

Tibetan Voices

By

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Drawings by JEAN HAMMOND

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F I R S T E D I T I O N

D-V

To

*the dear memory of my wife—
Do-rje-mtso to those our friends
who question in the dark*

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Tibetan Voices

THE MAN WHO KILLED

“. . . blood for blood.”

INDEED atonement has been paid
For killing of a man:
Life money—cattle, horses, money, cloth—
Enough to make me poor.
Life money twice over to the brother of the man I killed.
Life money for the killing of my son-in-law, when
My daughter's back was striped with blood.
I could not stand her tears.
That's why the floor was wet with blood
That seeped from where he lay.
But I have paid. Now all may nod and say,
“Indeed atonement has been paid.”
Even my rifle—gun amazing—that I
Had carried many years,
And carrying never used,
Was given in atonement.
I thought too much of merit to kill the fat gazelle,
Or even a wolf fleeing along the hillside—
Until I shot him down—my son-in-law—
Then fled, myself a wolf upon the hillsides.
Wolves, vultures, murderers, and Tem-chok
Who prayed for virtue forty years, and shot
His son-in-law.

Atonement has indeed been paid
In living creatures, wealth, and that most precious gun.

It turned to sin within my hand
And so I gave it up.
But still my heart stays not.
It runs along the hillside—a furtive wolf.
The vultures fly o'er head,
And black shadows cover me.
Once they called me Handsome Fortune Tem-chok.
Now what do they say?
I am an old man—
Well-earned merit gone,
Fingers fumbling with my beads,
Feet that stumble on this path,
And prayers that bring no hope.
The comfort of their sound was drowned by gunfire in
The room where it was done.

Long time ago, Shes-rab, telling of the Jesus way,
Said Jesus' honored blood bought peace for me—
Jesus' honored blood the great atonement is—
Even for me if I would take.
I liked not to hear of blood.
Even honored blood.
I had my better way, no peace
And yet small fear for I was truly good,
I needed not His peace or way.
But now my way is hard, there is no peace and
Blood has brought this weight of sin that
Will not lift.
And yet I told him "No" but yesterday.
Indeed I have atonement paid.
I have these beads, these prayers, this way

That winds around the shrine—
The *skora* path—the circle of
Magic fulfillment.



All these—and yet
The beads are cold within my hands.
The prayers are drowned by sound I cannot hush—
The sound that broke beneath my hand upon the gun;
The sound that will not cease—
And this the *skora* path
Is hard to climb. Even now his brothers—
The brothers of the man I shot—
Might wait for me along this way.
I paid until I am poor.
Yet they might think it not enough
To pay for life.
Some say life for life,

Some say blood for blood,
And Shes-rab says,
“My sin—what can cleanse?
Jesus’ honored blood only.”

No! I will say these prayers,
I will count these beads,
This path—the Enlightened One said
Was good—I will walk.
I want not great atonement.
Indeed atonement has been paid. Did I
Not give my wealth, and rifle too?
I’ll think no more of blood,
And touch not Jesus’ honored blood, though Shes-rab—
Ah—h—the sound again—and—blood!
Blood streaks on my daughter’s back?
His blood upon the floor?
No, mine.
My face is in the dust,
And yet I see the blood that flows along the path.
And pain comes not—but darkness.
The vultures’ shadows darkly fall.
Blood for blood—Shes-rab said,
“Jesus’ honored . . .”



THE DEVIL DANCER

“. . . again I dance.”

TRUMPETS—drums—fellow *drabas*
Chanting words of power.
Three times the dance of gods and demons
Has found me—the best dancer in the lamasery—ready.
Today again I dance.
In the center of the square
The *dorma*—pyramid of evil—stands;
Awaits assault and sure defeat.
Black *dorma* made of flour, fringed with paper flame,
Matrix of the curse that soon will burn,
When the powers of our spoken prayers
Have gathered every woe,

And fixed them in the *dorma* there.
Then religion triumphs over sin.
Trumpets—drums! Let it now begin.

Every skeleton is grisly white and red,
Dancing to the rattling of the bones
That have come from wretches long since dead,
While the sounding of the trumpets sobs and moans
Every mask, a skull with eyes like caves—
That the dancer carries 'round the square.
All of them escaped from open graves;
Fearful spirits dancing everywhere.

The dance of death!
I danced like that three years ago
Until my feet were sore.
For death mimes leap and run—
They are everywhere.
Death is everywhere.
In the book I read of
Life without limit.
What kind of life is life without limit?
And here comes Brong.

The horror of our own wild frozen land—
Here comes the demon of the coldest hell.
Fierce Brong the yak, to trample souls that yell
Beneath his hooves: a damned and tortured band.
As lords of pain the demons come and go,
But Brong's the cruelest, stepping grim and slow.
For after death the soul drops down and mourns
In ice-filled darkness racked by Brong's sharp horns.

The dance of Brong!
I danced like that two years ago.
And shook my horns to show
How all the demons prowl and threaten.
But in the book I read
The story of the devils' overthrow.
A voice they dared not disobey said "go."
They entered swine and drowned,
Leaving two to worship God in peace.
What voice can drive this evil band, with Brong the
 chief,
Back to the depths,
To leave men free?
The king of hell now comes.

'Tis Yama, lord of all the afterlife
 Where men must go. There Yama's awful wife
Awaits all souls. She killed her only son
 And holds him in her teeth. The meal begun,
She champs her bloody jaws and calls for more,
 And sprinkles all around with human gore.
The king of hell who rules the realms of pain,
 Will doom all sinners, ever and again,
To suffer in her jaws. Never one can flee.
 From Yama's chains how then can men be free?

The dance that brings the king of hell:
I danced last year,
And danced in fear.
But in the book I read
The story of the binding of the strong.

Yama shall give up his claim,
For Christ breaks every hobble made of iron—so it said—
Loosens every chain.
Sound the trumpets louder still,
Let the drums roll on!
To the chanting of the priests,
To dance my dance this year
I come.

Chief of all the Black Hat wizards,
Armed with dagger, bolt, and bell
I drive back these hosts of hell.

Thunderbolt, the bell, and dagger
Borrowed from a murderer's hand:

He who rid our ancient land
Of religion's persecutor.

Now the weapon of that hour
Has become religion's power

For the vanquishing of sin.
As we dance this measure through,

Yama and his demon crew
Meekly follow us in line.

We have tamed the powers of hell
Using dagger, bolt and bell;

And our magic incantations.
When within the *dorma* hearse

We embalm the year's black curse
By the dance's mystic power,

Then we'll sacrifice the mass,
Stab and burn it till it pass:

Sacrifice complete.

