

# Spoon River Anthology

by

Edgar Lee Masters

A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication

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*Spoon River Anthology*

**Contents**

<b>The Hill</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Hod Putt</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Ollie McGee</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Fletcher McGee</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Robert Fulton Tanner</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Cassius Hueffer</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Serepta Mason</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Amanda Barker</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Chase Henry</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Judge Somers</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Benjamin Pantier</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Mrs. Benjamin Pantier</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Reuben Pantier</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Emily Sparks</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Trainor, the Druggist</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Daisy Fraser</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Benjamin Fraser</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Minerva Jones</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>“Indignation” Jones</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>“Butch” Weldy</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Doctor Meyers</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Mrs. Meyers</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Knowlt Hoheimer</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Lydia Puckett</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Frank Drummer</b> .....	<b>24</b>

*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>Hare Drummer</b> .....	24
<b>Doc Hill</b> .....	25
<b>Sarah Brown</b> .....	25
<b>Percy Bysshe Shelley</b> .....	26
<b>Flossie Cabanis</b> .....	26
<b>Julia Miller</b> .....	27
<b>Johnnie Sayre</b> .....	27
<b>Charlie French</b> .....	28
<b>Zenas Witt</b> .....	28
<b>Theodore the Poet</b> .....	29
<b>The Town Marshal</b> .....	29
<b>Jack McGuire</b> .....	30
<b>Jacob Goodpasture</b> .....	30
<b>Dorcas Gustine</b> .....	31
<b>Nicholas Bindle</b> .....	31
<b>Harold Arnett</b> .....	32
<b>Margaret Fuller Slack</b> .....	32
<b>George Trimble</b> .....	33
<b>“Ace” Shaw</b> .....	33
<b>Willard Fluke</b> .....	34
<b>Aner Clute</b> .....	34
<b>Lucius Atherton</b> .....	35
<b>Homer Clapp</b> .....	35
<b>Deacon Taylor</b> .....	36
<b>Sam Hookey</b> .....	36
<b>Cooney Potter</b> .....	37
<b>Fiddler Jones</b> .....	37

*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>Nellie Clark</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Louise Smith</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Herbert Marshall</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>George Gray</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>Hon. Henry Bennett</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Griffy the Cooper</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>A. D. Blood</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Dora Williams</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Mrs. Williams</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>William and Emily</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>The Circuit Judge</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Blind Jack</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>John Horace Burleson</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Nancy Knapp</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>Barry Holden</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>State's Attorney Fallas</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>Wendell P. Bloyd</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>Francis Turner</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>Franklin Jones</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>John M. Church</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>Russian Sonia</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>Petit, the Poet</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Pauline Barrett</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Mrs. Charles Bliss</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>Mrs. George Reece</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>Rev. Lemuel Wiley</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>Thomas Ross, Jr.</b> .....	<b>52</b>

*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>Rev. Abner Peet</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>Jefferson Howard</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Albert Schirding</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Jonas Keene</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>Yee Bow</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>Washington McNeely</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>Mary McNeely</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>Daniel M' Cumber</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>Georgine Sand Miner</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>Thomas Rhodes</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Penniwit, the Artist</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>Jim Brown</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>Robert Davidson</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>Elsa Wertman</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>Hamilton Greene</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>Ernest Hyde</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Roger Heston</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Amos Sibley</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>Mrs. Sibley</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>Adam Weirauch</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Ezra Bartlett</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Amelia Garrick</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>John Hancock Otis</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>The Unknown</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>Jonathan Swift Somers (Author of the Spooniad)</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>Widow McFarlane</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>Carl Hamblin</b> .....	<b>66</b>

*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>Editor Whedon</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Eugene Carman</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Clarence Fawcett</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>W. Lloyd Garrison Standard</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Professor Newcomer</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Ralph Rhodes</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Mickey M’Grew</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<b>Rosie Roberts</b> .....	<b>70</b>
<b>Oscar Hummel</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<b>Josiah Tompkins</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<b>Roscoe Purkapile</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>Mrs. Purkapile</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>Mrs. Kessler</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>Harmon Whitney</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>Bert Kessler</b> .....	<b>74</b>
<b>Lambert Hutchins</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<b>Lillian Stewart</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<b>Hortense Robbins</b> .....	<b>76</b>
<b>Jacob Godbey</b> .....	<b>76</b>
<b>Walter Simmons</b> .....	<b>77</b>
<b>Tom Beatty</b> .....	<b>77</b>
<b>Roy Butler</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>Searcy Foote</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>Edmund Pollard</b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b>Thomas Trevelyan</b> .....	<b>80</b>
<b>Percival Sharp</b> .....	<b>80</b>
<b>Hiram Scates</b> .....	<b>81</b>

*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>Peleg Poague</b> .....	82
<b>Jeduthan Hawley</b> .....	83
<b>Abel Melveny</b> .....	83
<b>Oaks Tutt</b> .....	84
<b>Elliott Hawkins</b> .....	84
<b>Enoch Dunlap</b> .....	85
<b>Ida Frickey</b> .....	85
<b>Seth Compton</b> .....	86
<b>Felix Schmidt</b> .....	86
<b>Richard Bone</b> .....	87
<b>Silas Dement</b> .....	87
<b>Dillard Sissman</b> .....	88
<b>E. C. Culbertson</b> .....	88
<b>Shack Dye</b> .....	89
<b>Hildrup Tubbs</b> .....	89
<b>Henry Tripp</b> .....	90
<b>Granville Calhoun</b> .....	90
<b>Henry C. Calhoun</b> .....	91
<b>Alfred Moir</b> .....	91
<b>Perry Zoll</b> .....	92
<b>Magrady Graham</b> .....	92
<b>Archibald Higbie</b> .....	93
<b>Tom Merritt</b> .....	93
<b>Mrs. Merritt</b> .....	94
<b>Elmer Karr</b> .....	94
<b>Elizabeth Childers</b> .....	95
<b>Edith Conant</b> .....	96



*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>Father Malloy</b> .....	<b>96</b>
<b>Ami Green</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>Calvin Campbell</b> .....	<b>97</b>
<b>Henry Layton</b> .....	<b>98</b>
<b>Harlan Sewall</b> .....	<b>98</b>
<b>Ippolit Konovaloff</b> .....	<b>99</b>
<b>Henry Phipps</b> .....	<b>99</b>
<b>Harry Wilmans</b> .....	<b>100</b>
<b>John Wasson</b> .....	<b>101</b>
<b>Many Soldiers</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b>Godwin James</b> .....	<b>102</b>
<b>Lyman King</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>Caroline Branson</b> .....	<b>104</b>
<b>Anne Rutledge</b> .....	<b>105</b>
<b>Hamlet Micure</b> .....	<b>105</b>
<b>Mabel Osborne</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<b>William H. Herndon</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<b>Rutherford McDowell</b> .....	<b>107</b>
<b>Hannah Armstrong</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<b>Lucinda Matlock</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<b>Davis Matlock</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>Jennie M'Grew</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>Columbus Cheney</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>Tennessee Claflin Shope</b> .....	<b>110</b>
<b>Imanuel Ehrenhardt</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>Samuel Gardner</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>Dow Krittr</b> .....	<b>112</b>

*Spoon River Anthology*

<b>William Jones</b> .....	<b>112</b>
<b>William Goode</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>J. Milton Miles</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>Faith Matheny</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Willie Metcalf</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Willie Pennington</b> .....	<b>115</b>
<b>The Village Atheist</b> .....	<b>115</b>
<b>John Ballard</b> .....	<b>116</b>
<b>Julian Scott</b> .....	<b>116</b>
<b>Alfonso Churchill</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<b>Zilpha Marsh</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<b>James Garber</b> .....	<b>118</b>
<b>Lydia Humphrey</b> .....	<b>118</b>
<b>Le Roy Goldman</b> .....	<b>119</b>
<b>Gustav Richter</b> .....	<b>119</b>
<b>Arlo Will</b> .....	<b>120</b>
<b>Captain Orlando Killion</b> .....	<b>120</b>
<b>Joseph Dixon</b> .....	<b>121</b>
<b>Russell Kincaid</b> .....	<b>121</b>
<b>Aaron Hatfield</b> .....	<b>122</b>
<b>Isaiah Beethoven</b> .....	<b>122</b>
<b>Elijah Browning</b> .....	<b>123</b>
<b>Webster Ford</b> .....	<b>124</b>
<b>The Spooniad</b> .....	<b>125</b>

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## The Hill

WHERE are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,  
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozier,  
the fighter?

All, all are sleeping on the hill.

One passed in a fever,  
One was burned in a mine,  
One was killed in a brawl,  
One died in a jail,  
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—  
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith,  
The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud, the  
happy one?—

All, all are sleeping on the hill.

One died in shameful child-birth,  
One of a thwarted love,  
One at the hands of a brute in a brothel,  
One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire;  
One after life in far-away London and Paris  
Was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and Mag—  
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

**Hod Putt**

Where are Uncle Isaac and Aunt Emily,  
And old Towny Kincaid and Sevigne Houghton,  
And Major Walker who had talked  
With venerable men of the revolution?—  
All, all are sleeping on the hill.

They brought them dead sons from the war,  
And daughters whom life had crushed,  
And their children fatherless, crying—  
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.  
Where is Old Fiddler Jones  
Who played with life all his ninety years,  
Braving the sleet with bared breast,  
Drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin,  
Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven?  
Lo! he babbles of the fish-frys of long ago,  
Of the horse-races of long ago at Clary's Grove,  
Of what Abe Lincoln said  
One time at Springfield.

HERE I lie close to the grave  
Of Old Bill Piersol,  
Who grew rich trading with the Indians, and who  
Afterwards took the Bankrupt Law  
And emerged from it richer than ever  
Myself grown tired of toil and poverty  
And beholding how Old Bill and other grew in wealth  
Robbed a traveler one Night near Proctor's Grove,  
Killing him unwittingly while doing so,  
For which I was tried and hanged.  
That was my way of going into bankruptcy.  
Now we who took the bankrupt law in our respective ways  
Sleep peacefully side by side.

**Ollie McGee**

HAVE you seen walking through the village  
A Man with downcast eyes and haggard face?  
That is my husband who, by secret cruelty  
Never to be told, robbed me of my youth and my beauty;  
Till at last, wrinkled and with yellow teeth,  
And with broken pride and shameful humility,  
I sank into the grave.  
But what think you gnaws at my husband's heart?  
The face of what I was, the face of what he made me!  
These are driving him to the place where I lie.  
In death, therefore, I am avenged.

**Fletcher McGee**

SHE took my strength by minutes,  
She took my life by hours,  
She drained me like a fevered moon  
That saps the spinning world.  
The days went by like shadows,  
The minutes wheeled like stars.  
She took the pity from my heart,  
And made it into smiles.  
She was a hunk of sculptor's clay,  
My secret thoughts were fingers:  
They flew behind her pensive brow  
And lined it deep with pain.  
They set the lips, and sagged the cheeks,  
And drooped the eye with sorrow.  
My soul had entered in the clay,  
Fighting like seven devils.  
It was not mine, it was not hers;  
She held it, but its struggles  
Modeled a face she hated,  
And a face I feared to see.  
I beat the windows, shook the bolts.  
I hid me in a corner  
And then she died and haunted me,  
And hunted me for life.

**Robert Fulton Tanner**

IF a man could bite the giant hand  
That catches and destroys him,  
As I was bitten by a rat  
While demonstrating my patent trap,  
In my hardware store that day.  
But a man can never avenge himself  
On the monstrous ogre Life.  
You enter the room that's being born;  
And then you must live work out your soul,  
Of the cross-current in life  
Which Bring honor to the dead, who lived in shame.

**Cassius Hueffer**

THEY have chiseled on my stone the words:  
“His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him  
That nature might stand up and say to all the world,  
This was a man.”  
Those who knew me smile  
As they read this empty rhetoric.  
My epitaph should have been:  
“Life was not gentle to him,  
And the elements so mixed in him  
That he made warfare on life  
In the which he was slain.”  
While I lived I could not cope with slanderous tongues,  
Now that I am dead I must submit to an epitaph  
Graven by a fool!

**Serepta Mason**

My life's blossom might have bloomed on all sides  
Save for a bitter wind which stunted my petals  
On the side of me which you in the village could see.  
From the dust I lift a voice of protest:  
My flowering side you never saw!  
Ye living ones, ye are fools indeed  
Who do not know the ways of the wind  
And the unseen forces  
That govern the processes of life.

**Amanda Barker**

HENRY got me with child,  
Knowing that I could not bring forth life  
Without losing my own.  
In my youth therefore I entered the portals of dust.  
Traveler, it is believed in the village where I lived  
That Henry loved me with a husband's love  
But I proclaim from the dust  
That he slew me to gratify his hatred.

**Chase Henry**

IN life I was the town drunkard;  
When I died the priest denied me burial  
In holy ground.  
The which redounded to my good fortune.  
For the Protestants bought this lot,  
And buried my body here,  
Close to the grave of the banker Nicholas,  
And of his wife Priscilla.  
Take note, ye prudent and pious souls,  
Of the cross—currents in life  
Which bring honor to the dead, who lived in shame

**Judge Somers**

How does it happen, tell me,  
That I who was most erudite of lawyers,  
Who knew Blackstone and Coke  
Almost by heart, who made the greatest speech  
The court-house ever heard, and wrote  
A brief that won the praise of Justice Breese  
How does it happen, tell me,  
That I lie here unmarked, forgotten,  
While Chase Henry, the town drunkard,  
Has a marble block, topped by an urn  
Wherein Nature, in a mood ironical,  
Has sown a flowering weed?



## Benjamin Pantier

TOGETHER in this grave lie Benjamin Pantier, attorney at law,  
And Nig, his dog, constant companion, solace and friend.  
Down the gray road, friends, children, men and women,  
Passing one by one out of life, left me till I was alone  
With Nig for partner, bed-fellow; comrade in drink.  
In the morning of life I knew aspiration and saw glory,  
The she, who survives me, snared my soul  
With a snare which bled me to death,  
Till I, once strong of will, lay broken, indifferent,  
Living with Nig in a room back of a dingy office.  
Under my Jaw-bone is snuggled the bony nose of Nig  
Our story is lost in silence. Go by, Mad world!

## Mrs. Benjamin Pantier

I KNOW that he told that I snared his soul  
With a snare which bled him to death.  
And all the men loved him,  
And most of the women pitied him.  
But suppose you are really a lady, and have delicate tastes,  
And loathe the smell of whiskey and onions,  
And the rhythm of Wordsworth's "Ode" runs in your ears,  
While he goes about from morning till night  
Repeating bits of that common thing;  
"Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"  
And then, suppose;  
You are a woman well endowed,  
And the only man with whom the law and morality  
Permit you to have the marital relation  
Is the very man that fills you with disgust  
Every time you think of it while you think of it  
Every time you see him?  
That's why I drove him away from home  
To live with his dog in a dingy room  
Back of his office.

**Reuben Pantier**

WELL, Emily Sparks, your prayers were not wasted,  
Your love was not all in vain.  
I owe whatever I was in life  
To your hope that would not give me up,  
To your love that saw me still as good.  
Dear Emily Sparks, let me tell you the story.  
I pass the effect of my father and mother;  
The milliner's daughter made me trouble  
And out I went in the world,  
Where I passed through every peril known  
Of wine and women and joy of life.  
One night, in a room in the Rue de Rivoli,  
I was drinking wine with a black-eyed cocotte,  
And the tears swam into my eyes.  
She though they were amorous tears and smiled  
For thought of her conquest over me.  
But my soul was three thousand miles away,  
In the days when you taught me in Spoon River.  
And just because you no more could love me,  
Nor pray for me, nor write me letters,  
The eternal silence of you spoke instead.  
And the Black-eyed cocotte took the tears for hers,  
As well as the deceiving kisses I gave her.  
Somehow, from that hour, I had a new vision  
Dear Emily Sparks!

**Emily Sparks**

WHERE is my boy, my boy  
In what far part of the world?  
The boy I loved best of all in the school?—  
I, the teacher, the old maid, the virgin heart,  
Who made them all my children.  
Did I know my boy aright,  
Thinking of him as a spirit aflame,  
Active, ever aspiring?  
Oh, boy, boy, for whom I prayed and prayed  
In many a watchful hour at night,  
Do you remember the letter I wrote you  
Of the beautiful love of Christ?  
And whether you ever took it or not,  
My, boy, wherever you are,  
Work for your soul's sake,  
That all the clay of you, all of the dross of you,  
May yield to the fire of you,  
Till the fire is nothing but light!...  
Nothing but light!

## Trainor, the Druggist

ONLY the chemist can tell, and not always the chemist,  
What will result from compounding  
Fluids or solids.  
And who can tell  
How men and women will interact  
On each other, or what children will result?  
There were Benjamin Pantier and his wife,  
Good in themselves, but evil toward each other;  
He oxygen, she hydrogen,  
Their son, a devastating fire.  
I Trainor, the druggist, a miser of chemicals,  
Killed while making an experiment,  
Lived unwedded.

## Daisy Fraser

DID you ever hear of Editor Whedon  
Giving to the public treasury any of the money he received  
For supporting candidates for office?  
Or for writing up the canning factory  
To get people to invest?  
Or for suppressing the facts about the bank,  
When it was rotten and ready to break?  
Did you ever hear of the Circuit Judge  
Helping anyone except the "Q" railroad,  
Or the bankers? Or did Rev. Peet or Rev. Sibley  
Give any part of their salary, earned by keeping still,  
Or speaking out as the leaders wished them to do,  
To the building of the water works?  
But I Daisy Fraser who always passed  
Along the street through rows of nods and smiles,  
And caught words such as "there she goes."  
Never was taken before Justice Arnett  
Without contributing ten dollars and costs  
To the school fund of Spoon River!

**Benjamin Fraser**

THEIR spirits beat upon mine  
Like the wings of a thousand butterflies.  
I closed my eyes and felt their spirits vibrating.  
I closed my eyes, yet I knew when their lashes  
Fringed their cheeks from downcast eyes,  
And when they turned their heads;  
And when their garments clung to them,  
Or fell from them, in exquisite draperies.  
Their spirits watched my ecstasy  
With wide looks of starry unconcern.  
Their spirits looked upon my torture;  
They drank it as it were the water of life;  
With reddened cheeks, brightened eyes,  
The rising flame of my soul made their spirits guilt,  
Like the wings of a butterfly drifting suddenly into sunlight.  
And they cried to me for life, life, life.  
But in taking life for myself,  
In seizing and crushing their souls,  
As a child crushes grapes and drinks  
From its palms the purple juice,  
I came to this wingless void,  
Where neither red, nor gold, nor wine,  
Nor the rhythm of life are known.

**Minerva Jones**

I AM Minerva, the village poetess,  
Hooted at, jeered at by the Yahoos of the street  
For my heavy body, cock-eye, and rolling walk,  
And all the more when “Butch” Weldy  
Captured me after a brutal hunt.  
He left me to my fate with Doctor Meyers;  
And I sank into death, growing numb from the feet up,  
Like one stepping deeper and deeper into a stream of ice.  
Will some one go to the village newspaper,  
And gather into a book the verses I wrote?—  
I thirsted so for love  
I hungered so for life!

**“Indignation” Jones**

You would not believe, would you  
 That I came from good Welsh stock?  
 That I was purer blooded than the white trash here?  
 And of more direct lineage than the  
 New Englanders And Virginians of Spoon River?  
 You would not believe that I had been to school  
 And read some books.  
 You saw me only as a run-down man  
 With matted hair and beard  
 And ragged clothes.  
 Sometimes a man’s life turns into a cancer  
 From being bruised and continually bruised,  
 And swells into a purplish mass  
 Like growths on stalks of corn.  
 Here was I, a carpenter, mired in a bog of life  
 Into which I walked, thinking it was a meadow,  
 With a slattern for a wife, and poor Minerva, my daughter,  
 Whom you tormented and drove to death.  
 So I crept, crept, like a snail through the days  
 Of my life.  
 No more you hear my footsteps in the morning,  
 Resounding on the hollow sidewalk  
 Going to the grocery store for a little corn meal  
 And a nickel’s worth of bacon.

**“Butch” Weldy**

AFTER I got religion and steadied down  
 They gave me a job in the canning works,  
 And every morning I had to fill  
 The tank in the yard with gasoline,  
 That fed the blow-fires in the sheds  
 To heat the soldering irons.  
 And I mounted a rickety ladder to do it,  
 Carrying buckets full of the stuff.  
 One morning, as I stood there pouring,  
 The air grew still and seemed to heave,  
 And I shot up as the tank exploded,  
 And down I came with both legs broken,  
 And my eyes burned crisp as a couple of eggs.  
 For someone left a blow—fire going,  
 And something sucked the flame in the tank.  
 The Circuit Judge said whoever did it  
 Was a fellow-servant of mine, and so  
 Old Rhodes’ son didn’t have to pay me.  
 And I sat on the witness stand as blind  
 As lack the Fiddler, saying over and over,  
 “I didn’t know him at all.”

