,
 Are far too sacred for us below
 And are beloved by those in the sky.

So I fain would pluck one blossom,
 From this sacred garden so sweet,
 But I leave them in all their beauty
 To bloom at the Maker's feet.

ADVENTURER'S LUCK

Did you ever go a-trapping
 Where you knew the fur was plenty,
 Where a year ago you could have
 Made a bunch of "jack"?
 Next fall you got in early,
 Built your cabin in a hurry,—
 Then didn't even find a weasel track?

Did you ever go prospecting
 Where the gold was found in millions,
 And even every musher

Had made a pile of wealth?
 And you worked just like a beaver
 Cause you felt you couldn't leave 'er,
 And all you got was badly broken health?

Did you ever go a-fishing
 When the weather,—it was perfect!
 And you gathered up your tackle
 And had it fixed just right:
 And you whipped the streams and bait-fished
 And maybe swore a little,
 And then you never even got a bite?

Did you ever go a-hunting
 When the woods were damp and gloomy,
 Where everything was stillness
 And everywhere a trail,
 And you traveled over ridges,
 Through the hollows, round the ledges
 And then you never even glimpsed a tail?

But such is luck I find it,
 And the fellow who stays by it
 Will at last succeed and win the day:
 Be he trapper, or prospector,
 Be he fisherman, or hunter,
 I have always found it
 That it's pluck that wins the day.

THE LARK SONG

This morn at dawn I woke,
 The rain beat its tattoo,
 And through the dewy, fragrant air
 A lark's song whistled through:

And while he sang his song so true,

Then sang my soul's refrain;
 "Oh! may my heart, like yours, dear bird,
 Sing ever through the rain."

And when the sky of life seems grey,
 The sun itself seems very dark,
 And all ahead is black despair,
 I bethink me of the lark.

And always have I found this fact;
 However low the clouds may drop—
 The sun is always shining clear
 Upon the highest mountain top:

So we should look away beyond
 The things upon this world below,
 And sing our praises unto Him
 Who makes the rain and snow:

And ever as I travel on
 Upon this life's uncertain road,
 I meet with fellows every day
 Who carry just as big a load.

No matter if the sky is dark,
 Or if it rains the whole day long,
 God's messenger from out the sky
 Is pouring forth his little song.

THE TRAPPER'S STORY

The trapper sat in his cabin
 With grizzled beard and hair,
 Yet straight as any soldier's
 Were his massive shoulders square.
 Eyes as clear as a mountain spring
 That could pierce you at a glance,

Sharp as a pointed arrow
 Or Indian warrior's lance.

"Pard, will you kindly tell me
 Why you seek the hills,
 Why you love the solitude
 The lakes and crystal rills?
 I don't want to be inquisitive,
 Or pry into your life,
 But;—did you ever have a sweetheart,
 Did you ever have a wife?"

The trapper turned his eyes on me,
 'Twas with a friendly smile:—
 "Yes, Pal, I had a sweetheart,
 Also a wife and child.
 We had a little cabin,
 With plenty to wear and eat;
 We were richer far than any king,
 'Twas love so pure and sweet.

And Oh! how she loved the forest,
 And how she would sing all day;
 Happier far than the spotted fawns
 That on yonder hillside play.
 Then she told me the news one evening,
 That made me feel so proud;
 A child was soon to crown our joy;
 Say;—I walked along a cloud!

Now, Pard, I can't explain to you,—
 How am I going to tell
 Of the joy within our cabin
 That we both had loved so well?
 But God loves the best and purest,—
 Say, my eyes are growing dim—
 He took her up to Heaven
 Along with Little Jim!

So now I seek the forest

For I know her Spirit is here,
For very often on the trail
I feel her presence near.
And as long as the Creator
Will let me cruise around,
It will always be the woods for me,
I think them sacred ground.”

TO THE ROBIN

Dear little, sweet little robin
Dressed in nice grey coat
With your warm red sweater about you
Drawn close around your throat.

With your bright pink stockings,
That you keep so clean;
Don't you ever stain them
In the grass so green?

Eyes so dark and beautiful,
Bright as they can be,
Can spy a worm upon the ground,
And you high in a tree.