Thus I dance the Black Hat dance,
But my heart's afraid.
Death still follows red and white,
Demons haunt me in the night,
Yama rules in hell's red light,
And I'm captive by sin's might.
Dorma frees me not.
In that book I read,
"Christ our *dorma* now is sacrificed for us,
Therefore let us keep the festival."
Now my heart will answer,
"Let that offering even now be mine,
And forever I will keep that feast."
I dance the dance of gods and demons
Nevermore.
I follow Christ.
He the *dorma* most complete;
He alone can bring defeat
To death and demons, hell and sin.
I trust in Him, I enter in
To peace I have not known.

LAMA

“. . . as savior.”

I SIT as savior.
By the relic of the Buddha, 'tis
A soft seat—
Good food too.
And in this village the pork they offer



Is sweet and tender;
Good to taste. The foreigner says
I eat too much—am overfat.
But sweet fat pork is like butter in the teeth when
I sit as savior.

If not as savior, then I would have been
A beggar;
If not to eat fat pork, I would
Have starved;
Because my home was poor.
Better to sit and receive their offerings,
And bless them as they come.

Here, my blessing wand—my horsewhip's
The better stick—I must
Bless them as they come with offerings.
Yes, to you, good health—and you—and you;
Peace to your merit; your sins
Are gone, brave son. Healing? Yes, you will
Have it. Ah, good soul,
That is fine butter in your gift.
Merit is yours.

So they come, and soon the visit
Will be over; my throne
Be set in some other village.
These offerings should enable me
To buy more sweetmeats, and flour, fine and white,
From China.
So from village to village, to
Have my throne set in front of
Every village house of prayer;
Under the swinging oracle bones to
Receive gifts and tender pork like
Butter in the teeth.
What else for me? Women?

They say, "No"—the officers of my great house—
And I too say, "No."
But when we stop in villages, a girl or two
To pour my tea at night.
They will never tell, for I'm a lama.
No one would believe them anyway—
The testimony of the senses is illusion—
Only the lama knows;
And I'm the lama.

There's the foreigner on the roof top
Watching me as I bless them all.
I like to visit him, and talk about
The world, and lands beyond the sea;
Read his books,
Eat his food—
Sweet bread we Tibetans know not how
To make.
I liked his food better than his faith.
He gave me sweet bread and talked of
Bread come down from heaven.
I laughed.
He would not laugh—
Too serious he about it all, and preached of
Sin, righteousness, and judgment.
Good words! Because of them—especially judgment—
The people make their offerings.
But why say those words to me?
I'm a lama who sits as savior;
And religion is a good way to eat—
Good food and eating well can make one laugh.

I'll laugh at him now;
Standing with his serious face,
While I bless the people.
It doesn't hurt them when I bless,
Though well I know it doesn't help them on the way.
To consummation of righteousness.
So why not laugh?
My blessing wand! Here they come again
To worship on their knees.
I must touch their reverent heads;
Touch, and bless while I laugh
Within.
I'll wink to the foreigner the while,
I'll wink at him and make him smile,
For he too knows it for a play.
He believes it not.
Yet he talks, and he urges—
Bread come down from heaven;
Sin, righteousness, and judgment—
Too serious he.
He winks not back, though
I wave to him my wand of blessing.
That's all right.
Bread come down from heaven for him;
For me, I'll take the bread these
Offerings will buy.
I sit as savior.
By the presence of the Buddha,
A soft seat, and good food too!

WOMAN OF THE TENT

“. . . set me as wife.”

MILKING time again.
The stars were bright when last we milked,
But now the sun is hot above the tent.
I almost went to sleep;
Then *mdzo-mo*, the milch cow, put her head
Under the curtains of the black tent door.
Tea, butter, cheese—fresh *tsam-ba*, all
Ready for A-ba if he
Returns before I finish milking.
He is good to me;
Hires a servant to dry fuel
And churn the milk when I am tired.
But I, I like to milk the cows—
All mine. Part of the tent in which
A-ba set me as wife.

Here *mdzo-mo* . . . *mdzo-mo* . . . *mdzo-mo* . . . *mdzo-mo!*
Little one with udder full of milk.
Here, gold red beauty with your curving horns,
Come and let me stroke you—hair like silk.
Ah, you mourn for me to milk and pet you,
And you follow me—no longer wild—
For you lost your calf, and you come after
A woman of the black tents without child.
Here *mdzo-mo* . . . *mdzo-mo* . . . give your milk to me.
It's wealth for us, and food to stock the tent.

When flowers sit among the long, long grasses,
To milk and churn, thus time is rightly spent.

A full pail of milk—the
Butter skins are nearly filled,
And wealth increases in his tent in which
A-ba set me as wife.



He needed not to make me wife;
He took my tokens long before—
But I was happy to be wife until
My brother—learned monk who knows religion—
Muttered in his prayers
Of sin and blood's desire.
To wish for child, to hope for babe, and
Mourn as that poor *mdzo-mo* mourns,
Is sin and blood's desire,
So he said.

All sin? Must we live as the nuns,
Or as the shaven-headed ones
Who come as servants in the tent
And count their beads? I know their eyes
Still look at every man; their prayers were lies,
And in the night they darkly went.
I was very young, and if to wive was equal sin—
I gathered gifts and tokens, and let my lovers in
When A-ba was away.
But still thought tenderly of him.
That too was sin.
So my brother—learned in religion—said.
Thus my sins are many, and all that I have done
Has only gathered guilt, and still I have no son.

The years grow long.
The milch cows A-ba
Gave me when the tent was new are dead.
And new ones come like *mdzo-mo*—gold and red—
With her curving horns.
So I grew old and knew not
What is sin, and what is life and tenderness,
Until three years ago.
The foreigners stayed at our tent door,
And for two months they moved with us, and
Camped with us among the grasses and the flowers
Of the steppe in summertime.
They called it sin when laughingly I joked of lovers
Coming in the night.
They told of all our sinful hearts, and spoke of
Punishment for sin, until

My nights were long
With wakeful thoughts and fears.
Sleepless I went to milk
Beneath the stars, calling,
“*Mdzo-mo . . . mdzo-mo . . . mdzo-mo . . .*”

No, I didn't call you.
Out of the tent! You hell-bent one!
Licking me with your rough red tongue!
I spoke of the foreigners telling of sin, and of life,
And of tenderness lived every day,
And mixed with their prayers and religion.
They told of a Saviour who died for all people,
And said that their son was not born of sin;
They told of that Saviour that spoke e'en to women,
They told of His love, but—strangest of all,
Amazing—He went to a marriage and blest that occasion.
To wive is not sin if faith, trust, and prayer
Have lighted the way. They said it, and smiled
Tenderly one to another, but most at their child.
No child have I; but of A-ba
I tenderly think. My sins are so many—
But that is not sin.
With faith, trust, and prayer
My sins will be gone.
That Saviour they worship will hear e'en a woman:
He ate at a marriage feast blessing that time.