**Doctor Meyers**

No other man, unless it was Doc Hill,  
Did more for people in this town than I.  
And all the weak, the halt, the improvident  
And those who could not pay flocked to me.  
I was good-hearted, easy Doctor Meyers.  
I was healthy, happy, in comfortable fortune,  
Blest with a congenial mate, my children raised,  
All wedded, doing well in the world.  
And then one night, Minerva, the poetess,  
Came to me in her trouble, crying.  
I tried to help her out—she died—  
They indicted me, the newspapers disgraced me,  
My wife perished of a broken heart.  
And pneumonia finished me.

**Mrs. Meyers**

HE protested all his life long  
The newspapers lied about him villainously;  
That he was not at fault for Minerva's fall,  
But only tried to help her.  
Poor soul so sunk in sin he could not see  
That even trying to help her, as he called it,  
He had broken the law human and divine.  
Passers by, an ancient admonition to you:  
If your ways would be ways of pleasantness,  
And all your pathways peace,  
Love God and keep his commandments.

## Knowlt Hoheimer

I WAS the first fruits of the battle of Missionary Ridge.  
When I felt the bullet enter my heart  
I wished I had staid at home and gone to jail  
For stealing the hogs of Curl Trenary,  
Instead of running away and joining the army.  
Rather a thousand times the county jail  
Than to lie under this marble figure with wings,  
And this granite pedestal Bearing the words, "Pro Patria."  
What do they mean, anyway?

## Lydia Puckett

KNOWL T HOHEIMER ran away to the war  
The day before Curl Trenary  
Swore out a warrant through Justice Arnett  
For stealing hogs.  
But that's not the reason he turned a soldier.  
He caught me running with Lucius Atherton.  
We quarreled and I told him never again  
To cross my path.  
Then he stole the hogs and went to the war—  
Back of every soldier is a woman.

**Frank Drummer**

OUT of a cell into this darkened space—  
The end at twenty-five!  
My tongue could not speak what stirred within me,  
And the village thought me a fool.  
Yet at the start there was a clear vision,  
A high and urgent purpose in my soul  
Which drove me on trying to memorize  
The Encyclopedia Britannica!

**Hare Drummer**

Do the boys and girls still go to Siever's  
For cider, after school, in late September?  
Or gather hazel nuts among the thickets  
On Aaron Hatfield's farm when the frosts begin?  
For many times with the laughing girls and boys  
Played I along the road and over the hills  
When the sun was low and the air was cool,  
Stopping to club the walnut tree  
Standing leafless against a flaming west.  
Now, the smell of the autumn smoke,  
And the dropping acorns,  
And the echoes about the vales  
Bring dreams of life.  
They hover over me.  
They question me:  
Where are those laughing comrades?  
How many are with me, how many  
In the old orchards along the way to Siever's,  
And in the woods that overlook  
The quiet water?



**Doc Hill**

I WENT up and down the streets  
Here and there by day and night,  
Through all hours of the night caring for the poor who were  
    sick.  
Do you know why?  
My wife hated me, my son went to the dogs.  
And I turned to the people and poured out my love to them.  
Sweet it was to see the crowds about the lawns on the day  
    of my funeral,  
And hear them murmur their love and sorrow.  
But oh, dear God, my soul trembled, scarcely able  
To hold to the railing of the new life  
When I saw Em Stanton behind the oak tree  
At the grave,  
Hiding herself, and her grief!

**Sarah Brown**

MAURICE, weep not, I am not here under this pine tree.  
The balmy air of spring whispers through the sweet grass,  
The stars sparkle, the whippoorwill calls,  
But thou grieveest, while my soul lies rapturous  
In the blest Nirvana of eternal light!  
Go to the good heart that is my husband  
Who broods upon what he calls our guilty love:—  
Tell him that my love for you, no less than my love for him  
Wrought out my destiny— that through the flesh  
I won spirit, and through spirit, peace.  
There is no marriage in heaven  
But there is love.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

My father who owned the wagon-shop  
And grew rich shoeing horses  
Sent me to the University of Montreal.  
I learned nothing and returned home,  
Roaming the fields with Bert Kessler,  
Hunting quail and snipe.  
At Thompson's Lake the trigger of my gun  
Caught in the side of the boat  
And a great hole was shot through my heart.  
Over me a fond father erected this marble shaft,  
On which stands the figure of a woman  
Carved by an Italian artist.  
They say the ashes of my namesake  
Were scattered near the pyramid of Caius Cestius  
Somewhere near Rome.

**Flossie Cabanis**

FROM Bindle's opera house in the village  
To Broadway is a great step.  
But I tried to take it, my ambition fired  
When sixteen years of age,  
Seeing "East Lynne," played here in the village  
By Ralph Barrett, the coming  
Romantic actor, who enthralled my soul.  
True, I trailed back home, a broken failure,  
When Ralph disappeared in New York,  
Leaving me alone in the city—  
But life broke him also.  
In all this place of silence  
There are no kindred spirits.  
How I wish Duse could stand amid the pathos  
Of these quiet fields  
And read these words.

**Julia Miller**

WE quarreled that morning,  
For he was sixty—five, and I was thirty,  
And I was nervous and heavy with the child  
Whose birth I dreaded.  
I thought over the last letter written me  
By that estranged young soul  
Whose betrayal of me I had concealed  
By marrying the old man.  
Then I took morphine and sat down to read.  
Across the blackness that came over my eyes  
I see the flickering light of these words even now:  
“And Jesus said unto him, Verily  
I say unto thee, To-day thou shalt  
Be with me in paradise.”

**Johnnie Sayre**

FATHER, thou canst never know  
The anguish that smote my heart  
For my disobedience, the moment I felt  
The remorseless wheel of the engine  
Sink into the crying flesh of my leg.  
As they carried me to the home of widow Morris  
I could see the school-house in the valley  
To which I played truant to steal rides upon the trains.  
I prayed to live until I could ask your forgiveness—  
And then your tears, your broken words of comfort!  
From the solace of that hour I have gained infinite happiness.  
Thou wert wise to chisel for me:  
“Taken from the evil to come.”

**Charlie French**

DID you ever find out  
Which one of the O'Brien boys it was  
Who snapped the toy pistol against my hand?  
There when the flags were red and white  
In the breeze and "Bucky" Estil  
Was firing the cannon brought to Spoon River  
From Vicksburg by Captain Harris;  
And the lemonade stands were running  
And the band was playing,  
To have it all spoiled  
By a piece of a cap shot under the skin of my hand,  
And the boys all crowding about me saying:  
"You'll die of lock-jaw, Charlie, sure."  
Oh, dear! oh, dear!  
What chum of mine could have done it?

**Zenas Witt**

I WAS sixteen, and I had the most terrible dreams,  
And specks before my eyes, and nervous weakness.  
And I couldn't remember the books I read,  
Like Frank Drummer who memorized page after page.  
And my back was weak, and I worried and worried,  
And I was embarrassed and stammered my lessons,  
And when I stood up to recite I'd forget  
Everything that I had studied.  
Well, I saw Dr. Weese's advertisement,  
And there I read everything in print,  
Just as if he had known me;  
And about the dreams which I couldn't help.  
So I knew I was marked for an early grave.  
And I worried until I had a cough  
And then the dreams stopped.  
And then I slept the sleep without dreams  
Here on the hill by the river.

## Theodore the Poet

As a boy, Theodore, you sat for long hours  
On the shore of the turbid Spoon  
With deep-set eye staring at the door of the crawfish's burrow,  
Waiting for him to appear, pushing ahead,  
First his waving antennae, like straws of hay,  
And soon his body, colored like soap-stone,  
Gemmed with eyes of jet.  
And you wondered in a trance of thought  
What he knew, what he desired, and why he lived at all.  
But later your vision watched for men and women  
Hiding in burrows of fate amid great cities,  
Looking for the souls of them to come out,  
So that you could see  
How they lived, and for what,  
And why they kept crawling so busily  
Along the sandy way where water fails  
As the summer wanes.

## The Town Marshal

THE: Prohibitionists made me Town Marshal  
When the saloons were voted out,  
Because when I was a drinking man,  
Before I joined the church, I killed a Swede  
At the saw-mill near Maple Grove.  
And they wanted a terrible man,  
Grim, righteous, strong, courageous,  
And a hater of saloons and drinkers,  
To keep law and order in the village.  
And they presented me with a loaded cane  
With which I struck Jack McGuire  
Before he drew the gun with which he killed  
The Prohibitionists spent their money in vain  
To hang him, for in a dream  
I appeared to one of the twelve jurymen  
And told him the whole secret story.  
Fourteen years were enough for killing me.

**Jack McGuire**

THEY would have lynched me  
Had I not been secretly hurried away  
To the jail at Peoria.  
And yet I was going peacefully home,  
Carrying my jug, a little drunk,  
When Logan, the marshal, halted me  
Called me a drunken hound and shook me  
And, when I cursed him for it, struck me  
With that Prohibition loaded cane—  
All this before I shot him.  
They would have hanged me except for this:  
My lawyer, Kinsey Keene, was helping to land  
Old Thomas Rhodes for wrecking the bank,  
And the judge was a friend of  
Rhodes And wanted him to escape,  
And Kinsey offered to quit on  
Rhodes For fourteen years for me.  
And the bargain was made.  
I served my time  
And learned to read and write.

**Jacob Goodpasture**

WHEN Fort Sumter fell and the war came  
I cried out in bitterness of soul:  
“O glorious republic now no more!”  
When they buried my soldier son  
To the call of trumpets and the sound of drums  
My heart broke beneath the weight  
Of eighty years, and I cried:  
“Oh, son who died in a cause unjust!  
In the strife of Freedom slain!”  
And I crept here under the grass.  
And now from the battlements of time, behold:  
Thrice thirty million souls being bound together  
In the love of larger truth,  
Rapt in the expectation of the birth  
Of a new Beauty,  
Sprung from Brotherhood and Wisdom.  
I with eyes of spirit see the Transfiguration  
Before you see it.  
But ye infinite brood of golden eagles nesting ever higher,  
Wheeling ever higher, the sun— light wooing  
Of lofty places of Thought,  
Forgive the blindness of the departed owl.

## Dorcas Gustine

I WAS not beloved of the villagers,  
But all because I spoke my mind,  
And met those who transgressed against me  
With plain remonstrance, hiding nor nurturing  
Nor secret griefs nor grudges.  
That act of the Spartan boy is greatly praised,  
Who hid the wolf under his cloak,  
Letting it devour him, uncomplainingly.  
It is braver, I think, to snatch the wolf forth  
And fight him openly, even in the street,  
Amid dust and howls of pain.  
The tongue may be an unruly member—  
But silence poisons the soul.  
Berate me who will—I am content.

## Nicholas Bindle

WERE you not ashamed, fellow citizens,  
When my estate was probated and everyone knew  
How small a fortune I left?—  
You who hounded me in life,  
To give, give, give to the churches, to the poor,  
To the village!—me who had already given much.  
And think you not I did not know  
That the pipe-organ, which I gave to the church,  
Played its christening songs when Deacon Rhodes,  
Who broke and all but ruined me,  
Worshipped for the first time after his acquittal?

**Harold Arnett**

I LEANED against the mantel, sick, sick,  
Thinking of my failure, looking into the abysm,  
Weak from the noon-day heat.  
A church bell sounded mournfully far away,  
I heard the cry of a baby,  
And the coughing of John Yarnell,  
Bed-ridden, feverish, feverish, dying,  
Then the violent voice of my wife:  
“Watch out, the potatoes are burning!”  
I smelled them . . . then there was irresistible disgust.  
I pulled the trigger . . . blackness . . . light . . .  
Unspeakable regret . . . fumbling for the world again.  
Too late! Thus I came here,  
With lungs for breathing . . . one cannot breathe here with lungs,  
Though one must breathe  
Of what use is it To rid one’s self of the world,  
When no soul may ever escape the eternal destiny of life?

**Margaret Fuller Slack**

I WOULD have been as great as George Eliot  
But for an untoward fate.  
For look at the photograph of me made by Penniwit,  
Chin resting on hand, and deep—set eyes—  
Gray, too, and far-searching.  
But there was the old, old problem:  
Should it be celibacy, matrimony or unchastity?  
Then John Slack, the rich druggist, wooed me,  
Luring me with the promise of leisure for my novel,  
And I married him, giving birth to eight children,  
And had no time to write.  
It was all over with me, anyway,  
When I ran the needle in my hand  
While washing the baby’s things,  
And died from lock—jaw, an ironical death.  
Hear me, ambitious souls,  
Sex is the curse of life.



## George Trimble

Do you remember when I stood on the steps  
Of the Court House and talked free-silver,  
And the single-tax of Henry George?  
Then do you remember that, when the Peerless Leader  
Lost the first battle, I began to talk prohibition,  
And became active in the church?  
That was due to my wife,  
Who pictured to me my destruction  
If I did not prove my morality to the people.  
Well, she ruined me:  
For the radicals grew suspicious of me,  
And the conservatives were never sure of me—  
And here I lie, unwept of all.

## “Ace” Shaw

I NEVER saw any difference  
Between playing cards for money  
And selling real estate,  
Practicing law, banking, or anything else.  
For everything is chance.  
Nevertheless  
Seest thou a man diligent in business?  
He shall stand before Kings!

**Willard Fluke**

My wife lost her health,  
And dwindled until she weighed scarce ninety pounds.  
Then that woman, whom the men  
Styled Cleopatra, came along.  
And we— we married ones  
All broke our vows, myself among the rest.  
Years passed and one by one  
Death claimed them all in some hideous form  
And I was borne along by dreams  
Of God's particular grace for me,  
And I began to write, write, write, reams on reams  
Of the second coming of Christ.  
Then Christ came to me and said,  
"Go into the church and stand before the congregation  
And confess your sin."  
But just as I stood up and began to speak  
I saw my little girl, who was sitting in the front seat—  
My little girl who was born blind!  
After that, all is blackness.

**Aner Clute**

OVER and over they used to ask me,  
While buying the wine or the beer,  
In Peoria first, and later in Chicago,  
Denver, Frisco, New York, wherever I lived  
How I happened to lead the life,  
And what was the start of it.  
Well, I told them a silk dress,  
And a promise of marriage from a rich man—  
(It was Lucius Atherton).  
But that was not really it at all.  
Suppose a boy steals an apple  
From the tray at the grocery store,  
And they all begin to call him a thief,  
The editor, minister, judge, and all the people—  
"A thief," "a thief," "a thief," wherever he goes  
And he can't get work, and he can't get bread  
Without stealing it, why the boy will steal.  
It's the way the people regard the theft of the apple  
That makes the boy what he is.

**Lucius Atherton**

WHEN my moustache curled,  
 And my hair was black,  
 And I wore tight trousers  
 And a diamond stud,  
 I was an excellent knave of hearts and took many a trick.  
 But when the gray hairs began to appear—  
 Lo! a new generation of girls  
 Laughed at me, not fearing me,  
 And I had no more exciting adventures  
 Wherein I was all but shot for a heartless devil,  
 But only drabby affairs, warmed-over affairs  
 Of other days and other men.  
 And time went on until I lived at  
 Mayer's restaurant,  
 Partaking of short-orders, a gray, untidy,  
 Toothless, discarded, rural Don Juan. . . .  
 There is a mighty shade here who sings  
 Of one named Beatrice;  
 And I see now that the force that made him great  
 Drove me to the dregs of life.

**Homer Clapp**

OFTEN Aner Clute at the gate  
 Refused me the parting kiss,  
 Saying we should be engaged before that;  
 And just with a distant clasp of the hand  
 She bade me good-night, as I brought her home  
 From the skating rink or the revival.  
 No sooner did my departing footsteps die away  
 Than Lucius Atherton,  
 (So I learned when Aner went to Peoria)  
 Stole in at her window, or took her riding  
 Behind his spanking team of bays  
 Into the country.  
 The shock of it made me settle down  
 And I put all the money I got from my father's estate  
 Into the canning factory, to get the job  
 Of head accountant, and lost it all.  
 And then I knew I was one of Life's fools,  
 Whom only death would treat as the equal  
 Of other men, making me feel like a man.

**Deacon Taylor**

I BELONGED to the church,  
And to the party of prohibition;  
And the villagers thought I died of eating watermelon.  
In truth I had cirrhosis of the liver,  
For every noon for thirty years,  
I slipped behind the prescription partition  
In Trainor's drug store  
And poured a generous drink  
From the bottle marked "Spiritus frumenti."

**Sam Hookey**

I RAN away from home with the circus,  
Having fallen in love with Mademoiselle Estralada,  
The lion tamer.  
One time, having starved the lions  
For more than a day,  
I entered the cage and began to beat Brutus  
And Leo and Gypsy.  
Whereupon Brutus sprang upon me,  
And killed me.  
On entering these regions  
I met a shadow who cursed me,  
And said it served me right. . . .  
It was Robespierre!

## Cooney Potter

I INHERITED forty acres from my Father  
And, by working my wife, my two sons and two daughters  
From dawn to dusk, I acquired  
A thousand acres.  
But not content,  
Wishing to own two thousand acres,  
I bustled through the years with axe and plow,  
Toiling, denying myself, my wife, my sons, my daughters.  
Squire Higbee wrongs me to say  
That I died from smoking Red Eagle cigars.  
Eating hot pie and gulping coffee  
During the scorching hours of harvest time  
Brought me here ere I had reached my sixtieth year.

## Fiddler Jones

THE earth keeps some vibration going  
There in your heart, and that is you.  
And if the people find you can fiddle,  
Why, fiddle you must, for all your life.  
What do you see, a harvest of clover?  
Or a meadow to walk through to the river?  
The wind's in the corn; you rub your hands  
For beeves hereafter ready for market;  
Or else you hear the rustle of skirts  
Like the girls when dancing at Little Grove.  
To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust  
Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drouth;  
They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy  
Stepping it off, to "Toor-a-Loor."  
How could I till my forty acres  
Not to speak of getting more,  
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos  
Stirred in my brain by crows and robins  
And the creak of a wind-mill—only these?  
And I never started to plow in my life  
That some one did not stop in the road  
And take me away to a dance or picnic.  
I ended up with forty acres;  
I ended up with a broken fiddle—  
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,  
And not a single regret.

**Nellie Clark**

I WAS only eight years old;  
And before I grew up and knew what it meant  
I had no words for it, except  
That I was frightened and told my  
Mother; And that my Father got a pistol  
And would have killed Charlie, who was a big boy,  
Fifteen years old, except for his Mother.  
Nevertheless the story clung to me.  
But the man who married me, a widower of thirty-five,  
Was a newcomer and never heard it  
'Till two years after we were married.  
Then he considered himself cheated,  
And the village agreed that I was not really a virgin.  
Well, he deserted me, and I died  
The following winter.

**Louise Smith**

HERBERT broke our engagement of eight years  
When Annabelle returned to the village From the  
Seminary, ah me!  
If I had let my love for him alone  
It might have grown into a beautiful sorrow—  
Who knows? — filling my life with healing fragrance.  
But I tortured it, I poisoned it  
I blinded its eyes, and it became hatred—  
Deadly ivy instead of clematis.  
And my soul fell from its support  
Its tendrils tangled in decay.  
Do not let the will play gardener to your soul  
Unless you are sure  
It is wiser than your soul's nature.

## Herbert Marshall

ALL your sorrow, Louise, and hatred of me  
Sprang from your delusion that it was wantonness  
Of spirit and contempt of your soul's rights  
Which made me turn to Annabelle and forsake you.  
You really grew to hate me for love of me,  
Because I was your soul's happiness,  
Formed and tempered  
To solve your life for you, and would not.  
But you were my misery.  
If you had been  
My happiness would I not have clung to you?  
This is life's sorrow:  
That one can be happy only where two are;  
And that our hearts are drawn to stars  
Which want us not.

## George Gray

I HAVE studied many times  
The marble which was chiseled for me—  
A boat with a furled sail at rest in a harbor.  
In truth it pictures not my destination  
But my life.  
For love was offered me and I shrank from its disillusionment;  
Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid;  
Ambition called to me, but I dreaded the chances.  
Yet all the while I hungered for meaning in my life.  
And now I know that we must lift the sail  
And catch the winds of destiny  
Wherever they drive the boat.  
To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,  
But life without meaning is the torture  
Of restlessness and vague desire—  
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.

**Hon. Henry Bennett**

It never came into my mind  
Until I was ready to die  
That Jenny had loved me to death, with malice of heart.  
For I was seventy, she was thirty—five,  
And I wore myself to a shadow trying to husband  
Jenny, rosy Jenny full of the ardor of life.  
For all my wisdom and grace of mind  
Gave her no delight at all, in very truth,  
But ever and anon she spoke of the giant strength  
Of Willard Shafer, and of his wonderful feat  
Of lifting a traction engine out of the ditch  
One time at Georgie Kirby's.  
So Jenny inherited my fortune and married Willard—  
That mount of brawn! That clownish soul!

