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A Canticle of Praise

A Canticle of Praise

by Witter Bynner



First delivered in the Greek Theatre
at the University of California, Berkeley, Sunday, December first
and now Imprinted for the Joy of the Making by

John Henry Nash

San Francisco

Mdcccclviii

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The interpolated passage beginning
"It's a certain voice" is a part of the author's
translation of Emile Cammaerts's
poem, "La Patrie."

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I

A Cantic of Praise



A salutation of bugle and drum.

The First Cantor, to the continuing solemn, low beat of the drum :

Sing in thanksgiving, a song of the Lord
Who moves in His might through the feet of His horde.
The drum ceases.

O clap your hands, you people, and O you hills, give
praise

For the coming of His glory, the mystery of His ways!
Look and you shall see the Lord, though your eyes be
dim!

Sing and you shall hear the Lord—in His Battle-Hymn!
The People, singing :

“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;

“He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath are stored;

“He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible
swift sword;

“His truth is marching on.

“Glory, glory, hallelujah!

“Glory, glory, hallelujah!

“Glory, glory, hallelujah!

“His truth is marching on.”

The Second Cantor :

Oh clap your hands, you people, and Oh you hills, give
praise!

An end is come of Egypt, an end of evil days.

Under the red sea again that covers all vain things

Are drawn the intolerant, intolerable kings.

Behold, their drowning chariot-wheels, those imperial
wills,

Give praise, Oh you people, and clap your hands, you hills!

A salutation of bugles.

Give thanks for lads who held Liège, the gate,

While Europe shook amazed,

Those first, those garlanded, those sons of fate!

Oh let the name be praised

Of the town where the conquerors met the Belgian heart,

Till France came, and Britain came, to do their part!

Liège! That name! Name it with a shout!

The People :

Liège!

The Second Cantor :

Again—

The People :

Liège!

The first Cantor :

And what were they fighting for, fighting to defend?

They were fighting for the homeland, world without end—

Not for the monster, the devourer, the state,

But for everybody's homeland they held Liège, the gate,

Their home and your home, well you all know it—

Yet hear it in the echo of a Belgian poet. . . .

III

The Second Cantor, as a bell rings softly:

“It’s a certain voice, it’s the sound
“Of a bell in a distant tower,
“It’s sunlight on the ground
“Through trees or after a shower,
“It’s a certain roof under a certain sky,
“The fragrance of the path of a certain street.
“A steeple with a farm kneeling nearby,
“The feeling of the grass under the feet,
“The fragrance of the path of a certain street,
“The flash of a look, the faltering of a hand,
“A something from the past, too quick to understand—
“It’s what one feels and cannot say
“Even when one sings,
“Though that’s the nearest way,
“It’s all those things”—
For which France came and Britain came
To do their part,
And Russia, Russia,
With the bleeding heart. . . .

Both Cantors and the Musicians, singing in unison, first
boldly, then faintly, slowly, to the air of The Volga
Boatmen:

- Hear the boatmen on the Volga,
Hear them singing on the Volga,
Hear the boatmen on the Volga. . . .

The First Cantor:

Hear them, those forgotten men, men with bare hands,
Who fought for their own and for other lands
And in Mazurian marshes, in snow and in sleet,

Saved the British and the French from defeat! . . .
 Remembering Russia, let us not mistake
 Her hopeful, crucified heart-break!
 In our ease of victory, let us give thanks
 To those peasant-soldiers, those Russian ranks
 Who, betrayed by their masters, yet fought and fought
 again —

And dared at last the estate of men. . . .
 Let us be humble and own to them our debt,
 Lest we be arrogant, lest we forget
 Who gave to us our wider cry against imperial wills —
 Praise them, O you people, remember them, you hills!

The Second Cantor:

And why is every freeman every freeman's friend,
 If not for every homeland, world without end!

“It's the body's very best,

“It's the heart-beat in the side

“For children at the breast,

“It's remembering those who died,

“It's the ardor of the way,

“It's the savor of the song,

“It's the dream, aching to stay,

“And the passion, to belong,

“The sower's will to reap,

“The lover's will to keep —

“It's what one feels and cannot say

“Even when one sings,

“Though that's the nearest way,

“It's all those things.”

A long roll of drums.