A-ba still wonders which way leads above.
A-ba still wonders, but I surely know.
Way of true tenderness, comfort, and love;

Such is the way where I say my prayers,
Though I dare not say them aloud.
Only a woman in a black tent;
Waiting for A-ba to choose the right way,
Waiting for A-ba to love Jesus too.
Then together we can go that bright way,
And together we may live this life through.



THE LAMASERY RULER

“. . . for all my power.”

TODAY I call the outlander to come
And beg a place to put his house, and live
Where both our lamaseries lie beneath
The Goddess of the Tiger's Den. Here all
The tribes come month by month, and year by year,
To worship at our shrines and make us rich.
Go call him now—so strange of eye and hair—
Go tell the “Yellow Head” to drink with me
His noonday tea.

But best of all I laugh to think how Gurdu priests
Will rage; because they said he could not come

To live beside their great and holy place.
They call us "little hermitage" and mock
With jibe on jibe. But now the one they barred
Will live across the stream, within plain view
Of all their shrines. I wonder if he could,
Or would, enchant, and with an evil spell
Send them to hell. ·

And Dzo-pa says the foreigners will bring
Great good and blessing to our folk and place.
They wash foul wounds, and ask no pay to heal.
They lived with him for fifty days, so now
He offers to be surety for them.
That wise old man is hard to fool, and yet
He says they do not lie. Ha, all men lie.
Yet they have told in truth, quite lacking fear,
Why they are here.

The reason they are here is strangest yet.
They cry one Saviour true, against the names
Of all our saviors. Even when they ask
For land, they speak of truth; such truth that by
Its very being makes all else a lie.
I asked if they believed that I could kill
My foe afar. Then Shes-rab smiled, and I
Smiled too. I sometimes like to talk with those
Who dare dark foes.

Sometime when Chinese troops have marched this way,
And Chinese law has come, perhaps he then
Can speak for us. I've heard from refugees

How he can speak with soldiers, bandits, and
The highest ones. He rescued scores from death
With "face," and talking as we cannot talk.
So we will have him here for such a day;
Our Se-chu foreigner to speak indeed
In time of need.

The monks are murmuring about his creed;
I like it not, but like to have him drink
With me, and tell of all the world beyond
The sea: to ask him why the day and night,
And why it rains, and how men learned to fly,
Why rinderpest and smallpox come, and what
Can stop their march. Such things as these I learn
From him. His talk about the Way as yet
I can forget.

'Tis thus in every way we'll profit by
His stay; and yet will always let him think
It all a favor he receives from us.
Just one thing I am fearful of each day.
Around me all believe my magic power
Until I too believe, and then I see
His unbelief that shines so boldly clear
In word and look, till I can only smile
At him the while.

He thinks the people of this place will soon
Believe, and go the Jesus way. Were I
Not sure they cannot change, I'd never let

Him come. But if they do, we'll stop that change
With such a death as comes to flesh and bones
Within a yak hide shrinking in the sun.
Yet he's so sure—perhaps within these walls
Is one who dares to read his books this hour,
For all my power.

The tale he tells, or reads from out his books,
Is horrible and strange. It makes of sin
Not what we all must in our nature do,
And laugh about, but deadly, blackest crime;
Till blood is shed—a horror matching sin—
And death is matched by rising from a grave.
No vulture burial clean; no cycle of
Rebirth. A grave unclean and specter ghost
Appall me most.

Ah, Shes-rab, you have come. Here, sit and drink.
Now we will talk about the world you know.
Or stay, if I should practice magic spells,
Would you have fear? You laugh. Well, we will drink
Our tea. Here, eat the fat—more butter in
Your bowl. Perhaps we'll talk about a place
Where you may live. If only you'd forget
Your specter Saviour with the grave's black rot.
He charms me not.

BRAVE WHO NEARLY DIED

"... I had almost gone ..."

AH, the sun is good. Again I sit where
I can see the mountains and the trees.
Again I see the sky, and on this upper porch
Can drink my tea, with beauty, near and far,
Around me.

'Tis light, not darkness of the room below,
Where the priests still are chanting all the many prayers.
With the beating of the drums,
With the blowing of the horns,
Why should they keep chanting?
They helped me not when I was in the dark.
They could not hold my soul when it began to sink
To some deep place.
And I had almost gone to other darkness
Blacker yet.

Still they think to earn a presentation great;
The sheep, cattle, silver—my old father promised.
I remember when amongst the crags I killed a ram:
Sudden from the speckless blue
Shadows dropped to wait on cliffs—
Croaking—waiting and uneasy still;
Vultures gathered at a kill.

So they came—doctors, wizards, monks and lamas—
Those who came when I was sick.
Yet they helped me not.



What thought I of the vast hereafter—
The unseen darker half of life's great wheel—
Until the sickness came upon me?
Even when we raided, and my horse
Was shot from under me;
Even when I was a prisoner and rode away
With bullets like a hail around me;

Even when with Shes-rab I was stalking mountain sheep,
And turned to hide from other stalkers on our trail;
I found no time or need to pray.

I was a leader of our clan; "brave son"
They called me then; brave with lance and gun.
My sword as sharp as any other.
Tibetan brave to wear a blade, and twist it too,
Within a sheath, till blows are struck,
And blood is shed.
Yet always gave my gifts to festival and priest.
'Twas part of my religion—Tibetan brave's religion.
Then I fell sick. Nor prayer nor sacrifice,
Nor offering great or small
Could strengthen me.

Then brother rode to Shes-rab's place, to call on him.
He could not come to take my pulse,
He could not know what tore within with pain and fire,
And so he was not sure what medicine to send
To me, his friend, so near to death.
He could only choose and send
What heart and wisdom told.
That was all.

Little papers holding bitter grains;
Also powder white that had no taste.
And that was all. Oh no, not all.
I 'most forgot.
For when he gave them to my brother
Thus he said,

“I know not if ’twill bring health or no.
I cannot tell, yet I will pray
To Jesus every day; and if your brother from his pain is free,
The grace of God ’twill be.”

In the darkness of the room below,
In the darkness where my soul fast fell—
Where the muttering of the lamas’ chanting
Changed to moaning of the ghosts in hell—
I still could take what he had sent me,
And taking, soon was well.
But he had said,
“The grace of God ’twill be.”