And the songs you sing me!
I remember every note,
All so sweet and silver pure,
Warbled from your throat.

When you sing at break of dawn
Heralding the day,
Tell of hearts so young and true
With your sweetest lay.

Then again at eventide
When the sun is low

You sing your sweetest lullaby
Crooning, soft and low.

Then it starts me thinking
Of the One above
Who put you here to sing to us
Telling of His love.

THE PLACE WHERE I WAS BORN

There's a little old log cabin,
And its walls have fallen down,
Snow has broken down its rafters,
Not one log that's left is sound.

The brush obscures the doorway,
Everything looks so forlorn,
'Tis the little old log cabin,
The place where I was born—

Briers o'errun the pathway
Which leads to the crystal spring,
That cradled the tiny brooklet
Where the oriole used to sing.

The hills are fields and pastures
Where I roamed when but a child;
It was all unbroken forest,
And it stretched out far and wild.

The meadows ran in wavelets,
When the wind so wild and free
Blew o'er their level surface
Like a green and billowy sea.

There was childhood's shout and laughter
Within that cabin small;

But to me it was a palace,
 With wide and stately hall.

Our pleasures there were sweeter
 Than a rose without a thorn,
 In that little old log cabin,—
 The place where I was born.

Oh!—the little old log cabin!
 Where the air was sweet and cool,
 Where our school-house was the forest,
 And we went to Nature's school;

Could I but re-trace my footsteps
 Over life's uncertain road,
 Could I go back to that cabin,
 Lighter far would be my load.

MY JEWELS

The jewels of life are many,
 But the jewel most sacred to me
 And the one that I prize the highest,
 Is the jewel of memory.

My jewel of love that I cherished,
 And cared for day by day,
 Faded just like a flower
 And finally passed away.

My jewel of hope lost its lustre.
 It sparkles for me no more,
 Yet it tells me that I will meet her,
 Across on the other shore.

My jewel of faith was the smallest,
 Yet it's growing year by year,

And as I gaze upon it,
 I can feel some presence near.

When I am alone in the twilight,
 And weary with cares of the day,
 I look out upon the meadows,
 Where the fire-flies are at play,—

And I open this cherished casket,
 Where I keep these jewels rare,
 And when I gaze upon them
 My troubles pass into the air.

I like to look up at the stars
 That sparkle up above,
 And wonder if she is up there,
 The one that I fondly love.

Then this jewel I call memory,
 So crystal-clear and deep,
 I clasp to my breast and hold it,
 Till at last I fall asleep.

THE RAINSTORM

Here in the deep tangled forest
 All is quiet and still,
 While far to the west the thunder,
 Re-echoes from hill to hill.

And the lightning's flash, ever vivid,
 In great gashes knives the air;
 The rain comes down in torrents,
 A deluge everywhere!

Bathing the heat-sick flowers
 That they may bloom once more;

Painting the grass a greener hue,
That grows by our cabin door;

Making the pastures fresher,
For the cows and shepherd's herds,
Making the pools by the road-side,—
Bath tubs for the birds.

Then the thunder peals louder and louder,
Firing its shrapnel of rain.
The clouds charge after each other,
And the drouth is defeated again.

Then through a rent in the clouds
The sun's searchlight casts its ray,
And the Rain-God looks over the valley
And sees the result of the fray.

And as He sees his conquest,
His victory's flag is unfurled,
In a beautiful colored rainbow,—
He is telling all of the world,

What a victory was his, what a triumph!
It's flashed down the milky way,
Then the sentinel stars dot the heavens,
And the dew-drops sound taps for the day.

MY BLANKET-ROLL

A warm old friend is my blanket-roll
We've been pals for many a year;
And when I look back at the days gone by
I almost drop a tear.

A warmer friend I never had
Than you! old roll of a bed,

And after I've sung all your praises I can,
 Not half enough has been said.

You were a friend in summer heat,
 A friend in winter's snow;
 And whenever the wanderlust seized me,
 You were always ready to go.

From the sunny South to the Hudson Bay
 Or the land of the Western Sea;
 Then to Alaska's frozen shores
 You have traveled along with me.

Now you're getting worn, and your tarp is torn,
 You have stood too much hard weather;
 But I am the same, and it seems a shame,
 Yet,—we are growing old together!