**Griffy the Cooper**

THE cooper should know about tubs.  
But I learned about life as well,  
And you who loiter around these graves  
Think you know life.  
You think your eye sweeps about a wide horizon, perhaps,  
In truth you are only looking around the interior of your tub.  
You cannot lift yourself to its rim  
And see the outer world of things,  
And at the same time see yourself.  
You are submerged in the tub of yourself—  
Taboos and rules and appearances,  
Are the staves of your tub.  
Break them and dispel the witchcraft  
Of thinking your tub is life  
And that you know life.



## A. D. Blood

IF you in the village think that my work was a good one,  
Who closed the saloons and stopped all playing at cards,  
And haled old Daisy Fraser before Justice Arnett,  
In many a crusade to purge the people of sin;  
Why do you let the milliner's daughter Dora,  
And the worthless son of Benjamin Pantier  
Nightly make my grave their unholy pillow?

## Dora Williams

WHEN Reuben Pantier ran away and threw me  
I went to Springfield. There I met a lush,  
Whose father just deceased left him a fortune.  
He married me when drunk.  
My life was wretched.  
A year passed and one day they found him dead.  
That made me rich. I moved on to Chicago.  
After a time met Tyler Rountree, villain.  
I moved on to New York. A gray-haired magnate  
Went mad about me—so another fortune.  
He died one night right in my arms, you know.  
(I saw his purple face for years thereafter. )  
There was almost a scandal.  
I moved on, This time to Paris. I was now a woman,  
Insidious, subtle, versed in the world and rich.  
My sweet apartment near the Champs Elysees  
Became a center for all sorts of people,  
Musicians, poets, dandies, artists, nobles,  
Where we spoke French and German, Italian, English.  
I wed Count Navigato, native of Genoa.  
We went to Rome. He poisoned me, I think.  
Now in the Campo Santo overlooking  
The sea where young Columbus dreamed new worlds,  
See what they chiseled: "Contessa Navigato  
Implora eterna quiete."

**Mrs. Williams**

Do you think that Spoon River  
Had been any the worse?

I WAS the milliner  
Talked about, lied about,  
Mother of Dora,  
Whose strange disappearance  
Was charged to her rearing.  
My eye quick to beauty  
Saw much beside ribbons  
And buckles and feathers  
And leghorns and felts,  
To set off sweet faces,  
And dark hair and gold.  
One thing I will tell you  
And one I will ask:  
The stealers of husbands  
Wear powder and trinkets,  
And fashionable hats.  
Wives, wear them yourselves.  
Hats may make divorces—  
They also prevent them.  
Well now, let me ask you:  
If all of the children, born here in Spoon River  
Had been reared by the  
County, somewhere on a farm;  
And the fathers and mothers had been given their freedom  
To live and enjoy, change mates if they wished,

## William and Emily

THERE is something about  
Death Like love itself!  
If with some one with whom you have known passion  
And the glow of youthful love,  
You also, after years of life  
Together, feel the sinking of the fire  
And thus fade away together,  
Gradually, faintly, delicately,  
As it were in each other's arms,  
Passing from the familiar room—  
That is a power of unison between souls  
Like love itself!

## The Circuit Judge

TAKE note, passers-by, of the sharp erosions  
Eaten in my head-stone by the wind and rain—  
Almost as if an intangible Nemesis or hatred  
Were marking scores against me,  
But to destroy, and not preserve, my memory.  
I in life was the Circuit judge, a maker of notches,  
Deciding cases on the points the lawyers scored,  
Not on the right of the matter.  
O wind and rain, leave my head-stone alone  
For worse than the anger of the wronged,  
The curses of the poor,  
Was to lie speechless, yet with vision clear,  
Seeing that even Hod Putt, the murderer,  
Hanged by my sentence,  
Was innocent in soul compared with me.

**Blind Jack**

I HAD fiddled all day at the county fair.  
But driving home “Butch” Weldy and Jack McGuire,  
Who were roaring full, made me fiddle and fiddle  
To the song of Susie Skinner, while whipping the horses  
Till they ran away. Blind as I was, I tried to get out  
As the carriage fell in the ditch,  
And was caught in the wheels and killed.  
There’s a blind man here with a brow  
As big and white as a cloud.  
And all we fiddlers, from highest to lowest,  
Writers of music and tellers of stories  
Sit at his feet,  
And hear him sing of the fall of Troy.

**John Horace Burleson**

I WON the prize essay at school  
Here in the village,  
And published a novel before I was twenty-five.  
I went to the city for themes and to enrich my art;  
There married the banker’s daughter,  
And later became president of the bank—  
Always looking forward to some leisure  
To write an epic novel of the war.  
Meanwhile friend of the great, and lover of letters,  
And host to Matthew Arnold and to Emerson.  
An after dinner speaker, writing essays  
For local clubs. At last brought here—  
My boyhood home, you know—  
Not even a little tablet in Chicago  
To keep my name alive.  
How great it is to write the single line:  
“Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean, roll!”

## Nancy Knapp

WELL, don't you see this was the way of it:  
We bought the farm with what he inherited,  
And his brothers and sisters accused him of poisoning  
His fathers mind against the rest of them.  
And we never had any peace with our treasure.  
The murrain took the cattle, and the crops failed.  
And lightning struck the granary.  
So we mortgaged the farm to keep going.  
And he grew silent and was worried all the time.  
Then some of the neighbors refused to speak to us,  
And took sides with his brothers and sisters.  
And I had no place to turn, as one may say to himself,  
At an earlier time in life;  
"No matter, So and so is my friend, or I can shake this off  
With a little trip to Decatur."  
Then the dreadfulest smells infested the rooms.  
So I set fire to the beds and the old witch-house  
Went up in a roar of flame,  
As I danced in the yard with waving arms,  
While he wept like a freezing steer.

## Barry Holden

THE very fall my sister Nancy Knapp  
Set fire to the house  
They were trying Dr. Duval  
For the murder of Zora Clemens,  
And I sat in the court two weeks  
Listening to every witness.  
It was clear he had got her in a family  
And to let the child be born  
Would not do.  
Well, how about me with eight children,  
And one coming, and the farm  
Mortgaged to Thomas Rhodes?  
And when I got home that night,  
(After listening to the story of the buggy ride,  
And the finding of Zora in the ditch,)  
The first thing I saw, right there by the steps,  
Where the boys had hacked for angle worms,  
Was the hatchet!  
And just as I entered there was my wife,  
Standing before me, big with child.  
She started the talk of the mortgaged farm,  
And I killed her.

**State's Attorney Fallas**

I, THE scourge-wielder, balance-wrecker,  
Smiter with whips and swords;  
I, hater of the breakers of the law;  
I, legalist, inexorable and bitter,  
Driving the jury to hang the madman, Barry Holden,  
Was made as one dead by light too bright for eyes,  
And woke to face a Truth with bloody brow:  
Steel forceps fumbled by a doctor's hand  
Against my boy's head as he entered life  
Made him an idiot. I turned to books of science  
To care for him.  
That's how the world of those whose minds are sick  
Became my work in life, and all my world.  
Poor ruined boy! You were, at last, the potter  
And I and all my deeds of charity  
The vessels of your hand.

**Wendell P. Bloyd**

THEY first charged me with disorderly conduct,  
There being no statute on blasphemy.  
Later they locked me up as insane  
Where I was beaten to death by a Catholic guard.  
My offense was this:  
I said God lied to Adam, and destined him  
To lead the life of a fool,  
Ignorant that there is evil in the world as well as good.  
And when Adam outwitted God by eating the apple  
And saw through the lie,  
God drove him out of Eden to keep him from taking  
The fruit of immortal life.  
For Christ's sake, you sensible people,  
Here's what God Himself says about it in the book of Genesis:  
"And the Lord God said, behold the man  
Is become as one of us" (a little envy, you see),  
"To know good and evil" (The all-is-good lie exposed):  
"And now lest he put forth his hand and take  
Also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever:  
Therefore the Lord God sent Him forth from the garden of  
Eden." (The reason I believe God crucified His Own  
Son  
To get out of the wretched tangle is, because it sounds just  
like Him. )

**Francis Turner**

I COULD not run or play  
In boyhood.  
In manhood I could only sip the cup,  
Not drink—For scarlet-fever left my heart diseased.  
Yet I lie here  
Soothed by a secret none but Mary knows:  
There is a garden of acacia,  
Catalpa trees, and arbors sweet with vines—  
There on that afternoon in June  
By Mary's side—  
Kissing her with my soul upon my lips  
It suddenly took flight.

**Franklin Jones**

IF I could have lived another year  
I could have finished my flying machine,  
And become rich and famous.  
Hence it is fitting the workman  
Who tried to chisel a dove for me  
Made it look more like a chicken.  
For what is it all but being hatched,  
And running about the yard,  
To the day of the block?  
Save that a man has an angel's brain,  
And sees the ax from the first!

**John M. Church**

I WAS attorney for the “Q”  
And the Indemnity Company which insured  
The owners of the mine.  
I pulled the wires with judge and jury,  
And the upper courts, to beat the claims  
Of the crippled, the widow and orphan,  
And made a fortune thereat.  
The bar association sang my praises  
In a high-flown resolution.  
And the floral tributes were many—  
But the rats devoured my heart  
And a snake made a nest in my skull

**Russian Sonia**

I, BORN in Weimar  
Of a mother who was French  
And German father, a most learned professor,  
Orphaned at fourteen years,  
Became a dancer, known as Russian Sonia,  
All up and down the boulevards of Paris,  
Mistress betimes of sundry dukes and counts,  
And later of poor artists and of poets.  
At forty years, passe, I sought New York  
And met old Patrick Hummer on the boat,  
Red-faced and hale, though turned his sixtieth year,  
Returning after having sold a ship-load  
Of cattle in the German city, Hamburg.  
He brought me to Spoon River and we lived here  
For twenty years—they thought that we were married  
This oak tree near me is the favorite haunt  
Of blue jays chattering, chattering all the day.  
And why not? for my very dust is laughing  
For thinking of the humorous thing called life.  
Barney Hainsfeather

If the excursion train to Peoria  
Had just been wrecked, I might have escaped with my life—  
Certainly I should have escaped this place.  
But as it was burned as well, they mistook me



For John Allen who was sent to the Hebrew Cemetery  
At Chicago,  
And John for me, so I lie here.  
It was bad enough to run a clothing store in this town,  
But to be buried here—ach!

## Petit, the Poet

SEEDS in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick,  
Tick, tick, tick, like mites in a quarrel—  
Faint iambs that the full breeze wakens—  
But the pine tree makes a symphony thereof.  
Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,  
Ballades by the score with the same old thought:  
The snows and the roses of yesterday are vanished;  
And what is love but a rose that fades?  
Life all around me here in the village:  
Tragedy, comedy, valor and truth,  
Courage, constancy, heroism, failure—  
All in the loom, and oh what patterns!  
Woodlands, meadows, streams and rivers—  
Blind to all of it all my life long.  
Triolets, villanelles, rondels, rondeaus,  
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick, Tick, tick, tick, what little  
iambs,  
While Homer and Whitman roared in the pines?

**Pauline Barrett**

ALMOST the shell of a woman after the surgeon's knife  
And almost a year to creep back into strength,  
Till the dawn of our wedding decennial  
Found me my seeming self again.  
We walked the forest together,  
By a path of soundless moss and turf.  
But I could not look in your eyes,  
And you could not look in my eyes,  
For such sorrow was ours—the beginning of gray in your  
hair.

And I but a shell of myself.  
And what did we talk of?— sky and water,  
Anything, 'most, to hide our thoughts.  
And then your gift of wild roses,  
Set on the table to grace our dinner.  
Poor heart, how bravely you struggled  
To imagine and live a remembered rapture!  
Then my spirit drooped as the night came on,  
And you left me alone in my room for a while,  
As you did when I was a bride, poor heart.  
And I looked in the mirror and something said:  
“One should be all dead when one is half-dead—”  
Nor ever mock life, nor ever cheat love.”  
And I did it looking there in the mirror—  
Dear, have you ever understood?

**Mrs. Charles Bliss**

REVEREND Wiley advised me not to divorce him  
For the sake of the children,  
And Judge Somers advised him the same.  
So we stuck to the end of the path.  
But two of the children thought he was right,  
And two of the children thought I was right.  
And the two who sided with him blamed me,  
And the two who sided with me blamed him,  
And they grieved for the one they sided with.  
And all were torn with the guilt of judging,  
And tortured in soul because they could not admire  
Equally him and me.  
Now every gardener knows that plants grown in cellars  
Or under stones are twisted and yellow and weak.  
And no mother would let her baby suck  
Diseased milk from her breast.  
Yet preachers and judges advise the raising of souls  
Where there is no sunlight, but only twilight,  
No warmth, but only dampness and cold—  
Preachers and judges!

**Mrs. George Reece**

To this generation I would say:  
Memorize some bit of verse of truth or beauty.  
It may serve a turn in your life.  
My husband had nothing to do  
With the fall of the bank—he was only cashier.  
The wreck was due to the president, Thomas Rhodes,  
And his vain, unscrupulous son.  
Yet my husband was sent to prison,  
And I was left with the children,  
To feed and clothe and school them.  
And I did it, and sent them forth  
Into the world all clean and strong,  
And all through the wisdom of Pope, the poet:  
“Act well your part, there all the honor lies.”

**Rev. Lemuel Wiley**

I PREACHED four thousand sermons,  
I conducted forty revivals,  
And baptized many converts.  
Yet no deed of mine  
Shines brighter in the memory of the world,  
And none is treasured more by me:  
Look how I saved the Blisses from divorce,  
And kept the children free from that disgrace,  
To grow up into moral men and women,  
Happy themselves, a credit to the village.

**Thomas Ross, Jr.**

THIS I saw with my own eyes: A cliff—swallow  
Made her nest in a hole of the high clay-bank  
There near Miller's Ford.  
But no sooner were the young hatched  
Than a snake crawled up to the nest  
To devour the brood.  
Then the mother swallow with swift flutterings  
And shrill cries  
Fought at the snake,  
Blinding him with the beat of her wings,  
Until he, wriggling and rearing his head,  
Fell backward down the bank  
Into Spoon River and was drowned.  
Scarcely an hour passed  
Until a shrike  
Impaled the mother swallow on a thorn.  
As for myself I overcame my lower nature  
Only to be destroyed by my brother's ambition.

**Rev. Abner Peet**

I HAD no objection at all  
To selling my household effects at auction  
On the village square.  
It gave my beloved flock the chance  
To get something which had belonged to me  
For a memorial.  
But that trunk which was struck off  
To Burchard, the grog-keeper!  
Did you know it contained the manuscripts  
Of a lifetime of sermons?  
And he burned them as waste paper.

## Jefferson Howard

My valiant fight! For I call it valiant,  
 With my father's beliefs from old Virginia:  
 Hating slavery, but no less war.  
 I, full of spirit, audacity, courage  
 Thrown into life here in Spoon River,  
 With its dominant forces drawn from  
 New England, Republicans, Calvinists, merchants, bankers,  
 Hating me, yet fearing my arm.  
 With wife and children heavy to carry—  
 Yet fruits of my very zest of life.  
 Stealing odd pleasures that cost me prestige,  
 And reaping evils I had not sown;  
 Foe of the church with its charnel dankness,  
 Friend of the human touch of the tavern;  
 Tangled with fates all alien to me,  
 Deserted by hands I called my own.  
 Then just as I felt my giant strength  
 Short of breath, behold my children  
 Had wound their lives in stranger gardens—  
 And I stood alone, as I started alone  
 My valiant life! I died on my feet,  
 Facing the silence—facing the prospect  
 That no one would know of the fight I made.

## Albert Schirding

JONAS KEENE thought his lot a hard one  
 Because his children were all failures.  
 But I know of a fate more trying than that:  
 It is to be a failure while your children are successes.  
 For I raised a brood of eagles  
 Who flew away at last, leaving me  
 A crow on the abandoned bough.  
 Then, with the ambition to prefix  
 Honorable to my name,  
 And thus to win my children's admiration,  
 I ran for County Superintendent of Schools,  
 Spending my accumulations to win— and lost.  
 That fall my daughter received first prize in  
 Paris For her picture, entitled, "The Old Mill"—  
 (It was of the water mill before Henry Wilkin put in steam.)  
 The feeling that I was not worthy of her finished me.

**Jonas Keene**

WHY did Albert Schirding kill himself  
Trying to be County Superintendent of Schools,  
Blest as he was with the means of life  
And wonderful children, bringing him honor  
Ere he was sixty?  
If even one of my boys could have run a news-stand,  
Or one of my girls could have married a decent man,  
I should not have walked in the rain  
And jumped into bed with clothes all wet,  
Refusing medical aid.

**Yee Bow**

THEY got me into the Sunday-school  
In Spoon River And tried to get me to drop  
Confucius for Jesus. I could have been no worse off  
If I had tried to get them to drop Jesus for Confucius.  
For, without any warning, as if it were a prank,  
And sneaking up behind me, Harry Wiley,  
The minister's son, caved my ribs into my lungs,  
With a blow of his fist.  
Now I shall never sleep with my ancestors in Pekin,  
And no children shall worship at my grave.

## Washington McNeely

RICH, honored by my fellow citizens,  
The father of many children, born of a noble mother,  
All raised there  
In the great mansion—house, at the edge of town.  
Note the cedar tree on the lawn!  
I sent all the boys to Ann Arbor, all of the girls to Rockford,  
The while my life went on, getting more riches and honors—  
Resting under my cedar tree at evening.  
The years went on. I sent the girls to Europe;  
I dowered them when married.  
I gave the boys money to start in business.  
They were strong children, promising as apples  
Before the bitten places show.  
But John fled the country in disgrace.  
Jenny died in child-birth—  
I sat under my cedar tree.  
Harry killed himself after a debauch, Susan was divorced—  
I sat under my cedar tree. Paul was invalided from over  
study,  
Mary became a recluse at home for love of a man—  
I sat under my cedar tree.  
All were gone, or broken-winged or devoured by life—  
I sat under my cedar tree.  
My mate, the mother of them, was taken—  
I sat under my cedar tree,

Till ninety years were tolled.  
O maternal Earth, which rocks the fallen leaf to sleep.

**Mary McNeely**

PASSER-BY,  
To love is to find your own soul  
Through the soul of the beloved one.  
When the beloved one withdraws itself from your soul  
Then you have lost your soul.  
It is written: "I have a friend,  
But my sorrow has no friend."  
Hence my long years of solitude at the home of my father,  
Trying to get myself back,  
And to turn my sorrow into a suppremer self.  
But there was my father with his sorrows,  
Sitting under the cedar tree,  
A picture that sank into my heart at last  
Bringing infinite repose.  
Oh, ye souls who have made life  
Fragrant and white as tube roses  
From earth's dark soil,  
Eternal peace!

**Daniel M'Cumber**

WHEN I went to the city, Mary McNeely,  
I meant to return for you, yes I did.  
But Laura, my landlady's daughter,  
Stole into my life somehow, and won me away.  
Then after some years whom should I meet  
But Georgine Miner from Niles—a sprout  
Of the free love, Fourierist gardens that flourished  
Before the war all over Ohio.  
Her dilettante lover had tired of her,  
And she turned to me for strength and solace.  
She was some kind of a crying thing  
One takes in one's arms, and all at once  
It slimes your face with its running nose,  
And voids its essence all over you;  
Then bites your hand and springs away.  
And there you stand bleeding and smelling to heaven  
Why, Mary McNeely, I was not worthy  
To kiss the hem of your robe!



## Georgine Sand Miner

A STEPMOTHER drove me from home, embittering me.  
A squaw-man, a flaneur and dilettante took my virtue.  
For years I was his mistress—no one knew.  
I learned from him the parasite cunning  
With which I moved with the bluffs, like a flea on a dog.  
All the time I was nothing but “very private,” with different  
men.

Then Daniel, the radical, had me for years.  
His sister called me his mistress;  
And Daniel wrote me:  
“Shameful word, soiling our beautiful love!”  
But my anger coiled, preparing its fangs.  
My Lesbian friend next took a hand.  
She hated Daniel’s sister.  
And Daniel despised her midget husband.  
And she saw a chance for a poisonous thrust:  
I must complain to the wife of Daniel’s pursuit!  
But before I did that I begged him to fly to London with me.  
“Why not stay in the city just as we have?” he asked.  
Then I turned submarine and revenged his repulse  
In the arms of my dilettante friend.  
Then up to the surface, Bearing the letter that Daniel wrote me  
To prove my honor was all intact, showing it to his wife,  
My Lesbian friend and everyone.  
If Daniel had only shot me dead!