Not grace of all the vultures’ chantings,
Not grace that waits for presentation great
In cattle, sheep, and silver white;
Such grace, by the Buddha I’ve forgot,
I want it not.
It could not, would not, help me back to health.
For many years it only sought my wealth.
By the image of the resting Buddha,
By the towers of the moon and lotus,
By the thunderbolt and sacred magic,
Yes, by the oath that binds all here below;
The blue wide heavens over all our prayer,
The boughten grace of the Enlightened One,
I throw away, like refuse on the ash heap vile
I’ll have no more religion.
And yet to be without a creed the while,

To have no prayers to pray—although I seldom prayed—
I am afraid.

His medicine could heal and help my flesh.

“The grace of God,” he said. Perhaps the creed
He often talked to me about—I would not heed—
Can save and help my soul and teach me prayer;
Beneath the wide blue heavens everywhere.

In the sun I’ll sit till I am strong,

And then I’ll ride along.

Perhaps “the grace of God”—let Shes-rab say,
If grace, and prayer to Jesus every day,
Can be my new religion.

IDLE MONK

“... for I'm a busy man ...”

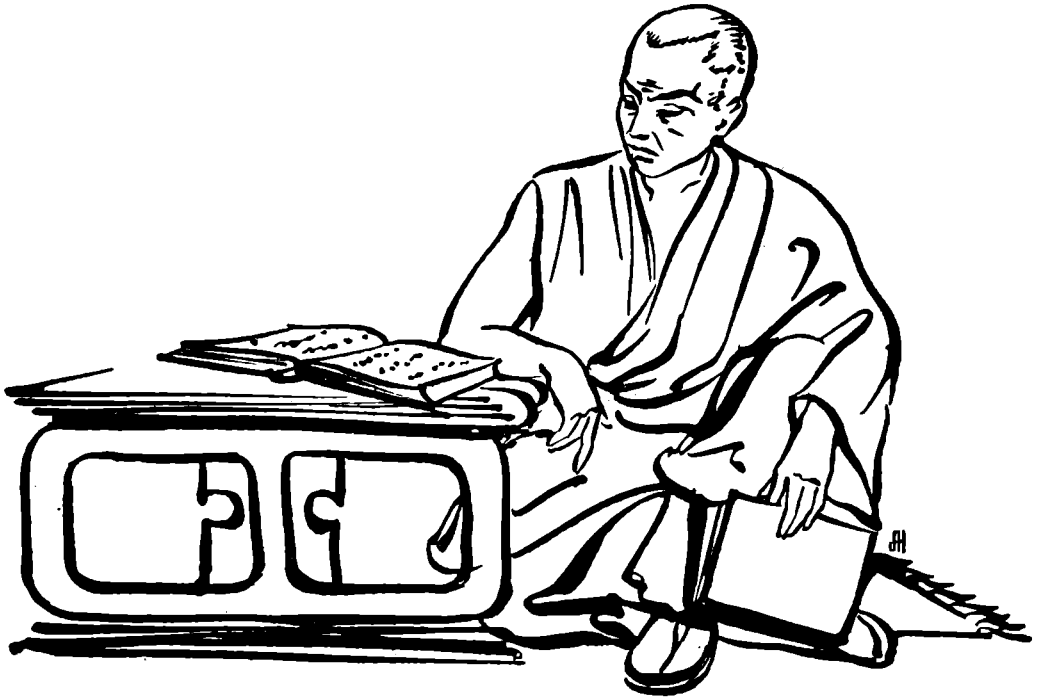
AH, foreigner, are you in peace?

I am. Yes, ever whole and hale. I find
You know me not? Small matter; never mind
My name.
My fame
Is large enough. There's none but knows me well.
Go ask “Stretch Ears,” your friend, and he will tell
Of me.

To see
Your many strange and curious things I've come.
Here foreigner, of all now show me some.
Lamps that burn,
Wheels that turn,
And turning make a sound like men that shout.
Then you can tell me what its all about.
A box
That talks,
Because the lightning rides upon a wire,
And brings the news about a world on fire.

You haven't one?
I've begun
To think you lie, or else you must be poor.
The white man in Labrang has one I'm sure.
What next?

I'm vexed
You haven't wonders such as these. Have done,
And show me "far-near" glasses, or your gun.
Today
I say,
I've come to see.



Then let me have a look
At pictures—men and women in a book—
All bright.
A sight
That's worth the seeing. What! No pictures too?
What's that within those volumes—not a few?
Just creeds
One needs
Perhaps to know for doctrine's sake? Not mine,
But yours.

Give then a picture for my shrine.
I'll take
And make
A place of worship for your Jesus lord,
And paste His colored face upon the board,
With all
I call
My gods—place for Him too. Just give me now
A paper with the colors bright. I vow
Each day
To pray.
And give Him incense too. But still you urge,
You have no idol of your god, to merge
With mine?
One shrine
For all would do.

What do you have to give?
Do I know how to read? Sure as I live,
I read
The creed,
And utter all the prayers within our books,
But not your foreign letters. This looks
Like ours.
What powers
Print smoothly and so well? I read it straight.
"Salvation's way"—God's Word is living—great."
But let
Me set
My hands on that with covers bright and green.
I read it too. Don't ask, "What does it mean?"

The sound
I've found.

“In the beginning was the Word.”

Where was this Word which you say is sublime,
Before that early misty birth of time?

How strange

The range

Of truth itself from that time to this hour.

“With God . . . was God . . . made flesh . . .” such words of
power.

Perchance

I'll glance

Within this book again whene'er I can,

But not today, for I'm a busy man,

And so

Must go,

Since there is nothing more now to be seen.

Well thanks for this. Its cover's bright and green.

If need

I'll read

It too. Some other day you'll let me take

A Jesus picture so that I can make

A god

To laud,

And give Him in my idol house a place,

That wealth may come to me from His great face.

You smile

The while.

A picture now is that for which I pine,
But take instead this book. It's truly mine?
No lie?
Goodbye,

O foreigner, and may you rest in peace.

AGED DWELLER OF THE TENTS

"For I am old . . ."

I WISH, alas, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.
Four years ago I knew, without
The slightest whispering of doubt,
Which way was heaven, which dropped below.