You're a good old friend, I will say again,
 And you, I will not discard.
 And as long as the Lord will let me roam
 I will keep you for my pard.

But some day I'll cross to the other side,
 Where we all some day must go;
 Where there is no wind, or no more rain,
 And unheard of is the snow;

And when I take that last long trip
 To that eternal goal;
 My dying wish is to snuggle up
 In you,—my blanket-roll.

THE CHINOOK WIND

There's a soft warm breeze upon the air,
 'Tis moaning soft and low,

'Tis cold and chill upon the hill,
Yet it's melting all the snow.

The Indians all tell us,
That many moons gone by
Right here within the mountains,
The North wind it did cry.

The Chinook wind made answer,
And said, "I'm not afraid,"
And then there raged a battle,
For a beautiful Indian Maid.

The Chinook wind was the victor,
The North wind went away,
But the Maiden fair had died of despair,
And deep in her grave she lay.

So every year his voice we hear,
Calling so soft and sweet,
Searching the grave of the one he would save,
Melting the snow at our feet.

'Tis the lover's wind, so the Indians say,
And his heart is ever sad,
But they welcome his coming, every one,
For the North wind is gone and they're glad.

THE PALE HORSE

When I saddle the pale horse, to take my last ride,
To the home ranch, over the Great Divide,
Will I find the trail blazed all the way,
A place to camp, at the close of day?

Will the trail be smooth, and the weather fair?
(For no one has ever come back from there)

But the good book says, if we shoot square,
 "Have no fear of the trails over there!"

An unseen hand guides the pale horse straight,
 O'er the summit height, to the home ranch gate,
 Where we all must meet the Boss Supreme,
 And all will be one pleasant dream.

No herding of dogies on frost night,
 Or wild stampede in the morning's light.
 No cinching of saddles, or shipping of steers.
 No sorrow or trouble or bitter tears.

But the sun will shine, and cool breezes blow,
 Over a range ever free from snow;
 And for those who lived as He who died
 To save us riders—that Great Divide

Will be only a foothill, so very low;
 That on its summit sweet flowers do grow,
 And the trail itself will be smooth all the way,
 With a place to camp at the close of day.

When at last I reach that Home Ranch gate,
 Peter will say, "You sure shot straight,"
 And the gate will open for me, I know,
 Saying, "Pull off your saddle, and let him go!"

THE SNOWSTORM

The snow has started falling,
 'Tis falling o'er mountain and plain,
 The trees bend under their burden,
 Shake free, and are draped again.

While I sit here safe in my cabin
 Where all is cozy and warm,

I can peer into the future,
 And view the woods after the storm.

I can see the deer seeking the low-lands,
 In search of their daily food,
 I can see the hunter's eyes glisten,
 For he knows that the tracking is good.

The lion dogs leap in their kennels,
 There is barking and wagging of tails,
 The hunter examines his snow-shoes,
 And dreams of "kills" and of trails.

The bear trails lead far up the mountain
 Where the cliffs are rugged and steep,
 And there is some cave in the ledges,
 They're beginning their winter's sleep.

They will sleep till the wild geese awaken them,
 As they take their Northern flight,
 Then again they will seek the hill-sides
 Where the sun shines clear and bright.

Now the wild geese honk as they leave us,
 Followed close by wind-driven snow;
 They are telling all of us trappers,
 But, of course, all us trappers know

That whenever the wild geese go homing,
 It is time that our traps are set;—
 Snow, I have been waiting for you!
 You are a welcome visitor—you bet.

SILENT VOICES OF THE NIGHT

When the shades of evening gather,
 And night's curtain's dropping low,

And the stars they dot the heavens
 With their candles, all aglow;—

Then to me there come the voices
 On each cool and fragrant breeze,
 Stealing in from every quarter,
 Creeping through among the trees.

And these voices, ever silent,
 Scarcely heard, their steps so light;
 Yet, to me are ever welcome;
 Silent voices of the night.

When within the noisy city,
 With its surging, busy crowd,
 The voices keep a-calling,
 And they seem to call so loud.

I can hear them pleading, coaxing,
 And to me they call so plain,
 And they have the self-same message,
 "Yes, we want you back again."