Instead of stripping me naked of lies  
A harlot in body and soul.

**Thomas Rhodes**

VERY well, you liberals,  
And navigators into realms intellectual,  
You sailors through heights imaginative,  
Blown about by erratic currents, tumbling into air pockets,  
You Margaret Fuller Slacks, Petits,  
And Tennessee Claflin Shoppes—  
You found with all your boasted wisdom  
How hard at the last it is  
To keep the soul from splitting into cellular atoms.  
While we, seekers of earth's treasures  
Getters and hoarders of gold,  
Are self-contained, compact, harmonized,  
Even to the end.

**Penniwit, the Artist**

I LOST my patronage in Spoon River  
From trying to put my mind in the camera  
To catch the soul of the person.  
The very best picture I ever took  
Was of Judge Somers, attorney at law.  
He sat upright and had me pause  
Till he got his cross-eye straight.  
Then when he was ready he said "all right."  
And I yelled "overruled" and his eye turned up.  
And I caught him just as he used to look  
When saying "I except."

## Jim Brown

WHILE I was handling Dom Pedro  
I got at the thing that divides the race between men who are  
For singing “Turkey in the straw” or  
“There is a fountain filled with blood”—  
(Like Rile Potter used to sing it over at Concord).  
For cards, or for Rev. Peet’s lecture on the holy land;  
For skipping the light fantastic, or passing the plate;  
For Pinafore, or a Sunday school cantata;  
For men, or for money;  
For the people or against them.  
This was it: Rev. Peet and the Social Purity Club,  
Headed by Ben Pantier’s wife,  
Went to the Village trustees,  
And asked them to make me take Dom Pedro  
From the barn of Wash McNeely, there at the edge of town,  
To a barn outside of the corporation,  
On the ground that it corrupted public morals.  
Well, Ben Pantier and Fiddler Jones saved the day—  
They thought it a slam on colts.

## Robert Davidson

I GREW spiritually fat living off the souls of men.  
If I saw a soul that was strong  
I wounded its pride and devoured its strength.  
The shelters of friendship knew my cunning  
For where I could steal a friend I did so.  
And wherever I could enlarge my power  
By undermining ambition, I did so,  
Thus to make smooth my own.  
And to triumph over other souls,  
Just to assert and prove my superior strength,  
Was with me a delight,  
The keen exhilaration of soul gymnastics.  
Devouring souls, I should have lived forever.  
But their undigested remains bred in me a deadly nephritis,  
With fear, restlessness, sinking spirits,  
Hatred, suspicion, vision disturbed.  
I collapsed at last with a shriek.  
Remember the acorn;  
It does not devour other acorns.

**Elsa Wertman**

I WAS a peasant girl from Germany,  
Blue-eyed, rosy, happy and strong.  
And the first place I worked was at Thomas Greene's.  
On a summer's day when she was away  
He stole into the kitchen and took me  
Right in his arms and kissed me on my throat,  
I turning my head. Then neither of us  
Seemed to know what happened.  
And I cried for what would become of me.  
And cried and cried as my secret began to show.  
One day Mrs. Greene said she understood,  
And would make no trouble for me,  
And, being childless, would adopt it.  
(He had given her a farm to be still.)  
So she hid in the house and sent out rumors,  
As if it were going to happen to her.  
And all went well and the child was born—  
They were so kind to me.  
Later I married Gus Wertman, and years passed.  
But— at political rallies when sitters-by thought I was crying  
At the eloquence of Hamilton Greene—  
That was not it. No! I wanted to say:  
That's my son!  
That's my son.

**Hamilton Greene**

I WAS the only child of Frances Harris of Virginia  
And Thomas Greene of Kentucky,  
Of valiant and honorable blood both.  
To them I owe all that I became,  
Judge, member of Congress, leader in the State.  
From my mother I inherited  
Vivacity, fancy, language;  
From my father will, judgment, logic.  
All honor to them  
For what service I was to the people!

## Ernest Hyde

My mind was a mirror:  
It saw what it saw, it knew what it knew.  
In youth my mind was just a mirror In a rapidly flying car,  
Which catches and loses bits of the landscape.  
Then in time  
Great scratches were made on the mirror,  
Letting the outside world come in,  
And letting my inner self look out.  
For this is the birth of the soul in sorrow,  
A birth with gains and losses.  
The mind sees the world as a thing apart,  
And the soul makes the world at one with itself.  
A mirror scratched reflects no image—  
And this is the silence of wisdom.

## Roger Heston

Oh many times did Ernest Hyde and I  
Argue about the freedom of the will.  
My favorite metaphor was Prickett's cow  
Roped out to grass, and free you know as far  
As the length of the rope.  
One day while arguing so, watching the cow  
Pull at the rope to get beyond the circle  
Which she had eaten bare,  
Out came the stake, and tossing up her head,  
She ran for us.  
“What's that, free-will or what?” said Ernest, running.  
I fell just as she gored me to my death.

**Amos Sibley**

NOT character, not fortitude, not patience  
Were mine, the which the village thought I had  
In bearing with my wife, while preaching on,  
Doing the work God chose for me.  
I loathed her as a termagant, as a wanton.  
I knew of her adulteries, every one.  
But even so, if I divorced the woman  
I must forsake the ministry.  
Therefore to do God's work and have it crop,  
I bore with her  
So lied I to myself  
So lied I to Spoon River!  
Yet I tried lecturing, ran for the legislature,  
Canvassed for books, with just the thought in mind:  
If I make money thus,  
I will divorce her.

**Mrs. Sibley**

THE secret of the stars— gravitation.  
The secret of the earth— layers of rock.  
The secret of the soil— to receive seed.  
The secret of the seed— the germ.  
The secret of man— the sower.  
The secret of woman— the soil.  
My secret: Under a mound that you shall never find.

## Adam Weirauch

I WAS crushed between Altgeld and Armour.  
I lost many friends, much time and money  
Fighting for Altgeld whom Editor Whedon  
Denounced as the candidate of gamblers and anarchists.  
Then Armour started to ship dressed meat to Spoon River,  
Forcing me to shut down my slaughter-house  
And my butcher shop went all to pieces.  
The new forces of Altgeld and Armour caught me  
At the same time. I thought it due me, to recoup the money I  
    lost  
And to make good the friends that left me,  
For the Governor to appoint me Canal Commissioner.  
Instead he appointed Whedon of the Spoon River Argus,  
So I ran for the legislature and was elected.  
I said to hell with principle and sold my vote  
On Charles T. Yerkes' street-car franchise.  
Of course I was one of the fellows they caught.  
Who was it, Armour, Altgeld or myself  
That ruined me?

## Ezra Bartlett

A CHAPLAIN in the army,  
A chaplain in the prisons,  
An exhorter in Spoon River,  
Drunk with divinity, Spoon River—  
Yet bringing poor Eliza Johnson to shame,  
And myself to scorn and wretchedness.  
But why will you never see that love of women,  
And even love of wine,  
Are the stimulants by which the soul, hungering for divinity,  
Reaches the ecstatic vision  
And sees the celestial outposts?  
Only after many trials for strength,  
Only when all stimulants fail,  
Does the aspiring soul  
By its own sheer power  
Find the divine  
By resting upon itself.

**Amelia Garrick**

YES, here I lie close to a stunted rose bush  
In a forgotten place near the fence  
Where the thickets from Siever's woods  
Have crept over, growing sparsely.  
And you, you are a leader in New York,  
The wife of a noted millionaire,  
A name in the society columns,  
Beautiful, admired, magnified perhaps  
By the mirage of distance.  
You have succeeded,  
I have failed In the eyes of the world.  
You are alive, I am dead.  
Yet I know that I vanquished your spirit;  
And I know that lying here far from you,  
Unheard of among your great friends  
In the brilliant world where you move,  
I am really the unconquerable power over your life  
That robs it of complete triumph.

**John Hancock Otis**

As to democracy, fellow citizens,  
Are you not prepared to admit  
That I, who inherited riches and was to the manor born,  
Was second to none in Spoon River  
In my devotion to the cause of Liberty?  
While my contemporary, Anthony Findlay,  
Born in a shanty and beginning life  
As a water carrier to the section hands,  
Then becoming a section hand when he was grown,  
Afterwards foreman of the gang, until he rose  
To the superintendency of the railroad,  
Living in Chicago,  
Was a veritable slave driver,  
Grinding the faces of labor,  
And a bitter enemy of democracy.  
And I say to you, Spoon River,  
And to you, O republic,  
Beware of the man who rises to power  
From one suspender.



## The Unknown

YE aspiring ones, listen to the story of the unknown  
Who lies here with no stone to mark the place.  
As a boy reckless and wanton,  
Wandering with gun in hand through the forest  
Near the mansion of Aaron Hatfield,  
I shot a hawk perched on the top  
Of a dead tree. He fell with guttural cry  
At my feet, his wing broken.  
Then I put him in a cage  
Where he lived many days cawing angrily at me  
When I offered him food.  
Daily I search the realms of Hades  
For the soul of the hawk,  
That I may offer him the friendship  
Of one whom life wounded and caged.  
Alexander Throckmorton

In youth my wings were strong and tireless,  
But I did not know the mountains.  
In age I knew the mountains  
But my weary wings could not follow my vision—  
Genius is wisdom and youth.

## Jonathan Swift Somers (Author of the Spooniad)

AFTER you have enriched your soul  
To the highest point,  
With books, thought, suffering,  
The understanding of many personalities,  
The power to interpret glances, silences,  
The pauses in momentous transformations,  
The genius of divination and prophecy;  
So that you feel able at times to hold the world  
In the hollow of your hand;  
Then, if, by the crowding of so many powers  
Into the compass of your soul,  
Your soul takes fire,  
And in the conflagration of your soul  
The evil of the world is lighted up and made clear—  
Be thankful if in that hour of supreme vision  
Life does not fiddle.

## Widow McFarlane

I WAS the Widow McFarlane,  
Weaver of carpets for all the village.  
And I pity you still at the loom of life,  
You who are singing to the shuttle  
And lovingly watching the work of your hands,  
If you reach the day of hate, of terrible truth.  
For the cloth of life is woven, you know,  
To a pattern hidden under the loom—  
A pattern you never see!  
And you weave high-hearted, singing, singing,  
You guard the threads of love and friendship  
For noble figures in gold and purple.  
And long after other eyes can see  
You have woven a moon-white strip of cloth,  
You laugh in your strength, for Hope overlays it  
With shapes of love and beauty.  
The loom stops short!  
The pattern's out  
You're alone in the room!  
You have woven a shroud  
And hate of it lays you in it.

## Carl Hamblin

THE press of the Spoon River Clarion was wrecked,  
And I was tarred and feathered,  
For publishing this on the day the  
Anarchists were hanged in Chicago:  
"I saw a beautiful woman with bandaged eyes  
Standing on the steps of a marble temple.  
Great multitudes passed in front of her,  
Lifting their faces to her imploringly.  
In her left hand she held a sword.  
She was brandishing the sword,  
Sometimes striking a child, again a laborer,  
Again a slinking woman, again a lunatic.  
In her right hand she held a scale;  
Into the scale pieces of gold were tossed  
By those who dodged the strokes of the sword.  
A man in a black gown read from a manuscript:  
"She is no respecter of persons."  
Then a youth wearing a red cap  
Leaped to her side and snatched away the bandage.  
And lo, the lashes had been eaten away  
From the oozy eye-lids;  
The eye-balls were seared with a milky mucus;  
The madness of a dying soul  
Was written on her face—  
But the multitude saw why she wore the bandage."

**Editor Whedon**

To be able to see every side of every question;  
 To be on every side, to be everything, to be nothing long;  
 To pervert truth, to ride it for a purpose,  
 To use great feelings and passions of the human family  
 For base designs, for cunning ends,  
 To wear a mask like the Greek actors—  
 Your eight-page paper— behind which you huddle,  
 Bawling through the megaphone of big type:  
 “This is I, the giant.”  
 Thereby also living the life of a sneak-thief,  
 Poisoned with the anonymous words  
 Of your clandestine soul.  
 To scratch dirt over scandal for money,  
 And exhume it to the winds for revenge,  
 Or to sell papers,  
 Crushing reputations, or bodies, if need be,  
 To win at any cost, save your own life.  
 To glory in demoniac power, ditching civilization,  
 As a paranoiac boy puts a log on the track  
 And derails the express train.  
 To be an editor, as I was.  
 Then to lie here close by the river over the place  
 Where the sewage flows from the village,  
 And the empty cans and garbage are dumped,  
 And abortions are hidden.

**Eugene Carman**

RHODES, slave! Selling shoes and gingham,  
 Flour and bacon, overalls, clothing, all day long  
 For fourteen hours a day for three hundred and thirteen days  
 For more than twenty years.  
 Saying “Yes’m” and “Yes, sir”, and “Thank you”  
 A thousand times a day, and all for fifty dollars a month.  
 Living in this stinking room in the rattle-trap “Commercial.”  
 And compelled to go to Sunday School, and to listen  
 To the Rev. Abner Peet one hundred and four times a year  
 For more than an hour at a time,  
 Because Thomas Rhodes ran the church  
 As well as the store and the bank.  
 So while I was tying my neck-tie that morning  
 I suddenly saw myself in the glass:  
 My hair all gray, my face like a sodden pie.  
 So I cursed and cursed: You damned old thing  
 You cowardly dog! You rotten pauper!  
 You Rhodes’ slave! Till Roger Baughman  
 Thought I was having a fight with some one,  
 And looked through the transom just in time  
 To see me fall on the floor in a heap  
 From a broken vein in my head.

**Clarence Fawcett**

THE sudden death of Eugene Carman  
Put me in line to be promoted to fifty dollars a month,  
And I told my wife and children that night.  
But it didn't come, and so I thought  
Old Rhodes suspected me of stealing  
The blankets I took and sold on the side  
For money to pay a doctor's bill for my little girl.  
Then like a bolt old Rhodes accused me,  
And promised me mercy for my family's sake  
If I confessed, and so I confessed,  
And begged him to keep it out of the papers,  
And I asked the editors, too.  
That night at home the constable took me  
And every paper, except the Clarion,  
Wrote me up as a thief  
Because old Rhodes was an advertiser  
And wanted to make an example of me.  
Oh! well, you know how the children cried,  
And how my wife pitied and hated me,  
And how I came to lie here.

**W. Lloyd Garrison Standard**

VEGETARIAN, non—resistant, free-thinker, in ethics a Christian;  
Orator apt at the rhine-stone rhythm of Ingersoll.  
Carnivorous, avenger, believer and pagan.  
Continent, promiscuous, changeable, treacherous, vain,  
Proud, with the pride that makes struggle a thing for laughter;  
With heart cored out by the worm of theatric despair.  
Wearing the coat of indifference to hide the shame of defeat;  
I, child of the abolitionist idealism—  
A sort of Brand in a birth of half-and-half.  
What other thing could happen when I defended  
The patriot scamps who burned the court house  
That Spoon River might have a new one  
Than plead them guilty?  
When Kinsey Keene drove through  
The card—board mask of my life with a spear of light,  
What could I do but slink away, like the beast of myself  
Which I raised from a whelp, to a corner and growl?  
The pyramid of my life was nought but a dune,  
Barren and formless, spoiled at last by the storm.

## Professor Newcomer

EVERYONE laughed at Col. Prichard  
For buying an engine so powerful  
That it wrecked itself, and wrecked the grinder  
He ran it with.  
But here is a joke of cosmic size:  
The urge of nature that made a man  
Evolve from his brain a spiritual life—  
Oh miracle of the world!—  
The very same brain with which the ape and wolf  
Get food and shelter and procreate themselves.  
Nature has made man do this,  
In a world where she gives him nothing to do  
After all— (though the strength of his soul goes round  
In a futile waste of power.  
To gear itself to the mills of the gods)—  
But get food and shelter and procreate himself!

## Ralph Rhodes

ALL they said was true:  
I wrecked my father's bank with my loans  
To dabble in wheat; but this was true—  
I was buying wheat for him as well,  
Who couldn't margin the deal in his name  
Because of his church relationship.  
And while George Reece was serving his term  
I chased the will-o-the-wisp of women  
And the mockery of wine in New York.  
It's deathly to sicken of wine and women  
When nothing else is left in life.  
But suppose your head is gray, and bowed  
On a table covered with acrid stubs  
Of cigarettes and empty glasses,  
And a knock is heard, and you know it's the knock  
So long drowned out by popping corks  
And the pea-cock screams of demireps—  
And you look up, and there's your Theft,  
Who waited until your head was gray,  
And your heart skipped beats to say to you:  
The game is ended. I've called for you,  
Go out on Broadway and be run over,  
They'll ship you back to Spoon River.

**Mickey M’Grew**

It was just like everything else in life:  
Something outside myself drew me down,  
My own strength never failed me.  
Why, there was the time I earned the money  
With which to go away to school,  
And my father suddenly needed help  
And I had to give him all of it.  
Just so it went till I ended up  
A man-of—all-work in Spoon River.  
Thus when I got the water-tower cleaned,  
And they hauled me up the seventy feet,  
I unhooked the rope from my waist,  
And laughingly flung my giant arms  
Over the smooth steel lips of the top of the tower—  
But they slipped from the treacherous slime,  
And down, down, down, I plunged  
Through bellowing darkness!

**Rosie Roberts**

I WAS sick, but more than that, I was mad  
At the crooked police, and the crooked game of life.  
So I wrote to the Chief of Police at Peoria:  
“I am here in my girlhood home in Spoon River,  
Gradually wasting away.  
But come and take me, I killed the son  
Of the merchant prince, in Madam Lou’s  
And the papers that said he killed himself  
In his home while cleaning a hunting gun—  
Lied like the devil to hush up scandal  
For the bribe of advertising.  
In my room I shot him, at Madam Lou’s,  
Because he knocked me down when I said  
That, in spite of all the money he had,  
I’d see my lover that night.”

## Oscar Hummel

I STAGGERED on through darkness,  
There was a hazy sky, a few stars  
Which I followed as best I could.  
It was nine o'clock, I was trying to get home.  
But somehow I was lost,  
Though really keeping the road.  
Then I reeled through a gate and into a yard,  
And called at the top of my voice:  
"Oh, Fiddler! Oh, Mr. Jones!"  
(I thought it was his house and he would show me the way  
home.)  
But who should step out but A. D. Blood,  
In his night shirt, waving a stick of wood,  
And roaring about the cursed saloons,  
And the criminals they made?  
"You drunken Oscar Hummel", he said,  
As I stood there weaving to and fro,  
Taking the blows from the stick in his hand  
Till I dropped down dead at his feet.

## Josiah Tompkins

I WAS well known and much beloved  
And rich, as fortunes are reckoned  
In Spoon River, where I had lived and worked.  
That was the home for me,  
Though all my children had flown afar—  
Which is the way of Nature—all but one.  
The boy, who was the baby, stayed at home,  
To be my help in my failing years  
And the solace of his mother.  
But I grew weaker, as he grew stronger,  
And he quarreled with me about the business,  
And his wife said I was a hindrance to it;  
And he won his mother to see as he did,  
Till they tore me up to be transplanted  
With them to her girlhood home in Missouri.  
And so much of my fortune was gone at last,  
Though I made the will just as he drew it,  
He profited little by it.

**Roscoe Purkapile**

SHE loved me.  
Oh! how she loved me I never had a chance to escape  
From the day she first saw me.  
But then after we were married I thought  
She might prove her mortality and let me out,  
Or she might divorce me. But few die, none resign.  
Then I ran away and was gone a year on a lark.  
But she never complained. She said all would be well  
That I would return. And I did return.  
I told her that while taking a row in a boat  
I had been captured near Van Buren Street  
By pirates on Lake Michigan,  
And kept in chains, so I could not write her.  
She cried and kissed me, and said it was cruel,  
Outrageous, inhuman! I then concluded our marriage  
Was a divine dispensation  
And could not be dissolved,  
Except by death.  
I was right.

**Mrs. Purkapile**

HE ran away and was gone for a year.  
When he came home he told me the silly story  
Of being kidnapped by pirates on Lake Michigan  
And kept in chains so he could not write me.  
I pretended to believe it, though I knew very well  
What he was doing, and that he met  
The milliner, Mrs. Williams, now and then  
When she went to the city to buy goods, as she said.  
But a promise is a promise  
And marriage is marriage,  
And out of respect for my own character  
I refused to be drawn into a divorce  
By the scheme of a husband who had merely grown tired  
Of his marital vow and duty.