Of course, I knew the way I'd go.
It was the way of fifty years,
It was the way, with pain and fears,
I'd built by pilgrimage and prayer,
And pious offerings everywhere.
So merit—surely reckoned mine

By gifts at every tower and shrine—
Would balance all my sins and blots:
Salvation by the Bodhisats.
But Shes-rab's faith, his Jesus Lord,
Was just a tale too weak, to ward
Away the fear and painful strife
Of all that somber afterlife.
*I wish, my life, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.*

Three years ago I changed and said,
Two ways were right: both surely led
To peace somehow. One strange and new
For foreign feet, and one would do—
Tibetan path; Tibetan sense—
For me, a dweller of the tents.
And though quite different seemed those ways
They'd meet at last through endless days.
'Twas thus I spoke and thus I thought,
Till all my thinking came to nought.
*I wish, my heart, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.*

Two years ago I still believed
My way was good as his, but grieved
Because my load so heavy grew;
The road so hard, my hopes so few,
While on his path there seemed to grow,
Like flowers golden in the snow,
Or all the fragrant bloom and yield
Of summer steppe and autumn field,
Both peace, and peaceful words and deeds,

And acts of kindness more than creeds.
Nor were they done for merit's sake,
His way above more sure to make;
But simply seemed to spring from love
As mirrored from the life above.
While on the way I climbed with fears,
Thronged hate and strife—yes, blood and tears.
If I had only learned to use
That charm my way to tame; not lose
It quite, and have to change my creed,
And try new answers to my need.
For I am old; familiar ways
Are safest for old feet. The days
Grow short for testing which is best.
An old man soon will have to rest.
*I wish, my soul, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.*

'Twas thus I thought and thus I spoke,
But all is changed. I sudden woke
To strange new doubts, and now my day
Is filled with clouds that hide the way.
And through the mists of doubt I hear
The myriad questionings of fear:
Fear of my sin, fear of its wage,
Fear of its end—Hell's boundless rage—
Fear that the answer to my doubt
Is, that I'm wrong, and so without
A rebirth's chance, I wait my doom.
For thus fears riot in the gloom.
So I have lost what peace I knew
And only cry, What shall I do?

Ah, Shes-rab, come within the tent,
And talk with me, then I'm content.
You tell me now, I must believe
In Jesus' name, and so receive
Salvation free—I like to hear
That name of Jesus. In my ear
Its sound is sweet in song or prayer.
I hear its whisper everywhere
When you have told about His love,
And all the tent sites up above,
Where I can pitch my tent, and stay
Encamped within the realm of day.
Yet, how can I of surety
Know it is meant for even me?
And of my tribe, must I alone
Be first to call your faith my own?
For I am old; it's hard to change
To ways uncertain, steps so strange.
Suppose I change, and changing, fail
To plant my feet upon that trail.
Then good or bad I will have lost
My way, nor gained, at any cost,
Your faith. And so between the two
I fall, and fail to find the true.
My heart's so dark—my day is night—
Ah, Shes-rab, pray that God's own light
Will come, and drive the mists away
So I may walk where it is day.
*I wish, strange God, I wish I knew
Which way is right, which way is true.*

TEBU WOMAN TAKES THE SIGN

“ . . . I must have it too.”

NOW come and tell,
You who know both Chinese and our speech,
What he has said
With words so strange—
That bearded preaching Chinaman.
Each day he's told us things about
The Jesus faith,
I once called foreigners' religion.
Yet here the Chinese sing and pray,
And you believe—
Half Tibetan tho you are.
And tell it all to me,
A woman from the Stone Box,
A full Tibetan from the land
Of all the Tebus.

He tells about the “sacred washing”?
And what is that?
A sign that one has taken
Hold on Jesus' creed?
Why then, I too, must have it done,
For I believe.

The old man first believed.
Ever since the foreigners
Lived within our village,

Lived within our home,
Lived within our hearts
At last;
He pondered deep
The Jesus way, and then he too,
Found words to say
His faith.

But I—I had a mouth both sharp
And ever full of words.
They spilled without all day,
I said the ancient charms
For both of us:
The words so strong
To drive away the hail.
And so with words
I split our home in two,
Ever and again.
But still he prayed,
Though I would laugh and jeer,
Until the sickness came upon me,
Weakness, and a whelming fear,
Upon me
Old with fifty years of sin,
And I could laugh and jeer no more.

Come, and tell me clear just what
The “sacred washing” is,
That bearded Chinaman who preaches
Tells about.
All down into the water?

Deep—until it rises swift around me?
And under?
Strangest I did ever hear.
Why leap into the river so?

The clans who live along
Its edge,
Thus throw their dead:
A water burial for Tibetans
Who have no place
Where vultures' wings can fly,
Who have no spot
For burial of the sky—
Where vultures' claws set free the soul.

So that's the sign!
I see! I see! Just like I'm dead—
An ugly dream—
And then I rise again,
To live for Mashika anew.
Yes, I must have it too.
Yes, I must go into that stream.
The old man was the first
To say his faith.
But I'll be first
To have the "sacred washing."

Yet in all my fifty years—
Fifty years of life and labor,
Fifty years of joy and sorrow,
Fifty years with birth and dying,

Fifty years of sins I'm saved from—
Yet in all those fifty years
No water thus has poured o'er me,
Nor come upon my flesh, except
Of course,



To wash my hands and mouth
Each morning as I rise.
And then it sometimes rains
In summertime,
When we are working in the fields.
Yet now for Him
Into that stream I'll leap.

Although the water is so strange,
The sign I'll take for Him.

For He healed me of my sickness,
Yes, He saved me from my weakness.
Like the old man, I believe it too;
That Jesus is the Way and Life anew.
So tell the bearded Chinaman who preaches,
That I will have it too.
When all the Chinese have the "sacred washing,"
Yes, I must have it too.

THE RICH MAN SAYS HIS CREED

“ . . . sign of riches . . . ”

HE'S gone—the foreign guest—from my tent door.
He's gone to preach his gospel to the poor.
At length, perhaps, some beggars will believe;
But only beggars want a faith so cheap
That gives salvation asking nought of price.
Yet somewhat hard, for one must learn to leave
A lot of things—the things he says are sin.
No more with lies to take a trader in,
No more to revel wild—of wine drink deep—
And watch the restless tumbling of the dice.
No more to pick the woman that I want
From New Year's crowds, and make a daring tryst
The night the Butter Images are shown.
For me, I know an easier way. I vaunt
My wealth to buy remission plainly priced
In silver to be paid. For me alone
Five hundred monks will chant atonement words
For all those pleasant things he says are sin.
For me they'll pray. And I'll be great in name
For having bought—with increase of my herds—
The prayers of many monks. And so I win
Both pleasure, merit, and a rich man's fame.

Well, so he's gone. I hope he comes again.
For guests who come to camp at my tent door
Are part of wealth's display, enhance it more

Than any show of swank that's known to men.
No rifle new, no horse like picture drawn,
No wealth of coral, silver set and hung
With lumps of amber, in my daughter's hair,
Is sign of riches half as proud and fair
As guest fires burning near my tent at dawn;
With guests to offer gifts with outstretched tongue.
So when he's preached his gospel to the poor,
I hope he comes again to my tent door.

