

BEACHCOMBER

and

Other Poems

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Poetry

CHAPBOOKS

Kenneth Heafield

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To
MARGARET

NOTE

Each of the poems appearing in this volume has been published previously in one or more periodicals. The author extends grateful acknowledgment to the editors of the following publications: *American Haiku*, *American Opinion*, *The Christian Century*, *Friends Journal*, *The Green World*, *Olivet College Bulletin*, *Peninsula Poets*, *Poetry Parade*, *Quaker Life*, *South and West*, *Washington Friends Newsletter*.

*Printed and bound in U.S.A.
by the Custom Printing Service
Saginaw Michigan*

SWIFT SEASONS

Grow
Springtime
In your heart.
Let the good seed
Start.

Give
Summer
To your soul
While swift seasons
Roll.

Hold
Autumn
In your hand.
This is harvest
Land.

Keep
Winter
Bright as fire,
White as old church
Spire.

TRANSITION

Bright pageantry of poppies, red and gold,
The summer day stands high at crest of noon.
But rest not long. Where will you stay? What hold?
The chill of autumn comes again too soon.

HOMECOMING

Walk. Don't run. Go slowly down the long road.
Move deliberate in meadows of rue.
View here the gold you never dreamed you'd see,
And wealth you dreamed about, but never knew.

Rejoice. Climb with firm step the cloistered walk.
The hope of yesterday is with you still.
Strong voices merge in pensive mood
When evensong rings forth upon the hill.

Tread lightly. Here is drifting snow
Upon a trail you found long long ago.

DEDICATION

*To those who build halls of learning,
in cities, on hilltops, or in green pastures*

Blessed by the sun, the wind, the urgent rain,
And yesterday but waiting for the builder's hand,
These acres will for ages long sustain
The roots of learning in the constant land.

Storied with dreams and music, toil and tears,
The noble structure crowns the wooded site.
Now each tomorrow for a span of years
May these halls greater grow to reach the light.

Pre-eminent of all who come and go,
The scholar charts again his chosen way.
When summer heat gives place to winter snow,
The life of learning will have come to stay.

STRANGE LAND

God! What am I doing here tonight?
Who is more lost than I, more without light?
Child and man I've now been through
World War I and World War II,
But yet in the end
I cannot choose between friend and friend.
Kiel and Kiev and Kalamazoo
Have been my hosts of the fleeting hour,
But which is which I have long forgotten.

Far or forgot to me is near,
The faith I profess is not quite clear,
And reformed or orthodox to me
Is unresolved in mystery.

Perhaps my own dark labyrinth
Is vaster than all or less or more
But this I know,
Though the rain fall and the whirlwind blow:
The Lord of Hosts will visit again His universe
Troubled with tragic blunder.
His Hand that holds the lightning and the thunder
Did not on Hiroshima's plain
Invoke the ghost men of the August rain.

He would have spared the child at play,
The visiting priest at his prayer,
The old man beginning another day,
The mother engrossed with her infant's care.

When and to whom did my Father in Heaven
Give license to ride the wings of the morning?
Have I seventy times seven
Forgiven those that offend?
Has warrant been given to poison the air,
Make stagnant the living waters?
God, must we stand this day
In the wings of thine illimitable theater
To try for thine own part
In this looming tragedy?
Who plays the role of God this afternoon?

Open again the gates of thy temple, O God.
Lead me beside the still waters.
Give me a song to sing in a strange land.

RECOLLECTION OF SPRING

Plum blossoms drift white,
Pale, fragile, giving no hint
Of purple harvest.

REMEMBRANCE

Child gone home, echo,
Laughter suspended, footprints
Deep in drifting snow.

TRIAD

Ghostly in moonlight:
Mist on the trail, shuttered house,
Pale chrysanthemums.

INTERMEZZO

Stop the show. Parade
No more on the boulevards.
Ban the name of war.

Break the arrow. Loose
The cord from the bow. Go home
To the flickering fire.

Purge the flame. Prepare
For snow. Let each lone actor
Plan for one more show.

PILGRIMAGE

The trail goes up through amaranth and thyme,
But soon goes down to meet the distant sea.
Thus on the long day's pilgrimage you climb,
Then rendezvous on shores of destiny.

MIGRANT WINGS

The migrants moving out at measured rate
May bivouac tonight on chartless foam,
But surely as their legions congregate,
They go tomorrow to another home.

BATTLEGROUND

The blue and gray in wrath encountered here
As youth and valor more than wisdom wrought,
But now the heirs of each bold volunteer
Must weigh the goals that he had sometime sought.

ECHO FOR ADELAIDE

Always
The nightingale,
Oh my dear, always yet
In the gloom thou wilt hear. Oh song
Bright clear.

TRINITY

All that
Remain in time
Are three: Word over all,
Change irrevocable, the deed
Of love.