**Mrs. Kessler**

MR. KESSLER, you know, was in the army,  
 And he drew six dollars a month as a pension,  
 And stood on the corner talking politics,  
 Or sat at home reading Grant's Memoirs;  
 And I supported the family by washing,  
 Learning the secrets of all the people  
 From their curtains, counterpanes, shirts and skirts.  
 For things that are new grow old at length,  
 They're replaced with better or none at all:  
 People are prospering or falling back.  
 And rents and patches widen with time;  
 No thread or needle can pace decay,  
 And there are stains that baffle soap,  
 And there are colors that run in spite of you,  
 Blamed though you are for spoiling a dress.  
 Handkerchiefs, napery, have their secrets—  
 The laundress, Life, knows all about it.  
 And I, who went to all the funerals  
 Held in Spoon River, swear I never  
 Saw a dead face without thinking it looked  
 Like something washed and ironed.

**Harmon Whitney**

OUT of the lights and roar of cities,  
 Drifting down like a spark in Spoon River,  
 Burnt out with the fire of drink, and broken,  
 The paramour of a woman I took in self-contempt,  
 But to hide a wounded pride as well.  
 To be judged and loathed by a village of little minds—  
 I, gifted with tongues and wisdom,  
 Sunk here to the dust of the justice court,  
 A picker of rags in the rubble of spites and wrongs,—  
 I, whom fortune smiled on!  
 I in a village,  
 Spouting to gaping yokels pages of verse,  
 Out of the lore of golden years,  
 Or raising a laugh with a flash of filthy wit  
 When they bought the drinks to kindle my dying mind.  
 To be judged by you,  
 The soul of me hidden from you,  
 With its wound gangrened  
 By love for a wife who made the wound,  
 With her cold white bosom, treasonous, pure and hard,  
 Relentless to the last, when the touch of her hand,  
 At any time, might have cured me of the typhus,  
 Caught in the jungle of life where many are lost.  
 And only to think that my soul could not react,  
 Like Byron's did, in song, in something noble,

But turned on itself like a tortured snake— judge me this  
way,  
O world.

**Bert Kessler**

I WINGED my bird,  
Though he flew toward the setting sun;  
But just as the shot rang out, he soared  
Up and up through the splinters of golden light,  
Till he turned right over, feathers ruffled,  
With some of the down of him floating near,  
And fell like a plummet into the grass.  
I tramped about, parting the tangles,  
Till I saw a splash of blood on a stump,  
And the quail lying close to the rotten roots.  
I reached my hand, but saw no brier,  
But something pricked and stung and numbed it.  
And then, in a second, I spied the rattler—  
The shutters wide in his yellow eyes,  
The head of him arched, sunk back in the rings of him,  
A circle of filth, the color of ashes,  
Or oak leaves bleached under layers of leaves.  
I stood like a stone as he shrank and uncoiled  
And started to crawl beneath the stump,  
When I fell limp in the grass.

**Lambert Hutchins**

I HAVE two monuments besides this granite obelisk:  
 One, the house I built on the hill,  
 With its spires, bay windows, and roof of slate.  
 The other, the lake-front in Chicago,  
 Where the railroad keeps a switching yard,  
 With whistling engines and crunching wheels  
 And smoke and soot thrown over the city,  
 And the crash of cars along the boulevard,—  
 A blot like a hog-pen on the harbor  
 Of a great metropolis, foul as a sty.  
 I helped to give this heritage  
 To generations yet unborn, with my vote  
 In the House of Representatives,  
 And the lure of the thing was to be at rest  
 From the never—ending fright of need,  
 And to give my daughters gentle breeding,  
 And a sense of security in life.  
 But, you see, though I had the mansion house  
 And traveling passes and local distinction,  
 I could hear the whispers, whispers, whispers,  
 Wherever I went, and my daughters grew up  
 With a look as if some one were about to strike them;  
 And they married madly, helter-skelter,  
 Just to get out and have a change.  
 And what was the whole of the business worth?  
 Why, it wasn't worth a damn!

**Lillian Stewart**

I WAS the daughter of Lambert Hutchins,  
 Born in a cottage near the grist—mill,  
 Reared in the mansion there on the hill,  
 With its spires, bay—windows, and roof of slate.  
 How proud my mother was of the mansion  
 How proud of father's rise in the world!  
 And how my father loved and watched us,  
 And guarded our happiness.  
 But I believe the house was a curse,  
 For father's fortune was little beside it;  
 And when my husband found he had married  
 A girl who was really poor,  
 He taunted me with the spires,  
 And called the house a fraud on the world,  
 A treacherous lure to young men, raising hopes  
 Of a dowry not to be had;  
 And a man while selling his vote  
 Should get enough from the people's betrayal  
 To wall the whole of his family in.  
 He vexed my life till I went back home  
 And lived like an old maid till I died,  
 Keeping house for father.

**Hortense Robbins**

My name used to be in the papers daily  
As having dined somewhere,  
Or traveled somewhere,  
Or rented a house in Paris,  
Where I entertained the nobility.  
I was forever eating or traveling,  
Or taking the cure at Baden-Baden.  
Now I am here to do honor  
To Spoon River, here beside the family whence I sprang.  
No one cares now where I dined,  
Or lived, or whom I entertained,  
Or how often I took the cure at Baden-Baden.

**Jacob Godbey**

How did you feel, you libertarians,  
Who spent your talents rallying noble reasons  
Around the saloon, as if Liberty  
Was not to be found anywhere except at the bar  
Or at a table, guzzling?  
How did you feel, Ben Pantier, and the rest of you,  
Who almost stoned me for a tyrant  
Garbed as a moralist,  
And as a wry-faced ascetic frowning upon Yorkshire pudding,  
Roast beef and ale and good will and rosy cheer—  
Things you never saw in a grog-shop in your life?  
How did you feel after I was dead and gone,  
And your goddess, Liberty, unmasked as a strumpet,  
Selling out the streets of Spoon River  
To the insolent giants  
Who manned the saloons from afar?  
Did it occur to you that personal liberty  
Is liberty of the mind,  
Rather than of the belly?

**Walter Simmons**

My parents thought that I would be  
 As great as Edison or greater:  
 For as a boy I made balloons  
 And wondrous kites and toys with clocks  
 And little engines with tracks to run on  
 And telephones of cans and thread.  
 I played the cornet and painted pictures,  
 Modeled in clay and took the part  
 Of the villain in the "Octoroon."  
 But then at twenty—one I married  
 And had to live, and so, to live  
 I learned the trade of making watches  
 And kept the jewelry store on the square,  
 Thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking,—  
 Not of business, but of the engine  
 I studied the calculus to build.  
 And all Spoon River watched and waited  
 To see it work, but it never worked.  
 And a few kind souls believed my genius  
 Was somehow hampered by the store.  
 It wasn't true.  
 The truth was this:  
 I did not have the brains.

**Tom Beatty**

I WAS a lawyer like Harmon Whitney  
 Or Kinsey Keene or Garrison Standard,  
 For I tried the rights of property,  
 Although by lamp-light, for thirty years,  
 In that poker room in the opera house.  
 And I say to you that Life's a gambler  
 Head and shoulders above us all.  
 No mayor alive can close the house.  
 And if you lose, you can squeal as you will;  
 You'll not get back your money.  
 He makes the percentage hard to conquer;  
 He stacks the cards to catch your weakness  
 And not to meet your strength.  
 And he gives you seventy years to play:  
 For if you cannot win in seventy  
 You cannot win at all.  
 So, if you lose, get out of the room—  
 Get out of the room when your time is up.  
 It's mean to sit and fumble the cards  
 And curse your losses, leaden-eyed,  
 Whining to try and try.

**Roy Butler**

If the learned Supreme Court of Illinois  
Got at the secret of every case  
As well as it does a case of rape  
It would be the greatest court in the world.  
A jury, of neighbors mostly, with "Butch" Weldy  
As foreman, found me guilty in ten minutes  
And two ballots on a case like this:  
Richard Bandle and I had trouble over a fence  
And my wife and Mrs. Bandle quarreled  
As to whether Ipava was a finer town than Table Grove.  
I awoke one morning with the love of God  
Brimming over my heart, so I went to see Richard  
To settle the fence in the spirit of Jesus Christ.  
I knocked on the door, and his wife opened;  
She smiled and asked me in.  
I entered— She slammed the door and began to scream,  
"Take your hands off, you low down varlet!"  
Just then her husband entered.  
I waved my hands, choked up with words.  
He went for his gun, and I ran out.  
But neither the Supreme Court nor my wife  
Believed a word she said.

**Searcy Foote**

I WANTED to go away to college  
But rich Aunt Persis wouldn't help me.  
So I made gardens and raked the lawns  
And bought John Alden's books with my earnings  
And toiled for the very means of life.  
I wanted to marry Delia Prickett,  
But how could I do it with what I earned?  
And there was Aunt Persis more than seventy  
Who sat in a wheel-chair half alive  
With her throat so paralyzed, when she swallowed  
The soup ran out of her mouth like a duck—  
A gourmand yet, investing her income  
In mortgages, fretting all the time  
About her notes and rents and papers.  
That day I was sawing wood for her,  
And reading Proudhon in between.  
I went in the house for a drink of water,  
And there she sat asleep in her chair,  
And Proudhon lying on the table,  
And a bottle of chloroform on the book,  
She used sometimes for an aching tooth!  
I poured the chloroform on a handkerchief  
And held it to her nose till she died.—  
Oh Delia, Delia, you and Proudhon  
Steadied my hand, and the coroner

Said she died of heart failure.  
I married Delia and got the money—  
A joke on you, Spoon River?

## Edmund Pollard

I WOULD I had thrust my hands of flesh  
Into the disk—flowers bee-infested,  
Into the mirror-like core of fire  
Of the light of life, the sun of delight.  
For what are anthers worth or petals  
Or halo-rays? Mockeries, shadows  
Of the heart of the flower, the central flame  
All is yours, young passer-by;  
Enter the banquet room with the thought;  
Don't sidle in as if you were doubtful  
Whether you're welcome—the feast is yours!  
Nor take but a little, refusing more  
With a bashful "Thank you", when you're hungry.  
Is your soul alive? Then let it feed!  
Leave no balconies where you can climb;  
Nor milk-white bosoms where you can rest;  
Nor golden heads with pillows to share;  
Nor wine cups while the wine is sweet;  
Nor ecstasies of body or soul,  
You will die, no doubt, but die while living  
In depths of azure, rapt and mated,  
Kissing the queen-bee, Life!

**Thomas Trevelyan**

READING in Ovid the sorrowful story of Itys,  
Son of the love of Tereus and Procne, slain  
For the guilty passion of Tereus for Philomela,  
The flesh of him served to Tereus by Procne,  
And the wrath of Tereus, the murderess pursuing  
Till the gods made Philomela a nightingale,  
Lute of the rising moon, and Procne a swallow  
Oh lovers and artists of Hellas centuries gone,  
Sealing in little thuribles dreams and wisdom,  
Incense beyond all price, forever fragrant,  
A breath whereof makes clear the eyes of the soul  
How I inhaled its sweetness here in Spoon River!  
The thurible opening when I had lived and learned  
How all of us kill the children of love, and all of us,  
Knowing not what we do, devour their flesh;  
And all of us change to singers, although it be  
But once in our lives, or change—alas!—to swallows,  
To twitter amid cold winds and falling leaves!

**Percival Sharp**

OBSERVE the clasped hands!  
Are they hands of farewell or greeting,  
Hands that I helped or hands that helped me?  
Would it not be well to carve a hand  
With an inverted thumb, like Elagabalus?  
And yonder is a broken chain,  
The weakest-link idea perhaps—but what was it?  
And lambs, some lying down,  
Others standing, as if listening to the shepherd—  
Others bearing a cross, one foot lifted up—  
Why not chisel a few shambles?  
And fallen columns!  
Carve the pedestal, please,  
Or the foundations; let us see the cause of the fall.  
And compasses and mathematical instruments,  
In irony of the under tenants, ignorance  
Of determinants and the calculus of variations.  
And anchors, for those who never sailed.  
And gates ajar—yes, so they were;  
You left them open and stray goats entered your garden.  
And an eye watching like one of the Arimaspi—  
So did you—with one eye.  
And angels blowing trumpets—you are heralded—  
It is your horn and your angel and your family's estimate.  
It is all very well, but for myself



I know I stirred certain vibrations in Spoon River  
Which are my true epitaph, more lasting than stone.

## Hiram Scates

I TRIED to win the nomination  
For president of the County-board  
And I made speeches all over the County  
Denouncing Solomon Purple, my rival,  
As an enemy of the people,  
In league with the master-foes of man.  
Young idealists, broken warriors,  
Hobbling on one crutch of hope,  
Souls that stake their all on the truth,  
Losers of worlds at heaven's bidding,  
Flocked about me and followed my voice  
As the savior of the County.  
But Solomon won the nomination;  
And then I faced about,  
And rallied my followers to his standard,  
And made him victor, made him King  
Of the Golden Mountain with the door  
Which closed on my heels just as I entered,  
Flattered by Solomon's invitation,  
To be the County—board's secretary.  
And out in the cold stood all my followers:  
Young idealists, broken warriors  
Hobbling on one crutch of hope—  
Souls that staked their all on the truth,  
Losers of worlds at heaven's bidding,

Watching the Devil kick the Millennium  
Over the Golden Mountain.

**Peleg Poague**

HORSES and men are just alike.  
There was my stallion, Billy Lee,  
Black as a cat and trim as a deer,  
With an eye of fire, keen to start,  
And he could hit the fastest speed  
Of any racer around Spoon River.  
But just as you'd think he couldn't lose,  
With his lead of fifty yards or more,  
He'd rear himself and throw the rider,  
And fall back over, tangled up,  
Completely gone to pieces.  
You see he was a perfect fraud:  
He couldn't win, he couldn't work,  
He was too light to haul or plow with,  
And no one wanted colts from him.  
And when I tried to drive him—well,  
He ran away and killed me.

**Jeduthan Hawley**

THERE would be a knock at the door  
 And I would arise at midnight and go to the shop,  
 Where belated travelers would hear me hammering  
 Sepulchral boards and tacking satin.  
 And often I wondered who would go with me  
 To the distant land, our names the theme  
 For talk, in the same week, for I've observed  
 Two always go together.  
 Chase Henry was paired with Edith Conant;  
 And Jonathan Somers with Willie Metcalf;  
 And Editor Hamblin with Francis Turner,  
 When he prayed to live longer than Editor Whedon,  
 And Thomas Rhodes with widow McFarlane;  
 And Emily Sparks with Barry Holden;  
 And Oscar Hummel with Davis Matlock;  
 And Editor Whedon with Fiddler Jones;  
 And Faith Matheny with Dorcas Gustine.  
 And I, the solemnest man in town,  
 Stepped off with Daisy Fraser.

**Abel Melveny**

I BOUGHT every kind of machine that's known—  
 Grinders, shellers, planters, mowers,  
 Mills and rakes and ploughs and threshers—  
 And all of them stood in the rain and sun,  
 Getting rusted, warped and battered,  
 For I had no sheds to store them in,  
 And no use for most of them.  
 And toward the last, when I thought it over,  
 There by my window, growing clearer  
 About myself, as my pulse slowed down,  
 And looked at one of the mills I bought—  
 Which I didn't have the slightest need of,  
 As things turned out, and I never ran—  
 A fine machine, once brightly varnished,  
 And eager to do its work,  
 Now with its paint washed off—  
 I saw myself as a good machine  
 That Life had never used.

**Oaks Tutt**

My mother was for woman's rights  
And my father was the rich miller at London Mills.  
I dreamed of the wrongs of the world and wanted to right  
    them.  
When my father died, I set out to see peoples and countries  
In order to learn how to reform the world.  
I traveled through many lands. I saw the ruins of Rome  
And the ruins of Athens, And the ruins of Thebes.  
And I sat by moonlight amid the necropolis of Memphis.  
There I was caught up by wings of flame,  
And a voice from heaven said to me:  
"Injustice, Untruth destroyed them.  
Go forth Preach Justice! Preach Truth!"  
And I hastened back to Spoon River  
To say farewell to my mother before beginning my work.  
They all saw a strange light in my eye.  
And by and by, when I talked, they discovered  
What had come in my mind.  
Then Jonathan Swift Somers challenged me to debate  
The subject, (I taking the negative):  
"Pontius Pilate, the Greatest Philosopher of the World."  
And he won the debate by saying at last,  
"Before you reform the world, Mr. Tutt  
Please answer the question of Pontius Pilate:  
"What is Truth?"

**Elliott Hawkins**

I LOOKED like Abraham Lincoln.  
I was one of you, Spoon River, in all fellowship,  
But standing for the rights of property and for order.  
A regular church attendant,  
Sometimes appearing in your town meetings to warn you  
Against the evils of discontent and envy  
And to denounce those who tried to destroy the Union,  
And to point to the peril of the Knights of Labor.  
My success and my example are inevitable influences  
In your young men and in generations to come,  
In spite of attacks of newspapers like the Clarion;  
A regular visitor at Springfield  
When the Legislature was in session  
To prevent raids upon the railroads  
And the men building up the state.  
Trusted by them and by you, Spoon River, equally  
In spite of the whispers that I was a lobbyist.  
Moving quietly through the world, rich and courted.  
Dying at last, of course, but lying here  
Under a stone with an open book carved upon it  
And the words "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."  
And now, you world-savers, who reaped nothing in life  
And in death have neither stones nor epitaphs,  
How do you like your silence from mouths stopped  
With the dust of my triumphant career?

**Enoch Dunlap**

How many times, during the twenty years  
 I was your leader, friends of Spoon River,  
 Did you neglect the convention and caucus,  
 And leave the burden on my hands  
 Of guarding and saving the people's cause?—  
 Sometimes because you were ill;  
 Or your grandmother was ill;  
 Or you drank too much and fell asleep;  
 Or else you said: "He is our leader,  
 All will be well; he fights for us;  
 We have nothing to do but follow."  
 But oh, how you cursed me when I fell,  
 And cursed me, saying I had betrayed you,  
 In leaving the caucus room for a moment,  
 When the people's enemies, there assembled,  
 Waited and watched for a chance to destroy  
 The Sacred Rights of the People.  
 You common rabble! I left the caucus  
 To go to the urinal.

**Ida Frickey**

NOTHING in life is alien to you:  
 I was a penniless girl from Summum  
 Who stepped from the morning train in Spoon River.  
 All the houses stood before me with closed doors  
 And drawn shades—I was barred out;  
 I had no place or part in any of them.  
 And I walked past the old McNeely mansion,  
 A castle of stone 'mid walks and gardens  
 With workmen about the place on guard  
 And the County and State upholding it  
 For its lordly owner, full of pride.  
 I was so hungry I had a vision:  
 I saw a giant pair of scissors  
 Dip from the sky, like the beam of a dredge,  
 And cut the house in two like a curtain.  
 But at the "Commercial" I saw a man  
 Who winked at me as I asked for work—  
 It was Wash McNeely's son.  
 He proved the link in the chain of title  
 To half my ownership of the mansion,  
 Through a breach of promise suit—the scissors.  
 So, you see, the house, from the day I was born,  
 Was only waiting for me.

**Seth Compton**

WHEN I died, the circulating library  
Which I built up for Spoon River,  
And managed for the good of inquiring minds,  
Was sold at auction on the public square,  
As if to destroy the last vestige  
Of my memory and influence.  
For those of you who could not see the virtue  
Of knowing Volney's "Ruins" as well as Butler's "Analogy"  
And "Faust" as well as "Evangeline,"  
Were really the power in the village,  
And often you asked me  
"What is the use of knowing the evil in the world?"  
I am out of your way now, Spoon River,  
Choose your own good and call it good.  
For I could never make you see  
That no one knows what is good  
Who knows not what is evil;  
And no one knows what is true  
Who knows not what is false.

**Felix Schmidt**

It was only a little house of two rooms—  
Almost like a child's play-house—  
With scarce five acres of ground around it;  
And I had so many children to feed  
And school and clothe, and a wife who was sick  
From bearing children.  
One day lawyer Whitney came along  
And proved to me that Christian Dallman,  
Who owned three thousand acres of land,  
Had bought the eighty that adjoined me  
In eighteen hundred and seventy-one  
For eleven dollars, at a sale for taxes,  
While my father lay in his mortal illness.  
So the quarrel arose and I went to law.  
But when we came to the proof,  
A survey of the land showed clear as day  
That Dallman's tax deed covered my ground  
And my little house of two rooms.  
It served me right for stirring him up.  
I lost my case and lost my place.  
I left the court room and went to work  
As Christian Dallman's tenant.

## Richard Bone

WHEN I first came to Spoon River  
I did not know whether what they told me  
Was true or false.  
They would bring me the epitaph  
And stand around the shop while I worked  
And say “He was so kind,” “He was so wonderful,”  
“She was the sweetest woman,” “He was a consistent  
Christian.”  
And I chiseled for them whatever they wished,  
All in ignorance of the truth.  
But later, as I lived among the people here,  
I knew how near to the life  
Were the epitaphs that were ordered for them as they died.  
But still I chiseled whatever they paid me to chisel  
And made myself party to the false chronicles  
Of the stones,  
Even as the historian does who writes  
Without knowing the truth,  
Or because he is influenced to hide it.