Voices of my little camp-fire,
 Voices of the woods and hills,
 Voices from the snow-capped mountains,
 Voices from the crystal-rills;

And I ever hear them calling,
 'Till I feel like taking flight,
 Back to where the voices whisper,—
 Silent voices of the night.

Oh! those voices, how I love them!
 Whether near or far away,
 And they ask me not to leave them,
 "Won't you please come back and stay?"

"Come and we will try to please you,"
 Calling from their wildwood home,

"Yes, my loved ones, I am coming,
And from you no more will roam."

THE PACK TRAIN

Did you hear that far off tinkle
In the canyon far below?
Listen! can't you hear it?
It is ringing very slow.

'Tis the bell upon the lead-mare,
As she's winding up the trail,
Guiding all the other horses,
Hitched to one another's tail.

They are headed for the camps,
Where they've lately made a find;
And the pack trains are all busy
Carrying grubstake to the mine.

Every horse is heavy loaded;
Ask me how that I can tell?
That is easy for the packer,
'Tis the tinkle of the bell.

Away back in the eighties
When they made the Wild Horse strike;—
We were in there with a pack train,
Me and old Pack Saddle Mike.

Mike could throw more knots and hitches
Than an expert sailor's crew,
Was a wizard with a lash-rope,
Knew what every horse could do.

Well, we packed for them there miners,
'Till the weather got so cold

It would freeze the lash-ropes solid,
And 'twas hard to make them hold;

It was hard to cinch a saddle,
Harder still to cinch a pack,
But the cold we never heeded;
We were making piles of "jack."

We left camp one frosty morning,
Started for our winter range;
Two hard days to reach the summit,
Then the weather took a change,

Hurled the snow into our faces,
Cut our eyes like broken glass,
And we had to stop the horses,
While the snow fell thick and fast.

For two days we held the horses
On that mountain in the snow,
While the mercury was flirting
Close to forty or more below.

Well, we had to shoot the horses,
Better far that, than let them die,
Made us snow-shoes from the saddles
And climbed o'er the summit high.

When at last we reached the ranches,
Almost dead from wind and snow;
Mike took down with the pneumonia,
And the next day had to go.

While he lay upon his pillow,
All his body racked with pain,
He'd keep talking of his horses,
Calling each one by its name.

Then he called me to his bedside,
And he said, "I'm going to ride,

And I know I'll find the horses
Over on the other side."

MOONLIGHT

When the moon has climbed the heavens,
And the sun has gone to rest,
And the evening shadows gather,
That's the time I love the best.

Seated by our little camp-fire,
In the forest dark and tall,
With the silence all around us,
Save the roar of water-fall—

Then the deer steal in the meadows,
Velvet shod, so still are they,
While among the waving grass-tops
Spotted fawns are there at play.

Then to me there comes a memory,
Of the days, now past and gone,
When my life was just in blossom,
I was young and life was dawn.

When I roamed the virgin forest,
Just as free as birds that fly,
With the moonbeams for a candle,
And my cover was the sky.

Still the moon shines just as brightly,
And the stars are just as clear,
But I see I'm growing older
Like the ending of the year.

Frost is gathering on my temple,
Soon my hair will be like snow,

But His will we all must follow
And some day we all must go.

Yet, I'm ever, ever hoping
That upon those shores of gold,
We will have the self-same moonlight
As we had in the days of old.

MY DREAM

I dreamed of a beautiful forest
That lies back in the hills,
With lakes of crystal clearness
And such noisy mountain rills.

Where there are no trails of trappers,
Where the game unchallenged roam—
Could I only find that forest,
That's the place I'd call my home.

There were beaver, lynx and marten,
Elk so stately, and so tall,
And such sunlit open hillsides,
And such lovely water-fall.

There was deep grass in the meadows,
There were breezes, sweet and cool,
There were trout, so lazy, swimming
In each clear and crystal pool.

There the birds were singing sweetly
Their sweet, yet plaintive song,
That told me of God's great wonders
There among their happy throng.

There were deer-trails, without number,
Bear-tracks everywhere were seen,

And the squirrels were never silent
 In those forests dark and green.

There the wild ducks they were nesting,
 There the loon called on the pond,
 There the snow-caps rose to sky-line
 In the distance far beyond.