I told him how to make his faith worthwhile.
I told him how to win a chief or king
With promise of an "iron bird." Indeed
I gave him good advice, Tibetan style.
As host to guest I told him everything
To help him sell his simple priceless creed.
To touch the fear of wealthy chiefs and kings
He might have brought to heads of all the camps
A letter, thick with seals and red with stamps;
An order from the Chinese lord of war
That quickly—under threat of iron wings
That circle in the sky—they must receive
His simple priceless creed, and so believe.
Such were the tricks he might have used—and more.
Instead, he only told of love and grace,
And never mentioned prestige, wealth, and "face."
No great ones have believed; they never will.
And till they do I stay a Buddhist still.

That guest of mine once talked in phrases strange
About a camel, and a gate so small—

Called Needle's Eye—where loads of wealth must fall.
Such talk about a camel! He must change
His talk to make Tibetans hear that word.
The low-browed Mongols have their camel trains;
But we have yak, and horses, swift and strong,
Like those that feed—and grazing, drift along
The meadows green—where all my horses herd.



Such horses—mares from Soktsong and the plains,
With shapely heads and ears that prick the air.
And with that herd that runs along the stream
I pay for all my sins. A single mare,
When changed to offerings, incense smoke, and prayer,

Will buy the merit fifty monks can make;
All piled up for the sins I cannot shake
From off my soul. If when I sleep I dream
Of death, I wake to count my mares again,
And reckon all the prayers they'll buy, for then
The monks will chant and ring those magic bells
To set me free from all the eighteen hells.

What cry is that which runs from tent to tent?
My horse herd's driven off? The *ra-mda* rides?
The raiders from our ancient tribal foes
Have swooped and gone? But taking as they went
My lovely mares. No matter what besides,
They've stolen my release from hellish woes.
My horse—my rifle—and a belt of shells!
Let me but sight them—by the eighteen hells
I'll kill a few. What difference does it make
To kill a score for my salvation's sake?
Lest, when that guest returns to my tent door,
For me he'll preach his gospel to the poor.

TIBETAN MOTHER

"... the touch of tiny fingers ..."

'TIS the third to go and leave me.
Leave, and break my heart with longing
For the touch of tiny fingers;
For a soft and hungry cuddling.



One I had in our encampment
When the grass was gay with flowers,
When the summer sun was shining,
When the cattle, sheep, and horses
All gave birth, until the sunshine
Filled with baby life and rapture.

All to live and grow and prosper.
Only one who did not flourish:
Born beneath the tent's black shadow,
Born to die for all my weeping,
Die, and leave my arms so empty.

Then they said our tent was haunted,
Plagued by hungry evil demons.
And our fireside polluted,
By the hate of hearthstone spirits.
So a tiny son or daughter
Born beneath the tent's black shadow,
Could not grow to healthy childhood;
Could not in my arms lie cooing,
Warmed and happy by that fire,
For the tent's black shadow falling
Surely would bring pain and curses.

So when next I felt the stirrings
Of new life within my body,
For the months and time appointed
We then sought a safer dwelling.
Sought a place within the circle
Of a lamasery's blessing.
On the fringes of the *tgon-ba*,
Where the prayers of holy lamas,
Make a charmed and sacred circle;
There we lived in hope unfailing.
Surely there the devils come not,
Surely there the hearthstones harm not,
And the tent's black shadow lifted.

Tiny son or little daughter
Born within that holy circle
Had a chance to live and prosper.
Then into my arms that daughter
Came to fill their hungry longing—
Born beneath the sacred towers,
Born to hear the sound of praying,
Born to later die and leave me;
Leave me lonely, scarred, and hopeless.

When at night my pain would wake me,
Then alone I'd lie and wonder
Where they'd gone, and how they journeyed—
Tiny son and little daughter.
Till the holy lama told me
Of the bleakness of that journey;
Eighteen hells of murk and anguish,
Hundred thousand angry devils,
Waiting for a tiny spirit
Wand'ring lonely—blindly seeking
Some way back to earth and living;
Some way back to life's illusion.
Then I paid him for his praying,
But my heart was full of anguish;
Wishing I could follow after
Tiny son and little daughter:
Follow them to share their journey,
Comfort, help them in the darkness.

Then again I knew the stirrings
Of another life within me,

Till a tiny son was given
As we made our pilgrimages.
Born upon the road of merit,
Surely he was safe from curses
Even of the fiercest demons;
Surely he would live to bless us.
Then we came to Tahktsang Lhamo,
There to spend the first long winter.
And we lived behind the windbreak
Of the house of Shes-rab Brdzon-grus.
And the wife of Shes-rab Brdzron-grus
Came to see my child when ailing;
For we lived like friends and neighbors
Even went to hear their singing,
And the talk of their religion.
But I little cared to hear it.
All our days were full of doing—
Prayers, and pilgrimage, and off'ring,
And the tasks of daily living.
Yet my child was often ailing
Till the end came—often ailing.
Then my arms again were empty,
And my heart again was lonely,
For my tiny son had left me;
Left my arms for murk and anguish.

*Now the third to go and leave me.
Go, and break my heart with longing
For the touch of tiny fingers;
For a soft and hungry cuddling.*

Then they asked us to their guest room,
Poured us tea to show their feeling,
And we sat beside their fire;
Listened to the words they told us:
Something strange from their religion.
Something strange—I was not listening—
Sudden heard through all my grieving,
“They need not of faith or striving.
They have known not sin or sinning.
They are blessed though you are lonely.
They are saved from pain and anguish.
Jesus takes them in His bosom.
There they rest and wait your coming.”

Tiny son and little daughter,
How I thank them for that telling!
You who left my arms so empty,
Though I know not of religion,
Though I have not prayed to Jesus,
Yet I know they told us truly,
Know you're safe from every evil.

Yet since what they've said is true,
What, oh what must I now do?



AN OLD, OLD WOMAN

"... aged soon to die."

MY eighty years have bent my back,
Yet Do-rje-mtso has gone ahead of me;
The aged soon to die.
An old, old woman I.
I can but weep—the tears must fall.
All year she told me of the way,
Not in the dark, but in the day:
And at the end the Jesus Lord
To let us in.

She helped me lift my dragging feet
Across the threshold of the room
Where we, the women, sat
To learn,
"Jesus to me makes love."
And laid her hand, so soft and clean,
On withered flesh and wrinkled skin
To make me know,
"Jesus to *you* makes love."