## Silas Dement

It was moon-light, and the earth sparkled  
With new-fallen frost.  
It was midnight and not a soul abroad.  
Out of the chimney of the court-house  
A gray-hound of smoke leapt and chased  
The northwest wind.  
I carried a ladder to the landing of the stairs  
And leaned it against the frame of the trap-door  
In the ceiling of the portico,  
And I crawled under the roof and amid the rafters  
And flung among the seasoned timbers  
A lighted handful of oil-soaked waste.  
Then I came down and slunk away.  
In a little while the fire-bell rang—  
Clang! Clang! Clang!  
And the Spoon River ladder company  
Came with a dozen buckets and began to pour water  
On the glorious bon-fire, growing hotter  
Higher and brighter, till the walls fell in  
And the limestone columns where Lincoln stood  
Crashed like trees when the woodman fells them .  
When I came back from Joliet  
There was a new court house with a dome.  
For I was punished like all who destroy  
The past for the sake of the future.

**Dillard Sissman**

THE buzzards wheel slowly  
In wide circles, in a sky  
Faintly hazed as from dust from the road.  
And a wind sweeps through the pasture where I lie  
Beating the grass into long waves.  
My kite is above the wind,  
Though now and then it wobbles,  
Like a man shaking his shoulders;  
And the tail streams out momentarily,  
Then sinks to rest.  
And the buzzards wheel and wheel,  
Sweeping the zenith with wide circles  
Above my kite. And the hills sleep.  
And a farm house, white as snow,  
Peeps from green trees—far away.  
And I watch my kite,  
For the thin moon will kindle herself ere long,  
Then she will swing like a pendulum dial  
To the tail of my kite.  
A spurt of flame like a water-dragon  
Dazzles my eyes—  
I am shaken as a banner.

**E. C. Culbertson**

Is it true, Spoon River,  
That in the hall—way of the New Court House  
There is a tablet of bronze  
Containing the embossed faces  
Of Editor Whedon and Thomas Rhodes?  
And is it true that my successful labors  
In the County Board, without which  
Not one stone would have been placed on another,  
And the contributions out of my own pocket  
To build the temple, are but memories among the people,  
Gradually fading away, and soon to descend  
With them to this oblivion where I lie?  
In truth, I can so believe.  
For it is a law of the Kingdom of Heaven  
That whoso enters the vineyard at the eleventh hour  
Shall receive a full day's pay.  
And it is a law of the Kingdom of this World  
That those who first oppose a good work  
Seize it and make it their own,  
When the corner—stone is laid,  
And memorial tablets are erected.



**Shack Dye**

THE white men played all sorts of jokes on me.  
 They took big fish off my hook  
 And put little ones on, while I was away  
 Getting a stringer, and made me believe  
 I hadn't seen aright the fish I had caught.  
 When Burr Robbins, circus came to town  
 They got the ring master to let a tame leopard  
 Into the ring, and made me believe  
 I was whipping a wild beast like Samson  
 When I, for an offer of fifty dollars,  
 Dragged him out to his cage.  
 One time I entered my blacksmith shop  
 And shook as I saw some horse-shoes crawling  
 Across the floor, as if alive—  
 Walter Simmons had put a magnet  
 Under the barrel of water.  
 Yet everyone of you, you white men,  
 Was fooled about fish and about leopards too,  
 And you didn't know any more than the horse-shoes did  
 What moved you about Spoon River.

**Hildrup Tubbs**

I MADE two fights for the people.  
 First I left my party, bearing the gonfalon  
 Of independence, for reform, and was defeated.  
 Next I used my rebel strength  
 To capture the standard of my old party—  
 And I captured it, but I was defeated.  
 Discredited and discarded, misanthropical,  
 I turned to the solace of gold  
 And I used my remnant of power  
 To fasten myself like a saprophyte  
 Upon the putrescent carcass  
 Of Thomas Rhodes, bankrupt bank,  
 As assignee of the fund.  
 Everyone now turned from me.  
 My hair grew white,  
 My purple lusts grew gray,  
 Tobacco and whisky lost their savor  
 And for years Death ignored me  
 As he does a hog.

## Henry Tripp

THE bank broke and I lost my savings.  
I was sick of the tiresome game in Spoon River  
And I made up my mind to run away  
And leave my place in life and my family;  
But just as the midnight train pulled in,  
Quick off the steps jumped Cully Green  
And Martin Vise, and began to fight  
To settle their ancient rivalry,  
Striking each other with fists that sounded  
Like the blows of knotted clubs.  
Now it seemed to me that Cully was winning,  
When his bloody face broke into a grin  
Of sickly cowardice, leaning on Martin  
And whining out "We're good friends, Mart,  
You know that I'm your friend."  
But a terrible punch from Martin knocked him  
Around and around and into a heap.  
And then they arrested me as a witness,  
And I lost my train and staid in Spoon River  
To wage my battle of life to the end.  
Oh, Cully Green, you were my savior—  
You, so ashamed and drooped for years,  
Loitering listless about the streets,  
And tying rags round your festering soul,  
Who failed to fight it out.

## Granville Calhoun

I WANTED to be County Judge  
One more term, so as to round out a service  
Of thirty years.  
But my friends left me and joined my enemies,  
And they elected a new man.  
Then a spirit of revenge seized me,  
And I infected my four sons with it,  
And I brooded upon retaliation,  
Until the great physician, Nature,  
Smote me through with paralysis  
To give my soul and body a rest.  
Did my sons get power and money?  
Did they serve the people or yoke them,  
To till and harvest fields of self?  
For how could they ever forget  
My face at my bed-room window,  
Sitting helpless amid my golden cages  
Of singing canaries,  
Looking at the old court-house?

## Henry C. Calhoun

I REACHED the highest place in Spoon River,  
But through what bitterness of spirit!  
The face of my father, sitting speechless,  
Child-like, watching his canaries,  
And looking at the court-house window  
Of the county judge's room,  
And his admonitions to me to seek  
My own in life, and punish Spoon River  
To avenge the wrong the people did him,  
Filled me with furious energy  
To seek for wealth and seek for power.  
But what did he do but send me along  
The path that leads to the grove of the Furies?  
I followed the path and I tell you this:  
On the way to the grove you'll pass the Fates,  
Shadow-eyed, bent over their weaving.  
Stop for a moment, and if you see  
The thread of revenge leap out of the shuttle  
Then quickly snatch from Atropos  
The shears and cut it, lest your sons  
And the children of them and their children  
Wear the envenomed robe.

## Alfred Moir

WHY was I not devoured by self-contempt,  
And rotted down by indifference  
And impotent revolt like Indignation Jones?  
Why, with all of my errant steps  
Did I miss the fate of Willard Fluke?  
And why, though I stood at Burchard's bar,  
As a sort of decoy for the house to the boys  
To buy the drinks, did the curse of drink  
Fall on me like rain that runs off,  
Leaving the soul of me dry and clean?  
And why did I never kill a man Like Jack McGuire?  
But instead I mounted a little in life,  
And I owe it all to a book I read.  
But why did I go to Mason City,  
Where I chanced to see the book in a window,  
With its garish cover luring my eye?  
And why did my soul respond to the book,  
As I read it over and over?

**Perry Zoll**

MY thanks, friends of the  
County Scientific Association,  
For this modest boulder,  
And its little tablet of bronze.  
Twice I tried to join your honored body,  
And was rejected  
And when my little brochure  
On the intelligence of plants  
Began to attract attention  
You almost voted me in.  
After that I grew beyond the need of you  
And your recognition.  
Yet I do not reject your memorial stone  
Seeing that I should, in so doing,  
Deprive you of honor to yourselves.

**Magrady Graham**

TELL me, was Altgeld elected Governor?  
For when the returns began to come in  
And Cleveland was sweeping the East  
It was too much for you, poor old heart,  
Who had striven for democracy  
In the long, long years of defeat.  
And like a watch that is worn  
I felt you growing slower until you stopped.  
Tell me, was Altgeld elected,  
And what did he do?  
Did they bring his head on a platter to a dancer,  
Or did he triumph for the people?  
For when I saw him  
And took his hand,  
The child-like blueness of his eyes  
Moved me to tears,  
And there was an air of eternity about him,  
Like the cold, clear light that rests at dawn  
On the hills!

## Archibald Higbie

I LOATHED you, Spoon River.  
I tried to rise above you,  
I was ashamed of you.  
I despised you  
As the place of my nativity.  
And there in Rome, among the artists,  
Speaking Italian, speaking French,  
I seemed to myself at times to be free  
Of every trace of my origin.  
I seemed to be reaching the heights of art  
And to breathe the air that the masters breathed  
And to see the world with their eyes.  
But still they'd pass my work and say:  
"What are you driving at, my friend?  
Sometimes the face looks like Apollo's  
At others it has a trace of Lincoln's."  
There was no culture, you know, in Spoon River  
And I burned with shame and held my peace.  
And what could I do, all covered over  
And weighted down with western soil  
Except aspire, and pray for another  
Birth in the world, with all of Spoon River  
Rooted out of my soul?

## Tom Merritt

AT first I suspected something—  
She acted so calm and absent-minded.  
And one day I heard the back door shut  
As I entered the front, and I saw him slink  
Back of the smokehouse into the lot  
And run across the field.  
And I meant to kill him on sight.  
But that day, walking near Fourth Bridge  
Without a stick or a stone at hand,  
All of a sudden I saw him standing  
Scared to death, holding his rabbits,  
And all I could say was, "Don't, Don't, Don't,"  
As he aimed and fired at my heart.

**Mrs. Merritt**

SILENT before the jury  
Returning no word to the judge when he asked me  
If I had aught to say against the sentence,  
Only shaking my head.  
What could I say to people who thought  
That a woman of thirty-five was at fault  
When her lover of nineteen killed her husband?  
Even though she had said to him over and over,  
“Go away, Elmer, go far away,  
I have maddened your brain with the gift of my body:  
You will do some terrible thing.”  
And just as I feared, he killed my husband;  
With which I had nothing to do, before  
God Silent for thirty years in prison  
And the iron gates of Joliet  
Swung as the gray and silent trusties  
Carried me out in a coffin.

**Elmer Karr**

WHAT but the love of God could have softened  
And made forgiving the people of Spoon River  
Toward me who wronged the bed of Thomas Merritt  
And murdered him beside?  
Oh, loving hearts that took me in again  
When I returned from fourteen years in prison!  
Oh, helping hands that in the church received me  
And heard with tears my penitent confession,  
Who took the sacrament of bread and wine!  
Repent, ye living ones, and rest with Jesus.

## Elizabeth Childers

DUST of my dust,  
And dust with my dust,  
O, child who died as you entered the world,  
Dead with my death!  
Not knowing  
Breath, though you tried so hard,  
With a heart that beat when you lived with me,  
And stopped when you left me for Life.  
It is well, my child.  
For you never traveled  
The long, long way that begins with school days,  
When little fingers blur under the tears  
That fall on the crooked letters.  
And the earliest wound, when a little mate  
Leaves you alone for another;  
And sickness, and the face of  
Fear by the bed;  
The death of a father or mother;  
Or shame for them, or poverty;  
The maiden sorrow of school days ended;  
And eyeless Nature that makes you drink  
From the cup of Love, though you know it's poisoned;  
To whom would your flower-face have been lifted?  
Botanist, weakling?  
Cry of what blood to yours?—

Pure or foul, for it makes no matter,  
It's blood that calls to our blood.  
And then your children—oh, what might they be?  
And what your sorrow?  
Child! Child Death is better than Life.

**Edith Conant**

WE stand about this place—we, the memories;  
And shade our eyes because we dread to read:  
“June 17th, 1884, aged 21 years and 3 days.”  
And all things are changed.  
And we—we, the memories, stand here for ourselves alone,  
For no eye marks us, or would know why we are here.  
Your husband is dead, your sister lives far away,  
Your father is bent with age;  
He has forgotten you, he scarcely leaves the house  
Any more. No one remembers your exquisite face,  
Your lyric voice!  
How you sang, even on the morning you were stricken,  
With piercing sweetness, with thrilling sorrow,  
Before the advent of the child which died with you.  
It is all forgotten, save by us, the memories,  
Who are forgotten by the world.  
All is changed, save the river and the hill—  
Even they are changed.  
Only the burning sun and the quiet stars are the same.  
And we—we, the memories, stand here in awe,  
Our eyes closed with the weariness of tears—  
In immeasurable weariness

**Father Malloy**

YOU are over there, Father Malloy,  
Where holy ground is, and the cross marks every grave,  
Not here with us on the hill—  
Us of wavering faith, and clouded vision  
And drifting hope, and unforgiven sins.  
You were so human, Father Malloy,  
Taking a friendly glass sometimes with us,  
Siding with us who would rescue Spoon River  
From the coldness and the dreariness of village morality.  
You were like a traveler who brings a little box of sand  
From the wastes about the pyramids  
And makes them real and Egypt real.  
You were a part of and related to a great past,  
And yet you were so close to many of us.  
You believed in the joy of life.  
You did not seem to be ashamed of the flesh.  
You faced life as it is,  
And as it changes.  
Some of us almost came to you, Father Malloy,  
Seeing how your church had divined the heart,  
And provided for it,  
Through Peter the Flame,  
Peter the Rock.



**Ami Green**

NOR “a youth with hoary head and haggard eye,”  
But an old man with a smooth skin  
And black hair! I had the face of a boy as long as I lived,  
And for years a soul that was stiff and bent,  
In a world which saw me just as a jest,  
To be hailed familiarly when it chose,  
And loaded up as a man when it chose,  
Being neither man nor boy.  
In truth it was soul as well as body  
Which never matured, and I say to you  
That the much-sought prize of eternal youth  
Is just arrested growth.

**Calvin Campbell**

YE who are kicking against Fate,  
Tell me how it is that on this hill-side  
Running down to the river,  
Which fronts the sun and the south-wind,  
This plant draws from the air and soil  
Poison and becomes poison ivy?  
And this plant draws from the same air and soil  
Sweet elixirs and colors and becomes arbutus?  
And both flourish?  
You may blame Spoon River for what it is,  
But whom do you blame for the will in you  
That feeds itself and makes you dock-weed,  
Jimpson, dandelion or mullen  
And which can never use any soil or air  
So as to make you jessamine or wistaria?

**Henry Layton**

WHOEVER thou art who passest by  
Know that my father was gentle,  
And my mother was violent,  
While I was born the whole of such hostile halves,  
Not intermixed and fused,  
But each distinct, feebly soldered together.  
Some of you saw me as gentle,  
Some as violent,  
Some as both.  
But neither half of me wrought my ruin.  
It was the falling asunder of halves,  
Never a part of each other,  
That left me a lifeless soul.

**Harlan Sewall**

YOU never understood,  
O unknown one,  
Why it was I repaid  
Your devoted friendship and delicate ministrations  
First with diminished thanks,  
Afterward by gradually withdrawing my presence from you,  
So that I might not be compelled to thank you,  
And then with silence which followed upon  
Our final Separation.  
You had cured my diseased soul.  
But to cure it  
You saw my disease, you knew my secret,  
And that is why I fled from you.  
For though when our bodies rise from pain  
We kiss forever the watchful hands  
That gave us wormwood, while we shudder  
For thinking of the wormwood,  
A soul that's cured is a different matter,  
For there we'd blot from memory  
The soft—toned words, the searching eyes,  
And stand forever oblivious,  
Not so much of the sorrow itself  
As of the hand that healed it.

**Ippolit Konovaloff**

I WAS a gun-smith in Odessa.  
 One night the police broke in the room  
 Where a group of us were reading Spencer.  
 And seized our books and arrested us.  
 But I escaped and came to New York  
 And thence to Chicago, and then to Spoon River,  
 Where I could study my Kant in peace  
 And eke out a living repairing guns  
 Look at my moulds! My architectonics  
 One for a barrel, one for a hammer  
 And others for other parts of a gun!  
 Well, now suppose no gun—smith living  
 Had anything else but duplicate moulds  
 Of these I show you—well, all guns  
 Would be just alike, with a hammer to hit  
 The cap and a barrel to carry the shot  
 All acting alike for themselves, and all  
 Acting against each other alike.  
 And there would be your world of guns!  
 Which nothing could ever free from itself  
 Except a Moulder with different moulds  
 To mould the metal over.

**Henry Phipps**

I WAS the Sunday-school superintendent,  
 The dummy president of the wagon works  
 And the canning factory,  
 Acting for Thomas Rhodes and the banking clique;  
 My son the cashier of the bank,  
 Wedded to Rhodes, daughter,  
 My week days spent in making money,  
 My Sundays at church and in prayer.  
 In everything a cog in the wheel of things—as—they-are:  
 Of money, master and man, made white  
 With the paint of the Christian creed.  
 And then:  
 The bank collapsed.  
 I stood and hooked at the wrecked machine—  
 The wheels with blow-holes stopped with putty and painted;  
 The rotten bolts, the broken rods;  
 And only the hopper for souls fit to be used again  
 In a new devourer of life,  
 When newspapers, judges and money-magicians  
 Build over again.  
 I was stripped to the bone, but I lay in the Rock of Ages,  
 Seeing now through the game, no longer a dupe,  
 And knowing “the upright shall dwell in the land  
 But the years of the wicked shall be shortened.”  
 Then suddenly, Dr. Meyers discovered

A cancer in my liver.  
I was not, after all, the particular care of God  
Why, even thus standing on a peak  
Above the mists through which I had climbed,  
And ready for larger life in the world,  
Eternal forces  
Moved me on with a push.

**Harry Wilmans**

I WAS just turned twenty-one,  
And Henry Phipps, the Sunday-school superintendent,  
Made a speech in Bindle's Opera House.  
"The honor of the flag must be upheld," he said,  
"Whether it be assailed by a barbarous tribe of Tagalogs  
Or the greatest power in Europe."  
And we cheered and cheered the speech and the flag he  
waved  
As he spoke.  
And I went to the war in spite of my father,  
And followed the flag till I saw it raised  
By our camp in a rice field near Manila,  
And all of us cheered and cheered it.  
But there were flies and poisonous things;  
And there was the deadly water,  
And the cruel heat,  
And the sickening, putrid food;  
And the smell of the trench just back of the tents  
Where the soldiers went to empty themselves;  
And there were the whores who followed us, full of syphilis;  
And beastly acts between ourselves or alone,  
With bullying, hatred, degradation among us,  
And days of loathing and nights of fear  
To the hour of the charge through the steaming swamp,  
Following the flag,

Till I fell with a scream, shot through the guts.  
Now there's a flag over me in  
Spoon River. A flag!  
A flag!

## John Wasson

OH! the dew-wet grass of the meadow in North Carolina  
Through which Rebecca followed me wailing, wailing,  
One child in her arms, and three that ran along wailing,  
Lengthening out the farewell to me off to the war with the  
British,  
And then the long, hard years down to the day of Yorktown.  
And then my search for Rebecca,  
Finding her at last in Virginia,  
Two children dead in the meanwhile.  
We went by oxen to Tennessee,  
Thence after years to Illinois,  
At last to Spoon River.  
We cut the buffalo grass,  
We felled the forests,  
We built the school houses, built the bridges,  
Leveled the roads and tilled the fields  
Alone with poverty, scourges, death—  
If Harry Wilmans who fought the Filipinos  
Is to have a flag on his grave  
Take it from mine.

## Many Soldiers

THE idea danced before us as a flag;  
The sound of martial music;  
The thrill of carrying a gun;  
Advancement in the world on coming home;  
A glint of glory, wrath for foes;  
A dream of duty to country or to God.  
But these were things in ourselves, shining before us,  
They were not the power behind us,  
Which was the Almighty hand of Life,  
Like fire at earth's center making mountains,  
Or pent up waters that cut them through.  
Do you remember the iron band  
The blacksmith, Shack Dye, welded  
Around the oak on Bennet's lawn,  
From which to swing a hammock,  
That daughter Janet might repose in, reading  
On summer afternoons?  
And that the growing tree at last  
Sundered the iron band?  
But not a cell in all the tree  
Knew aught save that it thrilled with life,  
Nor cared because the hammock fell  
In the dust with Milton's Poems.

## Godwin James

HARRY WILMANS! You who fell in a swamp  
Near Manila, following the flag  
You were not wounded by the greatness of a dream,  
Or destroyed by ineffectual work,  
Or driven to madness by Satanic snags;  
You were not torn by aching nerves,  
Nor did you carry great wounds to your old age.  
You did not starve, for the government fed you.  
You did not suffer yet cry "forward"  
To an army which you led  
Against a foe with mocking smiles,  
Sharper than bayonets.  
You were not smitten down  
By invisible bombs.  
You were not rejected  
By those for whom you were defeated.  
You did not eat the savorless bread  
Which a poor alchemy had made from ideals.  
You went to Manila, Harry Wilmans,  
While I enlisted in the bedraggled army  
Of bright-eyed, divine youths,  
Who surged forward, who were driven back and fell  
Sick, broken, crying, shorn of faith,  
Following the flag of the Kingdom of Heaven.  
You and I, Harry Wilmans, have fallen

In our several ways, not knowing  
Good from bad, defeat from victory,  
Nor what face it is that smiles  
Behind the demoniac mask.