Then I was suddenly wakened,
 Grabbed by the shoulder so hard,
 "Roll out now, breakfast is ready!"
 It was Jack, my "bunkie" and "pard."

THE OLD FRYING PAN

You may talk of your broilers, both single and double,
 Your roasters and toasters, they're all lots of trouble;
 But when out in the hills, just find if you can,
 Any kind of a dish like the old frying pan.

Over a campfire you don't need a stove,
 Out in the hills, the place we all love,
 Such hotcakes they never were tasted by man,
 With many the thanks to the old frying pan.

When the trout are all fried to a rich golden brown,
 I know old epicures would look, with a frown
 At the meal set before me; dispute it who can,
 With naught for a plate but the old frying pan.

With the venison cooked, the potatoes all fried,
 Bannocks like bed-quilts, with coffee beside,
 You could eat till you busted, dispute it who can;
 Was dish e'er invented like the old frying pan?

Many a miner, in the good days of old,
 Way back in the foothills a-searching for gold

Deep in some creek-bed, for the rich yellow sand,
Has panned out a grub-stake with the old frying pan.

There's been cattle rustlers, when in a great hurry
Used no other iron, but why should they worry,
For many and many and many the brand,
That has been blotched out with an old frying pan.

So your praises I'll shout, both far, wide and high,
That you're the best dish, till the day that I die;
Why, there's many a woman "cleaned up" on her man
With no other club but the old frying pan.

THE RAINY DAY

The hills are smothered in a fog,
The sky is somber-grey,
The rain is coming in a mist,
A cheerless rainy day.

To me the trees are weeping,
With their branches drooping low,
Their tears are steady falling,
With heavy drops, yet slow.

The birds they all are silent,
And not one sweet silvery note,
Re-echoes through the forest,
From our feathered songster's throat.

Not one thing to break the silence,
Save the rain-drops as they fall,
As I watch the clouds roll onward,
Or climb the mountain wall.

And somehow I feel so happy,
Though the world seems full of pain,

So I let my gaze go farther,
 When the sun will shine again.

The trees and flowers and grasses,
 They will all the fresher seem,
 And the laughter will be louder
 From the rippling mountain stream.

The birds will sing far sweeter
 Than they did in days gone by,
 The air will be the fresher,
 And of bluer tint the sky.

We all do love the sunshine,
 We love the moonlight, too,
 We also love the twilight,
 And the falling of the dew;

But I never growl or grumble,
 Only this I wish to say;—
 That this world would be a desert
 Without you, oh! Rainy Day!

THE STREAMLET

Tell me little streamlet,
 As you onward flow;
 Why in such a hurry,
 Whither do you go?

The stream slowed up a moment
 Within the alder's shade;
 "I go to join my brothers,
 And of us are rivers made.

We water the hills and meadows,
 We turn the mills' great wheel,

We carry logs to the mill-dam,
Where they're cut by teeth of steel.

We furnish power for the motor
That pulls the railroad train;
And after they have used our power,
It is given back again.

So you see we enjoy working,
That's why we laugh all day,
For when one's heart is in one's work,
Why! work is greatest play!

And growing broader and deeper,
We carry ships on our breasts,
'Till at last we reach the ocean,
And there we have time to rest."

ED ENDERS' GRAVE

When old Ed Enders first took ill,
'Twas first a fever and then a chill,
His respiration was very weak,
Throat so clogged he could scarcely speak.

The doctors prescribed all kinds of dope
And hotwater bottles, but had no hope.
Then old Bill Wallace and old Hank Lee,
And old Dad Lyons got on a spree;

And when half full old Bill did cry,
And says, "Old Ed is about to die.
I ain't no doctor, I can't shoot pills,
I've never prescribed for no one's ills

But I do believe we can pull Ed through,
If you all will help me;—I mean you two.

If old Ed dies, just stop and think,
He will never buy us another drink!

He has the money in that there claim,
If we let him die it will be a shame.
Old Ed is a feller no one can ride,
He will always take the other side.

If you say no, why he'll say 'yes'
Just to be contrary up to the last.
So now we'll try old Ed to save,—
A committee of three to pick his grave.