But now across the threshold goes
Her silent lips and folded hands:
So I must weep for she has gone.
No more she'll sing so sweet,
"Jesus to me makes love."
Her hands, so soft and clean,
No more will touch my wrinkled skin
To make me know,
"Jesus to *you* makes love."

You say
With you to go the *skora* rounds,
And tread out penance
On the uphill track?
No. Not for me to drag my feet
Around that way and back.
The burden of my eighty years
Has stayed my feet;
I sit and dream
Of days I learned about the living way.

“Jesus to me makes love.”
Such were the words so strange
That Do-rje-mtso once taught my lips
To say.
And then together we would drink our tea
In fireglow, so friendly warm;
So different from the dust of *skora* path
And storm.

But still I could not find belief,
And still my heart had no relief.
So now she's gone, and suddenly
I know.
His stricken lips that try to smile,
Could only tell the truth.
He tells where Do-rje-mtso has gone,
He tells the ending of the way,
“Within the great house many rooms there are . . .”
Where she will wait for us to come.
“We shall there quickly gathered be.”
They sing, and I sing too.

The silent lips will speak again,
But taste no more the gall of pain.
The clean and friendly hands will bless.
Through tears I find I can believe,
And Jesus' grace I can receive.

Enough.
No more the *skora* path for me,
No more the beads in stiffened fingers,

And no more doubts while sunset lingers.
I go the way she went,
Those days she would teach me slow
The path of Jesus' love to know.
I go her way—the Jesus way.

By eighty years my back is bent,
And shackled are
My heavy dragging feet.
But now those years become a boon.
They tell me I shall follow soon
Along the way she went.

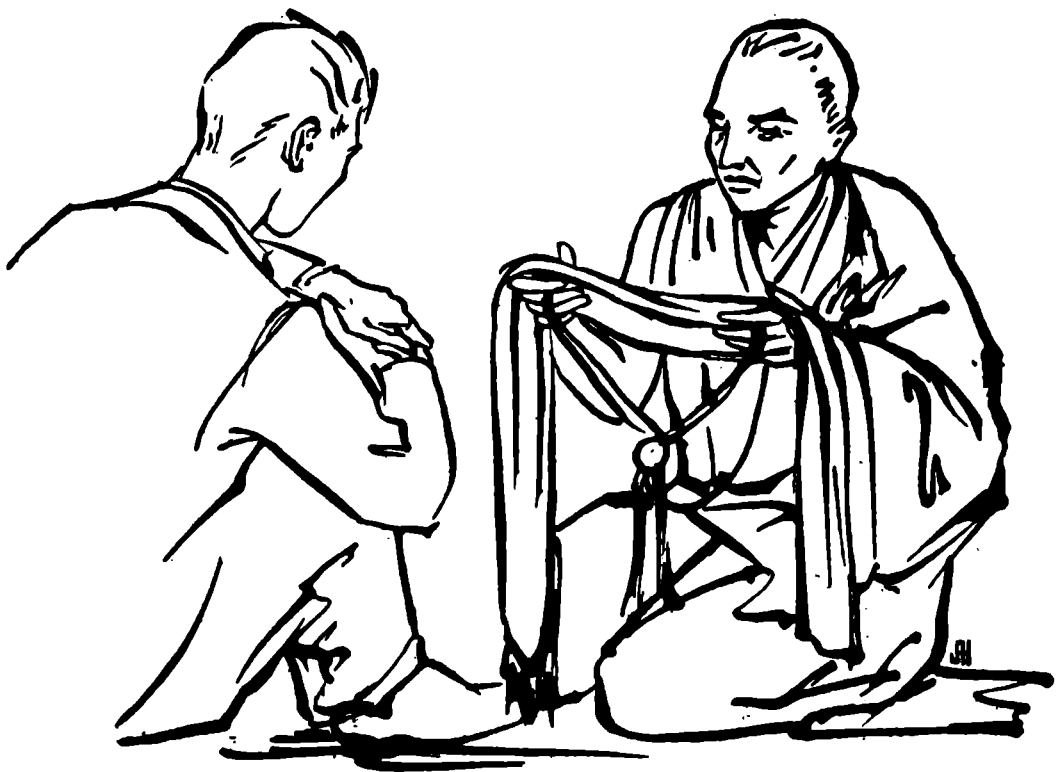
Her voice still whispers in my ear,
“Jesus to *you* makes love.”
Her hand, so soft and clean,
My wrinkled skin will touch again,
And point me out to Jesus Lord,
So He will know me as His guest.
No fear,
For she is there.
And here?
An old, old woman I.

TIBETAN COMFORTER

"... the words which must be said."

THE time it is. Your friends must come to you
And say the words which must be said. But first
Receive this gift, and let me place the scarf
Within your hands. So—now we sit, and I
May sadly ask of Do-rje-mtso your wife.

We know how dear she was to you. We saw
Your love and harmony, beyond what we
Have ever seen or known; one thought, one heart,
One flesh: a woman wise to read and pray
With you; to order all your household ways,
And then to ride with you where'er you went.



How great must be your grief! Your tears are right.
And yet to all—not you alone—comes death
To bring the grief of loss of mate or wife.
No one can hope to live through endless days.
With birth the hour of death is also fixed,
For all must die—not Do-rje-mtso alone.

And yet for you 'tis hard. Away from home
Upon the world's bleak fringe you live alone.
Your son so far away! No one to eat
With you! Alone you drink your bitter tea.

But since it comes to all—not you alone—
Remember not the past, put grief away.
You have a son; you are not aged yet;
Remember life; the days are long ahead.
And, foreigner though you are, you live
Among your friends. So plan for life and put
Your grief away. Yes, listen to your friends,
And put your grief for Do-rje-mtso away.

Of course you've done what always should be done,
And made right effort for the one who's gone?
I do not know what customs rest on you.
If any still are unfulfilled to pile
Up merit for her wand'ring, waiting soul,
Spare neither time, nor strength, nor all you have,
To say such masses as enrich that soul.

And that is all that can be done, so put
Both grief and memory away. Live for

The day. Forget that one-time happy past.
The future no one knows—beyond this realm
The least of all. So think sad thoughts no more,
Nor whet your heart on sorrow's jagged edge.
Again I say to put your grief away.
With that my words are done—I wait your say.

Amazing—what you say. Such hope and faith
Are wonderful, superb. Oh, hold them fast.
By Jesus' grace she's gone above with Him
To be. You upward look and see her not,
But she—I think—can downward look and see.
No merit to be piled up after death?
That's right, for merit must be won in life.
And hers was won by faith in Jesus' life
And death, you say? Hold fast such faith and hope.