## Lyman King

You may think, passer-by, that Fate  
Is a pit-fall outside of yourself,  
Around which you may walk by the use of foresight  
And wisdom.  
Thus you believe, viewing the lives of other men,  
As one who in God-like fashion bends over an anthill,  
Seeing how their difficulties could be avoided.  
But pass on into life:  
In time you shall see Fate approach you  
In the shape of your own image in the mirror;  
Or you shall sit alone by your own hearth,  
And suddenly the chair by you shall hold a guest,  
And you shall know that guest  
And read the authentic message of his eyes.

**Caroline Branson**

WITH our hearts like drifting suns, had we but walked,  
As often before, the April fields till star—light  
Silkened over with viewless gauze the darkness  
Under the cliff, our trysting place in the wood,  
Where the brook turns! Had we but passed from wooing  
Like notes of music that run together, into winning,  
In the inspired improvisation of love!  
But to put back of us as a canticle ended  
The rapt enchantment of the flesh,  
In which our souls swooned, down, down,  
Where time was not, nor space, nor ourselves—  
Annihilated in love!  
To leave these behind for a room with lamps:  
And to stand with our Secret mocking itself,  
And hiding itself amid flowers and mandolins,  
Stared at by all between salad and coffee.  
And to see him tremble, and feel myself  
Prescient, as one who signs a bond—  
Not flaming with gifts and pledges heaped  
With rosy hands over his brow.  
And then, O night! deliberate! unlovely!  
With all of our wooing blotted out by the winning,  
In a chosen room in an hour that was known to all!  
Next day he sat so listless, almost cold  
So strangely changed, wondering why I wept,

Till a kind of sick despair and voluptuous madness  
Seized us to make the pact of death.  
A stalk of the earth-sphere,  
Frail as star-light;  
Waiting to be drawn once again Into creation's stream.  
But next time to be given birth  
Gazed at by Raphael and St. Francis  
Sometimes as they pass.  
For I am their little brother,  
To be known clearly face to face  
Through a cycle of birth hereafter run.  
You may know the seed and the soil;  
You may feel the cold rain fall,  
But only the earth—sphere, only heaven  
Knows the secret of the seed  
In the nuptial chamber under the soil.  
Throw me into the stream again,  
Give me another trial—  
Save me, Shelley!



## Anne Rutledge

OUT of me unworthy and unknown  
The vibrations of deathless music;  
“With malice toward none, with charity for all.”,  
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions,  
And the beneficent face of a nation  
Shining with justice and truth.  
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds,  
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,  
Wedded to him, not through union, But through separation.  
Bloom forever, O Republic,  
From the dust of my bosom!

## Hamlet Micure

IN a lingering fever many visions come to you:  
I was in the little house again  
With its great yard of clover  
Running down to the board-fence,  
Shadowed by the oak tree,  
Where we children had our swing.  
Yet the little house was a manor hall  
Set in a lawn, and by the lawn was the sea.  
I was in the room where little Paul  
Strangled from diphtheria,  
But yet it was not this room—  
It was a sunny verandah enclosed  
With mullioned windows  
And in a chair sat a man in a dark cloak  
With a face like Euripides.  
He had come to visit me, or I had gone to visit him—I  
could not tell.  
We could hear the beat of the sea, the clover nodded  
Under a summer wind, and little Paul came  
With clover blossoms to the window and smiled.  
Then I said: “What is “divine despair” Alfred?”  
“Have you read ‘Tears, Idle Tears’?” he asked.  
“Yes, but you do not there express divine despair.”  
“My poor friend,” he answered, “that was why the despair  
Was divine.”

**Mabel Osborne**

YOUR red blossoms amid green leaves  
Are drooping, beautiful geranium!  
But you do not ask for water.  
You cannot speak!  
You do not need to speak—  
Everyone knows that you are dying of thirst,  
Yet they do not bring water!  
They pass on, saying:  
“The geranium wants water.”  
And I, who had happiness to share  
And longed to share your happiness;  
I who loved you, Spoon River,  
And craved your love,  
Withered before your eyes, Spoon River—  
Thirsting, thirsting,  
Voiceless from chasteness of soul to ask you for love,  
You who knew and saw me perish before you,  
Like this geranium which someone has planted over me,  
And left to die.

**William H. Herndon**

THERE by the window in the old house  
Perched on the bluff, overlooking miles of valley,  
My days of labor closed, sitting out life's decline,  
Day by day did I look in my memory,  
As one who gazes in an enchantress' crystal globe,  
And I saw the figures of the past  
As if in a pageant glassed by a shining dream,  
Move through the incredible sphere of time.  
And I saw a man arise from the soil like a fabled giant  
And throw himself over a deathless destiny,  
Master of great armies, head of the republic,  
Bringing together into a dithyramb of recreative song  
The epic hopes of a people;  
At the same time Vulcan of sovereign fires,  
Where imperishable shields and swords were beaten out  
From spirits tempered in heaven.  
Look in the crystal!  
See how he hastens on  
To the place where his path comes up to the path  
Of a child of Plutarch and Shakespeare.  
O Lincoln, actor indeed, playing well your part  
And Booth, who strode in a mimic play within the play,  
Often and often I saw you,  
As the cawing crows winged their way to the wood  
Over my house—top at solemn sunsets,

There by my window,  
Alone.

## Rutherford McDowell

THEY brought me ambrotypes  
Of the old pioneers to enlarge.  
And sometimes one sat for me—  
Some one who was in being  
When giant hands from the womb of the world  
Tore the republic.  
What was it in their eyes?—  
For I could never fathom  
That mystical pathos of drooped eyelids,  
And the serene sorrow of their eyes.  
It was like a pool of water,  
Amid oak trees at the edge of a forest,  
Where the leaves fall,  
As you hear the crow of a cock  
From a far—off farm house, seen near the hills  
Where the third generation lives, and the strong men  
And the strong women are gone and forgotten.  
And these grand—children and great grand-children  
Of the pioneers!  
Truly did my camera record their faces, too,  
With so much of the old strength gone,  
And the old faith gone,  
And the old mastery of life gone,  
And the old courage gone,  
Which labors and loves and suffers and sings  
Under the sun!

**Hannah Armstrong**

I WROTE him a letter asking him for old times, sake  
To discharge my sick boy from the army;  
But maybe he couldn't read it.  
Then I went to town and had James Garber,  
Who wrote beautifully, write him a letter.  
But maybe that was lost in the mails.  
So I traveled all the way to Washington.  
I was more than an hour finding the White House.  
And when I found it they turned me away,  
Hiding their smiles.  
Then I thought: "Oh, well, he ain't the same as when I  
boarded him  
And he and my husband worked together  
And all of us called him Abe, there in Menard."  
As a last attempt I turned to a guard and said:  
"Please say it's old Aunt Hannah Armstrong  
From Illinois, come to see him about her sick boy  
In the army."  
Well, just in a moment they let me in!  
And when he saw me he broke in a laugh,  
And dropped his business as president,  
And wrote in his own hand Doug's discharge,  
Talking the while of the early days,  
And telling stories.

**Lucinda Matlock**

I WENT to the dances at Chandlerville,  
And played snap-out at Winchester.  
One time we changed partners,  
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,  
And then I found Davis.  
We were married and lived together for seventy years,  
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,  
Eight of whom we lost  
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.  
I spun,  
I wove,  
I kept the house,  
I nursed the sick,  
I made the garden, and for holiday  
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,  
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,  
And many a flower and medicinal weed—  
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.  
At ninety—six I had lived enough, that is all,  
And passed to a sweet repose.  
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,  
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?  
Degenerate sons and daughters,  
Life is too strong for you—  
It takes life to love Life.

**Davis Matlock**

SUPPOSE it is nothing but the hive:  
That there are drones and workers  
And queens, and nothing but storing honey—  
(Material things as well as culture and wisdom)—  
For the next generation, this generation never living,  
Except as it swarms in the sun-light of youth,  
Strengthening its wings on what has been gathered,  
And tasting, on the way to the hive  
From the clover field, the delicate spoil.  
Suppose all this, and suppose the truth:  
That the nature of man is greater  
Than nature's need in the hive;  
And you must bear the burden of life,  
As well as the urge from your spirit's excess—  
Well, I say to live it out like a god  
Sure of immortal life, though you are in doubt,  
Is the way to live it.  
If that doesn't make God proud of you  
Then God is nothing but gravitation  
Or sleep is the golden goal.

**Jennie M'Grew**

NOT, where the stairway turns in the dark  
A hooded figure, shriveled under a flowing cloak!  
Not yellow eyes in the room at night,  
Staring out from a surface of cobweb gray!  
And not the flap of a condor wing  
When the roar of life in your ears begins  
As a sound heard never before!  
But on a sunny afternoon,  
By a country road,  
Where purple rag-weeds bloom along a straggling fence  
And the field is gleaned, and the air is still  
To see against the sun-light something black  
Like a blot with an iris rim—  
That is the sign to eyes of second sight. . .  
And that I saw!

## Columbus Cheney

THIS weeping willow!  
Why do you not plant a few  
For the millions of children not yet born,  
As well as for us?  
Are they not non-existent, or cells asleep  
Without mind?  
Or do they come to earth, their birth  
Rupturing the memory of previous being?  
Answer!  
The field of unexplored intuition is yours.  
But in any case why not plant willows for them,  
As well as for us?  
Marie Bateson  
You observe the carven hand  
With the index finger pointing heavenward.  
That is the direction, no doubt.  
But how shall one follow it?  
It is well to abstain from murder and lust,  
To forgive, do good to others, worship God  
Without graven images.  
But these are external means after all  
By which you chiefly do good to yourself.  
The inner kernel is freedom,  
It is light, purity—  
I can no more,  
Find the goal or lose it, according to your vision.

## Tennessee Claflin Shope

I WAS the laughing-stock of the village,  
Chiefly of the people of good sense, as they call them  
selves—  
Also of the learned, like Rev. Peet, who read Greek  
The same as English.  
For instead of talking free trade,  
Or preaching some form of baptism;  
Instead of believing in the efficacy  
Of walking cracks, picking up pins the right way,  
Seeing the new moon over the right shoulder,  
Or curing rheumatism with blue glass,  
I asserted the sovereignty of my own soul.  
Before Mary Baker G. Eddy even got started  
With what she called science I had mastered the “Bhagavad  
Gita,”  
And cured my soul, before Mary Began to cure bodies with  
souls—  
Peace to all worlds!

**Immanuel Ehrenhardt**

I BEGAN with Sir William Hamilton's lectures.  
 Then studied Dugald Stewart;  
 And then John Locke on the Understanding,  
 And then Descartes, Fichte and Schelling,  
 Kant and then Schopenhauer—  
 Books I borrowed from old Judge Somers.  
 All read with rapturous industry  
 Hoping it was reserved to me  
 To grasp the tail of the ultimate secret,  
 And drag it out of its hole.  
 My soul flew up ten thousand miles  
 And only the moon looked a little bigger.  
 Then I fell back, how glad of the earth!  
 All through the soul of William Jones  
 Who showed me a letter of John Muir.

**Samuel Gardner**

I WHO kept the greenhouse,  
 Lover of trees and flowers,  
 Oft in life saw this umbrageous elm,  
 Measuring its generous branches with my eye,  
 And listened to its rejoicing leaves  
 Lovingly patting each other  
 With sweet aeolian whispers.  
 And well they might:  
 For the roots had grown so wide and deep  
 That the soil of the hill could not withhold  
 Aught of its virtue, enriched by rain,  
 And warmed by the sun;  
 But yielded it all to the thrifty roots,  
 Through which it was drawn and whirled to the trunk,  
 And thence to the branches, and into the leaves,  
 Wherefrom the breeze took life and sang.  
 Now I, an under—tenant of the earth, can see  
 That the branches of a tree  
 Spread no wider than its roots.  
 And how shall the soul of a man  
 Be larger than the life he has lived?

**Dow Kritt**

SAMUEL is forever talking of his elm—  
But I did not need to die to learn about roots:  
I, who dug all the ditches about Spoon River.  
Look at my elm!  
Sprung from as good a seed as his,  
Sown at the same time,  
It is dying at the top:  
Not from lack of life, nor fungus,  
Nor destroying insect, as the sexton thinks.  
Look, Samuel, where the roots have struck rock,  
And can no further spread.  
And all the while the top of the tree  
Is tiring itself out, and dying,  
Trying to grow.

**William Jones**

ONCE in a while a curious weed unknown to me,  
Needing a name from my books;  
Once in a while a letter from Yeomans.  
Out of the mussel-shells gathered along the shore  
Sometimes a pearl with a glint like meadow rue:  
Then betimes a letter from Tyndall in England,  
Stamped with the stamp of Spoon River.  
I, lover of Nature, beloved for my love of her,  
Held such converse afar with the great  
Who knew her better than I.  
Oh, there is neither lesser nor greater,  
Save as we make her greater and win from her keener  
delight.  
With shells from the river cover me, cover me.  
I lived in wonder, worshipping earth and heaven.  
I have passed on the march eternal of endless life.



**William Goode**

To all in the village I seemed, no doubt,  
To go this way and that way, aimlessly. .  
But here by the river you can see at twilight  
The soft—winged bats fly zig-zag here and there—  
They must fly so to catch their food.  
And if you have ever lost your way at night,  
In the deep wood near Miller's Ford,  
And dodged this way and now that,  
Wherever the light of the Milky Way shone through,  
Trying to find the path,  
You should understand I sought the way  
With earnest zeal, and all my wanderings  
Were wanderings in the quest.

**J. Milton Miles**

WHENEVER the Presbyterian bell  
Was rung by itself, I knew it as the Presbyterian bell.  
But when its sound was mingled  
With the sound of the Methodist, the Christian,  
The Baptist and the Congregational,  
I could no longer distinguish it,  
Nor any one from the others, or either of them.  
And as many voices called to me in life  
Marvel not that I could not tell  
The true from the false,  
Nor even, at last, the voice that  
I should have known.

## **Faith Matheny**

At first you will know not what they mean,  
And you may never know,  
And we may never tell you:—  
These sudden flashes in your soul,  
Like lambent lightning on snowy clouds  
At midnight when the moon is full.  
They come in solitude, or perhaps  
You sit with your friend, and all at once  
A silence falls on speech, and his eyes  
Without a flicker glow at you:—  
You two have seen the secret together,  
He sees it in you, and you in him.  
And there you sit thrilling lest the  
Mystery Stand before you and strike you dead  
With a splendor like the sun's.  
Be brave, all souls who have such visions  
As your body's alive as mine is dead,  
You're catching a little whiff of the ether  
Reserved for God Himself.

## **Willie Metcalf**

I WAS Willie Metcalf.  
They used to call me "Doctor Meyers,"  
Because, they said, I looked like him.  
And he was my father, according to Jack McGuire.  
I lived in the livery stable,  
Sleeping on the floor  
Side by side with Roger Baughman's bulldog,  
Or sometimes in a stall.  
I could crawl between the legs of the wildest horses  
Without getting kicked—we knew each other.  
On spring days I tramped through the country  
To get the feeling, which I sometimes lost,  
That I was not a separate thing from the earth.  
I used to lose myself, as if in sleep,  
By lying with eyes half-open in the woods.  
Sometimes I talked with animals—even toads and snakes—  
Anything that had an eye to look into.  
Once I saw a stone in the sunshine  
Trying to turn into jelly.  
In April days in this cemetery  
The dead people gathered all about me,  
And grew still, like a congregation in silent prayer.  
I never knew whether I was a part of the earth  
With flowers growing in me, or whether I walked—  
Now I know.

## Willie Pennington

THEY called me the weakling, the simpleton,  
For my brothers were strong and beautiful,  
While I, the last child of parents who had aged,  
Inherited only their residue of power.  
But they, my brothers, were eaten up  
In the fury of the flesh, which I had not,  
Made pulp in the activity of the senses, which I had not,  
Hardened by the growth of the lusts, which I had not,  
Though making names and riches for themselves.  
Then I, the weak one, the simpleton,  
Resting in a little corner of life,  
Saw a vision, and through me many saw the vision,  
Not knowing it was through me.  
Thus a tree sprang  
From me, a mustard seed.

## The Village Atheist

YE young debaters over the doctrine  
Of the soul's immortality  
I who lie here was the village atheist,  
Talkative, contentious, versed in the arguments  
Of the infidels. But through a long sickness  
Coughing myself to death I read the  
Upanishads and the poetry of Jesus.  
And they lighted a torch of hope and intuition  
And desire which the Shadow  
Leading me swiftly through the caverns of darkness,  
Could not extinguish.  
Listen to me, ye who live in the senses  
And think through the senses only:  
Immortality is not a gift,  
Immortality is an achievement;  
And only those who strive mightily  
Shall possess it.

**John Ballard**

IN the lust of my strength  
I cursed God, but he paid no attention to me:  
I might as well have cursed the stars.  
In my last sickness I was in agony, but I was resolute  
And I cursed God for my suffering;  
Still He paid no attention to me;  
He left me alone, as He had always done.  
I might as well have cursed the Presbyterian steeple.  
Then, as I grew weaker, a terror came over me:  
Perhaps I had alienated God by cursing him.  
One day Lydia Humphrey brought me a bouquet  
And it occurred to me to try to make friends with God,  
So I tried to make friends with Him;  
But I might as well have tried to make friends with the  
    bouquet.  
Now I was very close to the secret,  
For I really could make friends with the bouquet  
By holding close to me the love in me for the bouquet  
And so I was creeping upon the secret, but—

**Julian Scott**

TOWARD the last  
The truth of others was untruth to me;  
The justice of others injustice to me;  
Their reasons for death, reasons with me for life;  
Their reasons for life, reasons with me for death;  
I would have killed those they saved,  
And save those they killed.  
And I saw how a god, if brought to earth,  
Must act out what he saw and thought,  
And could not live in this world of men  
And act among them side by side  
Without continual clashes.  
The dust's for crawling, heaven's for flying—  
Wherefore, O soul, whose wings are grown,  
Soar upward to the sun!

## Alfonso Churchill

THEY laughed at me as “Prof. Moon,”  
 As a boy in Spoon River, born with the thirst  
 Of knowing about the stars.  
 They jeered when I spoke of the lunar mountains,  
 And the thrilling heat and cold,  
 And the ebon valleys by silver peaks,  
 And Spica quadrillions of miles away,  
 And the littleness of man.  
 But now that my grave is honored, friends,  
 Let it not be because I taught  
 The lore of the stars in Knox College,  
 But rather for this: that through the stars  
 I preached the greatness of man,  
 Who is none the less a part of the scheme of things  
 For the distance of Spica or the Spiral Nebulae;  
 Nor any the less a part of the question  
 Of what the drama means.

## Zilpha Marsh

AT four o’ clock in late October  
 I sat alone in the country school-house  
 Back from the road ,mid stricken fields,  
 And an eddy of wind blew leaves on the pane,  
 And crooned in the flue of the cannon-stove,  
 With its open door blurring the shadows  
 With the spectral glow of a dying fire.  
 In an idle mood I was running the planchette—  
 All at once my wrist grew limp,  
 And my hand moved rapidly over the board,  
 ‘Till the name of “Charles Guiteau” was spelled,  
 Who threatened to materialize before me.  
 I rose and fled from the room bare-headed  
 Into the dusk, afraid of my gift.  
 And after that the spirits swarmed—  
 Chaucer, Caesar, Poe and Marlowe,  
 Cleopatra and Mrs. Surratt—  
 Wherever I went, with messages,—  
 Mere trifling twaddle, Spoon River agreed.  
 You talk nonsense to children, don’t you?  
 And suppose I see what you never saw  
 And never heard of and have no word for,  
 I must talk nonsense when you ask me  
 What it is I see!

**James Garber**

Do you remember, passer-by, the path  
I wore across the lot where now stands the opera house  
Hasting with swift feet to work through many years?  
Take its meaning to heart:  
You too may walk, after the hills at Miller's Ford  
Seem no longer far away;  
Long after you see them near at hand,  
Beyond four miles of meadow;  
And after woman's love is silent  
Saying no more: "I will save you."  
And after the faces of friends and kindred  
Become as faded photographs, pitifully silent,  
Sad for the look which means:  
"We cannot help you."  
And after you no longer reproach mankind  
With being in league against your soul's uplifted hands—  
Themselves compelled at midnight and at noon  
To watch with steadfast eye their destinies;  
After you have these understandings, think of me  
And of my path, who walked therein and knew  
That neither man nor woman, neither toil,  
Nor duty, gold nor power  
Can ease the longing of the soul,  
The loneliness of the soul!