As we can't agree where to make his bed,
We will have to leave it to poor old Ed."
"It will work," says Dad, with a tear in his eye,
"And I for one am ready to try."

Then up spoke Hank, "This ain't no joke,
Fill up the glasses and then we'll smoke."
So the three went down to Old Ed's room,
Faces as solemn as any tomb.

Old Ed says, "Boys, I'm on my way!"
Bill says, "You'll never see the day,
And as we were idle, and time to save,
We've been picking a place to dig your grave.

Now Hank wants to plant you in the shade,
Where the trail climbs up that steepest grade,
For you hunted the shade when the sun was hot,
And the land is worthless in that there spot.

But Dad wants you laid on that sunny slope,
There's a hole all ready in that old stope.
You hunted the sun when the weather was cold,
And he wants you planted in that old hole.

But I says, 'Boys, it is my wish,
To plant him where he liked to fish;

For he always fished at the same old hole,
Too lazy to walk and carry his pole.'

Now Ed, we as a committee of three,
Will leave it to you, we can't agree."
Old Ed looked up from his bed of pain,
Looked at them over and over again.

What he said to them won't do to tell,
At least he said, "You can go to hell!
You won't find the likes wherever you roam,
Rake the hot place over with a fine-tooth comb.

Such a bunch as you,—right here I swear,
Pick what you damn please, I won't be there."
Now listen, dear folks, I am here to tell,
In just three days old Ed got well.

SPRINGTIME

When sun begins to melt the snow
And the birds commence to sing,
And the days are getting longer,
Then we know 'tis surely spring.

It is then you get a fever,
But your temp'ture does not raise,
It's a kind of lazy feeling
On those balmy warm spring days.

And it starts your mind to working,
While your thoughts commence to stray,
To the hills and lakes and rivers,
And green woodlands far away.

And it makes you feel so drowsy
That you long to go to sleep,

Out beneath some tall green pine tree,
 Where the shadows cool and deep

Just seem to be a-calling,
 While the stream beneath the hill
 Is chuckling with glad laughter,
 And I seem to hear it still.

'Tis then memory breaks its halter
 And stampedes and starts to go,
 Till it stops in childhood's pasture
 In the days of long ago;

Where the birds were all a-singing,
 Songs so rare and pure and sweet,
 Squirrel's chatter in the tree-tops,—
 Flowers blooming at your feet.

Then the city seems a prison,
 While brick walls like prison bars,
 Seem to reach clear up to heaven,
 Till they mingle with the stars.

Still I do not call a doctor,
 For he cannot ease, I know,
 Any longings for the wildwood
 Of the days of long ago.

THE CALL OF NATURE

My traps are getting rusty
 Here upon my cabin wall;
 The leaves are turning golden,
 'Tis already early fall.

My snow-shoes need repairing,
 And so does my canoe;

My dogs are begging, coaxing,
 And there's just one thing to do.

I'll have to quit this cruising,
 And a-looking over land,
 And lay aside my compass,
 They can get another man.

For a section-line can't hold me,
 I despise a "bearing" tree,
 When I hear the wild geese honking,
 And I know they're calling me.

I'll go back into the mountains,
 Back of Uncle Sam's survey,
 Where the only line's a trap-line,
 And I'm going there to stay;

Where the only trails are game-trails,
 Where the moose unchallenged roam,
 There I'll build for me a cabin
 And I'll call that cabin "home."

In the wildest, greenest forest,
 That no man has come to spoil,
 With his sawmills and his railroads,
 And his many slaves of toil—

Where the streams are not polluted,
 Stopped by dams of mine or mill,
 Where everything is Nature's
 And the rush of life is still.

So I'll send my resignation,
 And I know the Boss will say,
 "Won't you stay until the winter,
 And of course, we'll raise your pay."

But no salary can hold me,
 I have heard that line before;—

So here's good-bye to cruising
 From today for evermore.

MY REQUEST

When I leave this old dreary world
 To cross to the Great Unknown;
 Don't bury me in a costly tomb
 Or raise a shaft of stone—

But lay me on some hill-side,
 Mid the forest that I love;
 Where the wild flowers bloom around me
 And the eagle soars above:

With an ancient ledge above me,
 One that is all moss-grown;
 These words inscribed upon it,
 "He is one of Nature's own.