Forget her not. She waits above. The day
Will come you'll meet; salvation's way complete.
And her once empty house will rise to be
A palace fair beside your tower strong.
We say that life is temporary still,
And only death lasts on through endless time.
Your hope makes death an incident to pass,
While life lasts on through countless blissful days.
Hold fast such hope, O friend of mine.
Hold it with thoughts of her, and be content,
For Do-rje-mtso will live most blest again.
But only hold your faith unfailing, firm
Against the gloom and doubt long time may bring.

Here I have lost a score of loved ones gone;
For I'm the last of all my line. Not once
In twenty dark and bitter times had I
Such hope. Nor have it yet. Your home's above.
Your loved ones gather there sure one by one.
But where are mine? And even if I made
That home my own, there's no one there of mine.
They never heard or knew the Jesus way,
They died too soon, and now, Oh where are they?

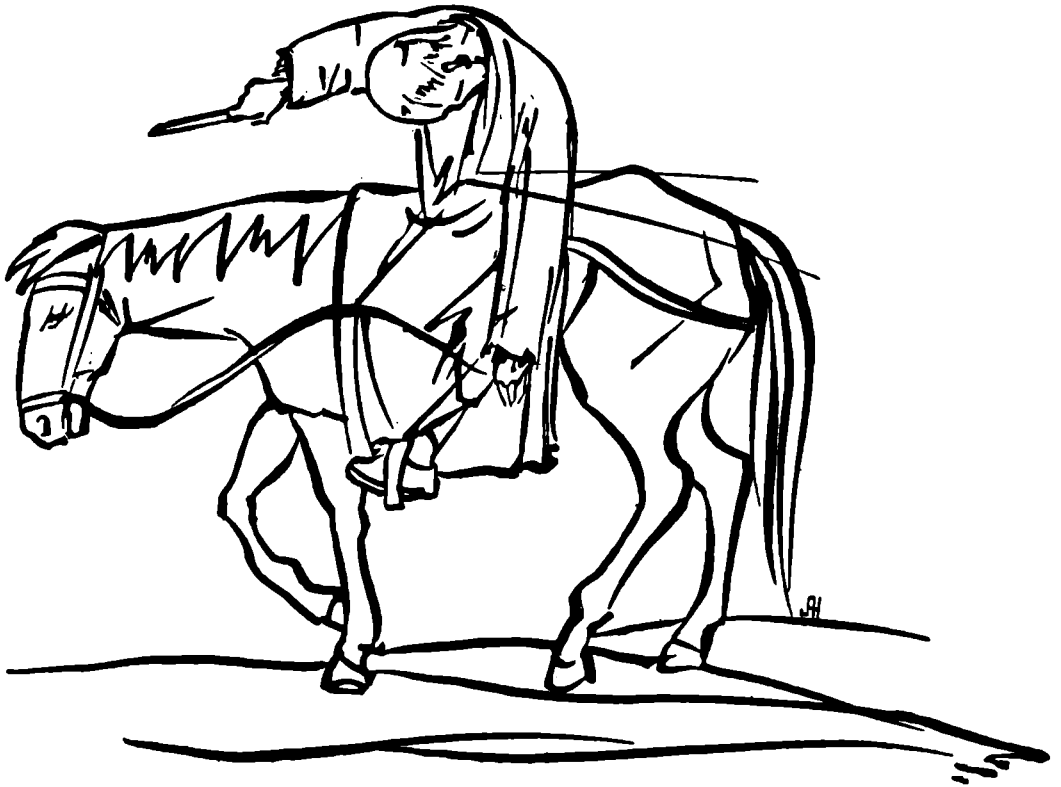
When all is said and done, I urge again,
Put grief away. And think not of the past.
No! Hold the past and future both within
The compass of your faith and hope. You have
What should put all of bitter grief away,
And bring your heart to final blessed peace.
Well, now I go; affection's duty done.

Amazing words—such hope of life complete!

THE MAN WHO KILLED

"Atonement I will pay."

AH, Shes-rab, here's my gift to you.
Yes, I am seeing all my friends—you too.
All who will help—Tibetan style—
A friend in need.



Since last we met, and talked
Of truth—atonement's way—
I am engaged to pay
The most of all I own.
Ah yes, I'll tell you why.

Blood money had never yet been
Paid, for killing of the man.
I did not wish to kill him as he rode:
An old man heavy in the saddle.
But he turned his gun on us
When we called him to a halt.
And mine—the first rifle that
Spoke death.
Death—and an old man's blood
Trickling slowly on the trail.

We did not care.
It seemed worthwhile.
Horse, rifle, and fifty ounces of silver
We took.
And left—only an old man
Face downward on the trail.
He was from the wretched village folk;
Down near the Chinese border;
Far from all our trails and journeys;
Far, too far to ever hunt us,
Or to haunt our festive outings
With the threat of retribution.
Yes, it seemed worthwhile.

Through the years he never bothered me—
That old man—face downward on the trail:
Nor his village folk and kindred.
They are far away; a weak folk.
From living near the Chinese,

They have lost the gift of raiding.
I had almost then forgotten him.
In truth, for simple stealing of a sheep,
I've had far more grief.
The vengeance of the nomads
Is heavier for a single bleating ewe
Roped, and lifted to a horse
In the night.

That old man never
Bothered me,
Until the day you spoke of sins,
And the great retribution.
Until the day my sins began
To gather, like the *ra-mda* riding
In pursuit of one lone raider
On a jaded horse.
Among them all—theft and lust,
And lies and anger; dark thoughts
That hide the face of God from man,
One more; an old man
Face downward on the trail,
And blood.
Retribution seemed at hand—
Close.
Atonement I had none.
And then you told of grace:
Jesus' honored blood the great atonement is.
I learned
Payment had been made, to stop
Those vengeful riders

That gather on the trail of one who was
Alone.

I learned the truth, and by
That truth was freed of all my fears;
Even that latest fear.
Blood for blood had been paid.
Poor old man—face downward
In the dust.

Men began to call me Jesusite,
And I was glad, until
One day the old man in the dust
Came back.

Not fear to haunt, but shame
Because of that new name
I bore.

I knew that I must pay.
My atonement had been paid.
Yet for that very reason, I
Must make a settlement for the man
I killed.

And now because I press to pay;
A new reason pressing in my heart,
The folk of that old man demand
A settlement that beggars me.
My companions will not bear their share.
To them it's foolishness
To pay, when there's no threat
Or fear of vengeance.

The deed is still worthwhile—

For them.

So there is all the reason I

Am visiting my friends.

Ah yes, thank you greatly for

The sum that you propose.

With all the help of all my friends,

Atonement I will pay

To the son and widow of

That poor old man—face downward

In the dust.

Jesus' honored name must honored be.

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