ONE STEP

One step
Initiates
A trip; one word, a book.
One smile? The candle of kindness
Burns bright.

PRAYER AT A PLACE OF LEARNING

O GOD, most graciously thou walkest here,
Thy footsteps echoing. These are thy halls
Of learning, these the colonnaded walls
That know thy revelation firm and clear.
All zeal and purpose come from thee, O Lord.
The cultivated mind, the healing hand
Are yet thine instruments. Give to this land
Thy music, handiwork, and holy word.
Grant that the universe may know thy face,
Thy measured music heard from every tower,
Thy handiwork revealed in every hour,
That every child and man may learn thy grace.
O God, who walkest here in gardens bright,
Guide us forever to reveal thy light.

BEACHCOMBER

Beach rock retains
Fire of setting sun, memory
Of yesterday's warmth, promise of life tomorrow.
Boulder and sand and sea form threshold and lintel under the sky.
Where is my home?

Chill on the air,
Feathers of frost in the bracken,
Mullein and goldenrod changing the meadows to flame,
All speak of change. Now is the time to rest in the lee of the pine.
Where is my home?

He meditates
Where spindrift looms and the beach curves
To infinity. Build no more estates, but only
A driftwood lodge. Poverty illumines the ways of the pensive.
Here is my home.

AUGUST RAIN

Full of ghosts tonight, the rain echoes memories
Of all yesterdays.

Now the gentle fluent rain blesses the acres of wheat,
The cruel atomic rain all but forgotten,
And now the massive plentiful rain is filling the pools,
Not blighting the rose, or blasting the dream of a child.
Again, as yesterday, the bountiful August rain
Ripens the fruit, showers of the summer noon
Fulfilling the harvest. Now too on a midsummer day
The children play in the streets of the city.
They take no thought for the morrow, speak no prayer.
The hour is appointed, the minutes
Trickle to seconds to eternity.
What now can stay? The lowering militant rain
Explodes on the target city.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts.

The rain is full of ghosts tonight
That hold the domain of the shadows.
You must not remember, you may not forget
The echo of yesterday, the anniversary of the August rain.

DESTINATION

Where are you going, sir? I ask the man in the diner
And he answers Omaha (just like Sandburg's man).
I move through more cars, a shifting caravan.

And where do you travel this winter night?
I ask the young tired mother
Trying to rest in the glare of the light.
Back to Bob's family to leave the boys.
There's another child coming. The Lord knows
I'm going to have need of rest.

Your destination, sir, is it far to the West?
I ask the head of the household-in-transit
Hard-pressed with old portmanteaux.
Yes, friend, we're going to retire.
House burned and we cashed the insurance.
Going where we'll need no fire
To warm the hands or the slow heart.

And where (fragile woman in Roomette Seven)
Would you be going on this long night ride?
Home, she replies. It will be Heaven to watch the sun
Rise and set beyond the Divide.

Then I speak to the small pensive lad
Peripatetic in the aisle:
Shall you sleep at home for a while
This winter night? At Grandfather's, he says.
Perhaps he or you can tell me what I'd like to know:

Is this for certain the way things go?
What comes after the rain and the snow?
Are you and I the travelers tonight
Riding this train and talking so bright?
Or is it a dream? What would you say?
Do you think it might be a story too good to stay?

The train moves on through hail and snow,
It stops at every lighted station,
While passengers make plans to go
Each to his chosen destination.

HOMESTEAD

Treasure this picture of a summer day,
Long meadows redolent of thyme and clover,
Try not a blade or seed or leaf to stay
When shadows loom and evensong is over.

LONDON RIVER

The slow tide slackens in the brooding gloom
(How faint and far the half-remembered light).
Now suddenly the haunts and specters loom
Against the frosted margins of the night.

The ship stands hesitant within her ways
(The stars obscured, the pilot gone ashore).
Each wakeful seaman thinks of dawn. All days
Have come on schedule heretofore.

Where is the compass, where the printed chart?
(Where are the golden galleons of the sea?)
Oh give us a captain stout of heart,
And courage, to fathom our destiny.

ECCE HOMO

Behold
The Man: these words
Will echo at each new
Gethsemane. Why must He stand
Alone?

CURFEW

Good night
My son,
The light
Is gone,
The clock negotiates
The final hour
Too soon.

Good night
All golden lads
And girls,
Children of light.
Nothing stays.
Change of the hour
Is dictum of all our days.

Good night
All that I know.
The greater and lesser light
Will come and go.
All this, and more,
I know. And so
Good night.

SNOW CRYSTAL

A small and perfect universe, each form
Spills truth and beauty from the raging storm.
With shovels or with microscopes men go
Each with his own awareness of the snow.

WINTER AFTERNOON

You cannot match the glory anywhere
Of sunlight, snow, and winter afternoon,
But even while you stand remote, and stare,
The night has come again too soon, too soon.