One who loved the forest,
 One who loved the hills,
 Although his soul has taken flight,
 His foot-steps echo still."

MEMORY'S CAMP-FIRE

Come with me to the forest tall,
 And spend a few of autumn days,
 And study nature at first hand,
 Learn how they lived in early days.
 Take up your pack and rod and gun,
 And once again to seek the wild,
 Leave all your sorrows far behind,
 And be as carefree as a child.

Then memory's camp-fire kindle bright
 And as you feel its friendly blaze,
 Just let your mind go back o'er time
 To happy scenes of early days.
 When you yourself were but a child
 That roamed at will the woodland o'er;
 Oh! how your heart did exultant leap
 Always new country to explore.

Then take your gun from memory's rack
 Which for many moons has forgotten hung
 And see if you again can sing,
 The songs that for years, you've left unsung.
 Then tell some tale of early days
 Of when you hunted in the glade,
 Or when you caught the bear asleep,
 Or lured the trout from the alder shade.

And as each spark arises high
 From this camp-fire's golden light,
 The moon will shed its yellow rays
 On distant snow-caps clear and bright.
 And should these lines make you recall
 Some happy days 'neath skies so fair,
 To me this little camp-fire smoke
 Will be sweet incense on the air.

INDIAN TRAILS

Creeping along the mountain,
 Or winding along the stream,
 Each year growing dimmer and dimmer,
 Then fading away like a dream—

Almost impossible to follow,
 Still in the days long ago,
 These trails were the only highways

And whither did they go?

Some lead deep in the forest
 Where they hunted the deer and bear,
 Where they dried the meat for food
 And skins made them clothes to wear.

While some lead to lakes and rivers
 Where the loon and wild geese call,
 To rice-fields in late October
 When the snow commenced to fall,—

While some climbed high on the mountain
 Where the huckleberries grew,
 And ripened upon the sunny slopes,
 Sweetened by mountain dew,—

Others found way to the border tribes
 Where the war-whoops loud and shrill,
 Echoed along the cliffs and crags,—
 Me-thinks I can hear them still.

Now only a scar on some tree remains
 Of the trails of the long ago,
 The summer comes, the fall appears,
 With winter's frost and snow.

And as each season passes,
 Leaves dimmer every trace,
 I can see the trails a-passing,
 The same as the Indian race.

WINTER

Winter has descended o'er mountain and hill,
 His mantle of snow has spread;
 The grass and flowers are withered and brown,

The leaves on the bushes are dead.

The streams all are silent in icy embrace,
 They are held in his bondage so strong:
 Not even one faint murmur is heard,
 Where they laughed so loud and so long.

The trees are draped in a mantle of snow,
 That clings to their boughs like a shroud,
 And the mountains cold and still and white
 Appear like a light fleecy cloud.

The cattle have come from their good summer range,
 The sheep have all entered the fold,
 Winter, they know, is starting its slumber,
 And the wind is so searching and cold.

The logs in the fire-place crackle and glow—
 Our cabin's all cozy and warm,
 The dogs are a-sleeping,—content as can be,
 So why worry o'er winter's storm.

PASSING OF THE RANGE

Today as I gaze o'er the prairie
 That stretches away into space,
 I look back only a few short years
 At the change that's taken place.

When I was one of the cowboys,
 All our time was spent on the range;
 Now I don't see even one rider,—
 'Tis then I feel lonesome and strange.

No trail-herds with plaintive lowing,
 No shouting, or singing to steers,
 No sound of horses mad galloping,—

It almost moves me to tears.

For then we rode stirrup to stirrup,
 While the jingle of spurs played a tune;
 Oh! could I go back to the round-up
 For a day at the cow-camp in June.

When the grass was so green on the prairie,
 With the cattle all sleek and so fat,
 Each rider all dressed for hard riding,
 With high heels and chaps and wide hat.

Each with his string of horses,
 Some broken and others half wild,
 The wilder the better he liked them,
 Happy and carefree as a child;—

Wild as the steers that they wrangled,
 Hardy as the bronchos they rode,
 Ready to take others' troubles,
 Or carry another one's load.