The First Cantor :

And what would have become of all those things,
 Where would they be, by the will of kings?
 Over them all, a tide would have rolled
 An ocean of iron, if the kings controlled . . .
 But the men of France and England heard the flood,
 They raised human dykes up, dykes of flesh and blood,
 Building, ever building, when some would give way,
 Another and another, till the flood should stay. . . .
 And O the holy river
 Whose calm name shall ever
 Be a name — by which to pray!
 Stand! Uncover!
 Stand, every lover
 Of France and of Britain and of home today
 And name that river, that immortal river,
 Once for the first battle, once for the second,
 Both of those battles which the foe never reckoned,
 Let high heaven hear you say —
 The Marne!

The People :

The Marne!

The First Cantor :

Again —

The People :

The Marne!

The First Cantor :

Stand, yet stand —
 And name the command,
 The everlasting answer

That has saved Alsace!
 Miraculous answer,
 Agonized answer,
 Solemn as a mass!
 Cannon! Machine-gun! Liquid-fire! Gas!
 But Verdun answered—
 Indomitable answer!
 They shall not pass!
 Remember it! Speak it—

The People:

They shall not pass!

The First Cantor:

Again— with all your voices—

The People:

They shall not pass!

A roll of muffled drums.

The Second Cantor:

And now your own are answering. . . .

Listen to them clear—

Saying in their graves,

“Lafayette, we are here”—

Pour young, your quick,

Pour dead, your dear—

O say it, say it with them,

Deeper than a cheer,

Say it as an anthem,

Say it as a tear,

A wreath, a crown—

Lafayette, we are here,

Say it as a prayer—

VII

The People :

Lafayette, we are here.

The Second Cantor :

Say it as a trumpet !

The People :

Lafayette, we are here !

Trumpets blow.

The Second Cantor :

Give praise for America,
Final, mighty, sure,
Whose heart, as the strength of ten,
Dared to endure !

Be glad of her patience,
Slow to wrath . . .
For love shall be given
To a land if love it hath—
And from the land that hath not love
For aye

All that it hath
Shall be taken away . . .
O be glad for America,
Whatever they may say,
America, to whom the world
Turns for love today. . . .
So remember St. Mihiel—
And remember Grandpré—
And the tide at Château-Chierry
That rolled the other way!—
Three cheers for Château-Chierry!
The people cheer.

VIII

The first Cantor, with an accent of cymbals :

 O the catalogue of history,
 The catalogue of cheer,
 City after city
 Which the world holds dear—

The Second Cantor :

 Jerusalem, Bagdad,
 Rheims, Monastir,
 Strassburg, Metz—

Both Cantors :

Free!

The Second Cantor :

 And that city by the Piave,
 That city by the sea,
 Venice, delivered,
 Delivered Italy!

The first Cantor :

 And river after river,
 Line after line,
 The Aisne, the Dise,
 The Meuse—

 A final sharp challenge from the bugle.

Both Cantors and the Musicians :

The Rhine!

 The cymbals cease.

The Second Cantor :

 Cities and rivers
 Evermore to be
 Hymns of the happy,
 Songs of the free. . . .

IX

The first Cantor, with an increasing drum-roll :

 I sing, now sing a song of praise,
 A song of no nation now, of no narrow ways—
 One quick drum-beat.

Both Cantors :

 The song of the world—
 Another single drum-beat.

Both Cantors and the Musicians :

 The Marseillaise!
 A final drum-beat.

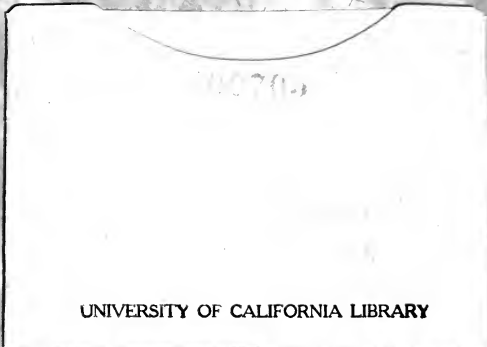
The People, singing :

 “O arouse, ye sons of a world of light,
 “To greet the day your glory comes!
 “Though the might of the tyrant advances,
 “And though hate be the beat of his drums,
 “Though hate be the beat of his drums,
 “Shall the tread of his legions appal you,
 “Though trampling the fields of your home,
 “Though near and nearer yet they come—
 “Hear the lips of your little children call you. . . .
 “To arms, ye sons of light!
 “From mountain to the sea,
 “March on, march on, sons of the world—
 “Till all the world be free!”



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