Those were the real days I tell you—
 Night-herding by light of the stars;
 Three weeks drive to the stockyards
 Where we loaded the steers in the cars.

Then when the loading was finished
 And the cattle were on their way,
 The Boss called the bunch together
 And gave us our season's pay.

We were just like a bunch of children,
 And many an old-timer like me
 Recalls being served in his saddle,
 When on a periodical spree.

Now, cattle are held in pastures,
 They no longer roam wild and free,—
 And the cowboys are gone forever,

Leaving only a memory.

And as each one crosses the border
That is over the Great Divide,
I hope the bunk-house is ample
And none will be left outside.

THE CABIN OF MYSTERY

No trail leads to this cabin,
Not even a blaze on a tree,
Hidden beneath the tall dark firs
Is this cabin of mystery.

No one knew its builder
Or when this cabin was made,
Not one of the oldest trappers
Can explain or give any aid.

The stove still stands in the corner,
The table all neat and clean
And the cupboard still holds its grubstake
As fine as ever was seen.

But there are no traps or stretchers
So no trapper was he,
No prospector's pick or shovel,—
All adds to the mystery.

No name upon the door-jamb,
No initials cut in the wall,
No calendar hangs by the window,
Just silence and mystery—that's all.

But the hills hold many a secret,
That the trails and streams never tell,
We can only guess at the answer

And perhaps it's just as well.

Now as I gaze at this cabin,—
 Brush almost obscuring the door,—
 Many moons have you guarded the secret,
 Keep guard for as many more.

But perhaps when we cross the border
 And step aboard death's train,
 The secrets of hills and mountains,
 To us will then be plain.

WHEN THE LEAVES COMMENCE TO FALL

When the days commence to shorten
 And the nights are getting long,
 And we miss the flies and skeeters
 And the song birds' sweetest song,—
 To some the summer's passing,
 Leaves the world a darker hue,
 But to me it makes it brighter,
 Just the same as if 'twas new.
 As I say, some people hate it,
 But I love it best of all;
 When the nights are getting frosty
 And the leaves commence to fall.

You get up in the morning
 And the air is crisp and cold,
 The hills have on their war paint,
 Crimson, orange, brown and gold;
 And to me they have a message
 That I can't forget at all,
 When the nights are getting frosty
 And the leaves commence to fall.

I can easily foresee

That I cannot tarry long,
 So I at once get busy,
 And my heart is full of song;
 As I look my snow-shoes over,
 And patch up my canoe;
 As happy as a little boy
 Whose red-top boots are new.
 And I work both late and early
 And don't want to stop at all,
 When the nights are getting frosty
 And the leaves commence to fall.

Now the north wind is a-blowing
 But, then little do I care,
 For I know a little cabin
 Holds all my grubstake there.
 And that very self-same cabin
 Is dearer to me than all,
 When the nights are getting frosty
 And the leaves commence to fall.

And so I will soon be starting
 To where the deer on meadows play,
 And the wondrous Northern lights
 Make the forest light as day.
 Back to the lakes and rivers,
 As straight as a laden bee,
 Back to the forest primeval,
 That's where I long to be!
 Trapping on creeks and marshes,
 Back where the bull-moose call.
 When the nights are getting frosty
 And the leaves commence to fall.

AU REVOIR

Now here's my pack of trail-told rhymes,

Written by me at varying times;
Some when the flowers were fresh with bloom
And the air was fragrant with sweet perfume.

And others when forests were dark and drear,
And the meadows all were brown and sear;
The trees were leafless that the wind moaned through,
And frost in the morning replaced the dew.

And some when the snow through his mantle deep
Had told the flowers to go to sleep;
And ever as I took my pen in hand
To picture God's wonders so noble and grand,

I felt if I was able to even phase
One thing correctly, I would sing His praise
To the long trail's end where e'er I tramp,
Till I drop my pack at the last home camp.

And so dear friends, when you gaze on these lines,
Should they take you back to some former times
When you, yourself, were a knight of the hills,
And these lines cause your heart some thrills;

And cause you to say, "He's a friend of mine,
He's a son of Nature, at Nature's shrine!"
Then the world will be sweet as the new mown hay,
Or the blossoms that bloom in the month of May.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK RHYMES OF THE ROCKIES

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