**Lydia Humphrey**

BACK and forth, back and forth, to and from the church,  
With my Bible under my arm  
'Till I was gray and old;  
Unwedded, alone in the world,  
Finding brothers and sisters in the congregation,  
And children in the church.  
I know they laughed and thought me queer.  
I knew of the eagle souls that flew high in the sunlight,  
Above the spire of the church, and laughed at the church,  
Disdaining me, not seeing me.  
But if the high air was sweet to them, sweet was the church  
to me.  
It was the vision, vision, vision of the poets  
Democratized!

## Le Roy Goldman

WHAT will you do when you come to die,  
 If all your life long you have rejected Jesus,  
 And know as you lie there,  
 He is not your friend?"  
 Over and over I said, I, the revivalist.  
 Ah, yes! but there are friends and friends.  
 And blessed are you, say I, who know all now,  
 You who have lost ere you pass,  
 A father or mother, or old grandfather or mother  
 Some beautiful soul that lived life strongly  
 And knew you all through, and loved you ever,  
 Who would not fail to speak for you,  
 And give God an intimate view of your soul  
 As only one of your flesh could do it.  
 That is the hand your hand will reach for,  
 To lead you along the corridor  
 To the court where you are a stranger!

## Gustav Richter

AFTER a long day of work in my hot—houses  
 Sleep was sweet, but if you sleep on your left side  
 Your dreams may be abruptly ended.  
 I was among my flowers where some one  
 Seemed to be raising them on trial,  
 As if after-while to be transplanted  
 To a larger garden of freer air.  
 And I was disembodied vision  
 Amid a light, as it were the sun  
 Had floated in and touched the roof of glass  
 Like a toy balloon and softly bursted,  
 And etherealized in golden air.  
 And all was silence, except the splendor  
 Was immanent with thought as clear  
 As a speaking voice, and I, as thought,  
 Could hear a  
 Presence think as he walked  
 Between the boxes pinching off leaves,  
 Looking for bugs and noting values,  
 With an eye that saw it all:  
 "Homer, oh yes! Pericles, good.  
 Caesar Borgia, what shall be done with it?  
 Dante, too much manure, perhaps.  
 Napoleon, leave him awhile as yet.  
 Shelley, more soil. Shakespeare, needs spraying—"  
 Clouds, eh!—

**Arlo Will**

DID you ever see an alligator  
Come up to the air from the mud,  
Staring blindly under the full glare of noon?  
Have you seen the stabled horses at night  
Tremble and start back at the sight of a lantern?  
Have you ever walked in darkness  
When an unknown door was open before you  
And you stood, it seemed, in the light of a thousand candles  
Of delicate wax?  
Have you walked with the wind in your ears  
And the sunlight about you  
And found it suddenly shine with an inner splendor?  
Out of the mud many times  
Before many doors of light  
Through many fields of splendor,  
Where around your steps a soundless glory scatters  
Like new—fallen snow,  
Will you go through earth, O strong of soul,  
And through unnumbered heavens  
To the final flame!

**Captain Orlando Killion**

OH, YOU young radicals and dreamers,  
You dauntless fledglings  
Who pass by my headstone,  
Mock not its record of my captaincy in the army  
And my faith in God!  
They are not denials of each other.  
Go by reverently, and read with sober care  
How a great people, riding with defiant shouts  
The centaur of Revolution,  
Spurred and whipped to frenzy,  
Shook with terror, seeing the mist of the sea  
Over the precipice they were nearing,  
And fell from his back in precipitate awe  
To celebrate the Feast of the Supreme Being.  
Moved by the same sense of vast reality  
Of life and death, and burdened as they were  
With the fate of a race,  
How was I, a little blasphemer,  
Caught in the drift of a nation's unloosened flood,  
To remain a blasphemer,  
And a captain in the army?



**Joseph Dixon**

WHO carved this shattered harp on my stone?  
 I died to you, no doubt. But how many harps and pianos  
 Wired I and tightened and disentangled for you,  
 Making them sweet again—with tuning fork or without?  
 Oh well! A harp leaps out of the ear of a man, you say,  
 But whence the ear that orders the length of the strings  
 To a magic of numbers flying before your thought  
 Through a door that closes against your breathless wonder?  
 Is there no Ear round the ear of a man, that it senses  
 Through strings and columns of air the soul of sound?  
 I thrill as I call it a tuning fork that catches  
 The waves of mingled music and light from afar,  
 The antennae of  
 Thought that listens through utmost space.  
 Surely the concord that ruled my spirit is proof  
 Of an Ear that tuned me, able to tune me over  
 And use me again if I am worthy to use.

**Russell Kincaid**

IN the last spring I ever knew,  
 In those last days, I sat in the forsaken orchard  
 Where beyond fields of greenery shimmered  
 The hills at Miller's Ford;  
 Just to muse on the apple tree  
 With its ruined trunk and blasted branches,  
 And shoots of green whose delicate blossoms  
 Were sprinkled over the skeleton tangle,  
 Never to grow in fruit.  
 And there was I with my spirit girded  
 By the flesh half dead, the senses numb  
 Yet thinking of youth and the earth in youth,—  
 Such phantom blossoms palely shining  
 Over the lifeless boughs of Time.  
 O earth that leaves us ere heaven takes us!  
 Had I been only a tree to shiver  
 With dreams of spring and a leafy youth,  
 Then I had fallen in the cyclone  
 Which swept me out of the soul's suspense  
 Where it's neither earth nor heaven.

**Aaron Hatfield**

BETTER than granite, Spoon River,  
Is the memory-picture you keep of me  
Standing before the pioneer men and women  
There at Concord Church on Communion day.  
Speaking in broken voice of the peasant youth  
Of Galilee who went to the city  
And was killed by bankers and lawyers;  
My voice mingling with the June wind  
That blew over wheat fields from Atterbury;  
While the white stones in the burying ground  
Around the Church shimmered in the summer sun.  
And there, though my own memories  
Were too great to bear, were you, O pioneers,  
With bowed heads breathing forth your sorrow  
For the sons killed in battle and the daughters  
And little children who vanished in life's morning,  
Or at the intolerable hour of noon.  
But in those moments of tragic silence,  
When the wine and bread were passed,  
Came the reconciliation for us—  
Us the ploughmen and the hewers of wood,  
Us the peasants, brothers of the peasant of Galilee—  
To us came the Comforter  
And the consolation of tongues of flame!

**Isaiah Beethoven**

THEY told me I had three months to live,  
So I crept to Bernadotte,  
And sat by the mill for hours and hours  
Where the gathered waters deeply moving  
Seemed not to move:  
O world, that's you!  
You are but a widened place in the river  
Where Life looks down and we rejoice for her  
Mirrored in us, and so we dream And turn away, but when  
again  
We look for the face, behold the low-lands  
And blasted cotton-wood trees where we empty  
Into the larger stream!  
But here by the mill the castled clouds  
Mocked themselves in the dizzy water;  
And over its agate floor at night  
The flame of the moon ran under my eyes  
Amid a forest stillness broken  
By a flute in a hut on the hill.  
At last when I came to lie in bed  
Weak and in pain, with the dreams about me,  
The soul of the river had entered my soul,  
And the gathered power of my soul was moving  
So swiftly it seemed to be at rest  
Under cities of cloud and under

Spheres of silver and changing worlds—  
Until I saw a flash of trumpets  
Above the battlements over Time.

## Elijah Browning

I WAS among multitudes of children  
Dancing at the foot of a mountain.  
A breeze blew out of the east and swept them as leaves,  
Driving some up the slopes. . . .  
All was changed.  
Here were flying lights, and mystic moons, and dream-music.  
A cloud fell upon us.  
When it lifted all was changed.  
I was now amid multitudes who were wrangling.  
Then a figure in shimmering gold, and one with a trumpet,  
And one with a sceptre stood before me.  
They mocked me and danced a rigadon and vanished. . . .  
All was changed again.  
Out of a bower of poppies  
A woman bared her breasts and lifted her open mouth to mine.  
I kissed her.  
The taste of her lips was like salt.  
She left blood on my lips.  
I fell exhausted.  
I arose and ascended higher, but a mist as from an iceberg  
Clouded my steps.  
I was cold and in pain.  
Then the sun streamed on me again,  
And I saw the mists below me hiding all below them.  
And I, bent over my staff, knew myself

**Webster Ford**

Silhouetted against the snow.  
And above me  
Was the soundless air, pierced by a cone of ice,  
Over which hung a solitary star!  
A shudder of ecstasy, a shudder of fear  
Ran through me.  
But I could not return to the slopes—  
Nay, I wished not to return.  
For the spent waves of the symphony of freedom  
Lapped the ethereal cliffs about me.  
Therefore I climbed to the pinnacle.  
I flung away my staff.  
I touched that star  
With my outstretched hand.  
I vanished utterly.  
For the mountain delivers to  
Infinite Truth  
Whosoever touches the star.

Do you remember, O Delphic Apollo,  
The sunset hour by the river, when Mickey M'Grew  
Cried, "There's a ghost," and I, "It's Delphic Apollo,"  
And the son of the banker derided us, saying, "It's light  
By the flags at the water's edge, you half-witted fools."  
And from thence, as the wearisome years rolled on, long  
after  
Poor Mickey fell down in the water tower to his death  
Down, down, through bellowing darkness, I carried  
The vision which perished with him like a rocket which falls  
And quenches its light in earth, and hid it for fear  
Of the son of the banker, calling on Plutus to save me?  
Avenged were you for the shame of a fearful heart  
Who left me alone till I saw you again in an hour  
When I seemed to be turned to a tree with trunk and branches  
Growing indurate, turning to stone, yet burgeoning  
In laurel leaves, in hosts of lambent laurel,  
Quivering, fluttering, shrinking, fighting the numbness  
Creeping into their veins from the dying trunk and branches!  
'Tis vain, O youth, to fly the call of Apollo.  
Fling yourselves in the fire, die with a song of spring,  
If die you must in the spring. For none shall look  
On the face of Apollo and live, and choose you must  
'Twixt death in the flame and death after years of sorrow,  
Rooted fast in the earth, feeling the grisly hand,

Not so much in the trunk as in the terrible numbness  
Creeping up to the laurel leaves that never cease  
To flourish until you fall. O leaves of me  
Too sere for coronal wreaths, and fit alone  
For urns of memory, treasured, perhaps, as themes  
For hearts heroic, fearless singers and livers—  
Delphic Apollo.

## The Spooniad

OF John Cabanis, wrath and of the strife  
Of hostile parties, and his dire defeat  
Who led the common people in the cause  
Of freedom for Spoon River, and the fall  
Of Rhodes, bank that brought unnumbered woes  
And loss to many, with engendered hate  
That flamed into the torch in Anarch hands  
To burn the court—house, on whose blackened wreck  
A fairer temple rose and Progress stood—  
Sing, muse, that lit the Chian's face with smiles  
Who saw the ant-like Greeks and Trojans crawl  
About Scamander, over walls, pursued  
Or else pursuing, and the funeral pyres  
And sacred hecatombs, and first because  
Of Helen who with Paris fled to Troy  
As soul-mate; and the wrath of Peleus, son,  
Decreed to lose Chryseis, lovely spoil  
Of war, and dearest concubine.

Say first,

Thou son of night, called Momus, from whose eyes  
No secret hides, and Thalia, smiling one,  
What bred 'twixt Thomas Rhodes and John Cabanis  
The deadly strife? His daughter Flossie, she,  
Returning from her wandering with a troop  
Of strolling players, walked the village streets,

Her bracelets tinkling and with sparkling rings  
And words of serpent wisdom and a smile  
Of cunning in her eyes. Then Thomas Rhodes,  
Who ruled the church and ruled the bank as well,  
Made known his disapproval of the maid;  
And all Spoon River whispered and the eyes  
Of all the church frowned on her, till she knew  
They feared her and condemned.

But them to flout  
She gave a dance to viols and to flutes,  
Brought from Peoria, and many youths,  
But lately made regenerate through the prayers  
Of zealous preachers and of earnest souls,  
Danced merrily, and sought her in the dance,  
Who wore a dress so low of neck that eyes  
Down straying might survey the snowy swale  
'Till it was lost in whiteness.

With the dance  
The village changed to merriment from gloom.  
The milliner, Mrs. Williams, could not fill  
Her orders for new hats, and every seamstress  
Plied busy needles making gowns; old trunks  
And chests were opened for their store of laces  
And rings and trinkets were brought out of hiding  
And all the youths fastidious grew of dress;  
Notes passed, and many a fair one's door at eve  
Knew a bouquet, and strolling lovers thronged

About the hills that overlooked the river.  
Then, since the mercy seats more empty showed,  
One of God's chosen lifted up his voice:  
"The woman of Babylon is among us; rise  
Ye sons of light and drive the wanton forth!"  
So John Cabanis left the church and left  
The hosts of law and order with his eyes  
By anger cleared, and him the liberal cause  
Acclaimed as nominee to the mayoralty  
To vanquish A. D. Blood.

But as the war  
Waged bitterly for votes and rumors flew  
About the bank, and of the heavy loans  
Which Rhodes, son had made to prop his loss  
In wheat, and many drew their coin and left  
The bank of Rhodes more hollow, with the talk  
Among the liberals of another bank  
Soon to be chartered, lo, the bubble burst  
'Mid cries and curses; but the liberals laughed  
And in the hall of Nicholas Bindle held  
Wise converse and inspiring debate.

High on a stage that overlooked the chairs  
Where dozens sat, and where a pop-eyed daub  
Of Shakespeare, very like the hired man  
Of Christian Dallman, brow and pointed beard,  
Upon a drab proscenium outward stared,

Sat Harmon Whitney, to that eminence,  
 By merit raised in ribaldry and guile,  
 And to the assembled rebels thus he spake:  
 "Whether to lie supine and let a clique  
 Cold-blooded, scheming, hungry, singing psalms,  
 Devour our substance, wreck our banks and drain  
 Our little hoards for hazards on the price  
 Of wheat or pork, or yet to cower beneath  
 The shadow of a spire upreared to curb  
 A breed of lackeys and to serve the bank  
 Coadjutor in greed, that is the question.  
 Shall we have music and the jocund dance,  
 Or tolling bells? Or shall young romance roam  
 These hills about the river, flowering now  
 To April's tears, or shall they sit at home,  
 Or play croquet where Thomas Rhodes may see,  
 I ask you? If the blood of youth runs o'er  
 And riots 'gainst this regimen of gloom,  
 Shall we submit to have these youths and maids  
 Branded as libertines and wantons?"

Ere

His words were done a woman's voice called "No!"  
 Then rose a sound of moving chairs, as when  
 The numerous swine o'er-run the replenished troughs;  
 And every head was turned, as when a flock  
 Of geese back-turning to the hunter's tread  
 Rise up with flapping wings; then rang the hall

With riotous laughter, for with battered hat  
 Tilted upon her saucy head, and fist  
 Raised in defiance, Daisy Fraser stood.  
 Headlong she had been hurled from out the hall  
 Save Wendell Bloyd, who spoke for woman's rights,  
 Prevented, and the bellowing voice of Burchard.  
 Then, mid applause she hastened toward the stage  
 And flung both gold and silver to the cause  
 And swiftly left the hall.

Meantime upstood

A giant figure, bearded like the son  
 Of Alcmene, deep-chested, round of paunch,  
 And spoke in thunder: "Over there behold  
 A man who for the truth withstood his wife—  
 Such is our spirit—when that A. D. Blood  
 Compelled me to remove Dom Pedro—"

Quick

Before Jim Brown could finish, Jefferson Howard  
 Obtained the floor and spake: "Ill suits the time  
 For clownish words, and trivial is our cause  
 If naught's at stake but John Cabanis, wrath,  
 He who was erstwhile of the other side  
 And came to us for vengeance. More's at stake  
 Than triumph for New England or Virginia.  
 And whether rum be sold, or for two years  
 As in the past two years, this town be dry  
 Matters but little— Oh yes, revenue

For sidewalks, sewers; that is well enough!  
I wish to God this fight were now inspired  
By other passion than to salve the pride  
Of John Cabanis or his daughter.  
Why Can never contests of great moment spring  
From worthy things, not little? Still, if men  
Must always act so, and if rum must be  
The symbol and the medium to release  
From life's denial and from slavery,  
Then give me rum!"

Exultant cries arose.

Then, as George Trimble had overcome his fear  
And vacillation and begun to speak,  
The door creaked and the idiot, Willie Metcalf,  
Breathless and hatless, whiter than a sheet,  
Entered and cried: "The marshal's on his way  
To arrest you all. And if you only knew  
Who's coming here to—morrow; I was listening  
Beneath the window where the other side  
Are making plans."

So to a smaller room

To hear the idiot's secret some withdrew  
Selected by the Chair; the Chair himself  
And Jefferson Howard, Benjamin Pantier,  
And Wendell Bloyd, George Trimble, Adam Weirauch,  
Imanuel Ehrenhardt, Seth Compton, Godwin James  
And Enoch Dunlap, Hiram Scates, Roy Butler,

Carl Hamblin, Roger Heston, Ernest Hyde  
And Penniwit, the artist, Kinsey Keene,  
And E. C. Culbertson and Franklin Jones,  
Benjamin Fraser, son of Benjamin Pantier  
By Daisy Fraser, some of lesser note,  
And secretly conferred.

But in the hall

Disorder reigned and when the marshal came  
And found it so, he marched the hoodlums out  
And locked them up.

Meanwhile within a room

Back in the basement of the church, with Blood  
Counseled the wisest heads. Judge Somers first,  
Deep learned in life, and next him, Elliott Hawkins  
And Lambert Hutchins; next him Thomas Rhodes  
And Editor Whedon; next him Garrison Standard,  
A traitor to the liberals, who with lip  
Upcurled in scorn and with a bitter sneer:  
"Such strife about an insult to a woman—  
A girl of eighteen"—Christian Dallman too,  
And others unrecorded. Some there were  
Who frowned not on the cup but loathed the rule  
Democracy achieved thereby, the freedom  
And lust of life it symbolized.

Now morn with snowy fingers up the sky  
Flung like an orange at a festival



The ruddy sun, when from their hasty beds  
Poured forth the hostile forces, and the streets  
Resounded to the rattle of the wheels  
That drove this way and that to gather in  
The tardy voters, and the cries of chieftains  
Who manned the battle. But at ten o'clock  
The liberals bellowed fraud, and at the polls  
The rival candidates growled and came to blows.  
Then proved the idiot's tale of yester-eve  
A word of warning. Suddenly on the streets  
Walked hog-eyed Allen, terror of the hills  
That looked on Bernadotte ten miles removed.  
No man of this degenerate day could lift  
The boulders which he threw, and when he spoke  
The windows rattled, and beneath his brows  
Thatched like a shed with bristling hair of black,  
His small eyes glistened like a maddened boar.  
And as he walked the boards creaked, as he walked  
A song of menace rumbled. Thus he came,  
The champion of A. D. Blood, commissioned  
To terrify the liberals. Many fled  
As when a hawk soars o'er the chicken yard.  
He passed the polls and with a playful hand  
Touched Brown, the giant, and he fell against,  
As though he were a child, the wall; so strong  
Was hog-eyed Allen. But the liberals smiled.  
For soon as hog-eyed Allen reached the walk,

Close on his steps paced Bengal Mike, brought in  
By Kinsey Keene, the subtle-witted one,  
To match the hog-eyed Allen. He was scarce  
Three-fourths the other's bulk, but steel his arms,  
And with a tiger's heart. Two men he killed  
And many wounded in the days before,  
And no one feared.

But when the hog-eyed one  
Saw Bengal Mike his countenance grew dark,  
The bristles o'er his red eyes twitched with rage,  
The song he rumbled lowered. Round and round  
The court-house paced he, followed stealthily  
By Bengal Mike, who jeered him every step:  
"Come, elephant, and fight! Come, hog-eyed coward!  
Come, face about and fight me, lumbering sneak!  
Come, beefy bully, hit me, if you can!  
Take out your gun, you duffer, give me reason  
To draw and kill you. Take your billy out.  
I'll crack your boar's head with a piece of brick!"  
But never a word the hog-eyed one returned  
But trod about the court-house, followed both  
By troops of boys and watched by all the men.  
All day, they walked the square. But when Apollo  
Stood with reluctant look above the hills  
As fain to see the end, and all the votes  
Were cast, and closed the polls, before the door  
Of Trainor's drug store Bengal Mike, in tones

That echoed through the village, bawled the taunt:  
“Who was your mother, hog—eyed?” In a trice  
As when a wild boar turns upon the hound  
That through the brakes upon an August day  
Has gashed him with its teeth, the hog- one  
Rushed with his giant arms on Bengal Mike  
And grabbed him by the throat. Then rose to heaven  
The frightened cries of boys, and yells of men  
Forth rushing to the street. And Bengal Mike  
Moved this way and now that, drew in his head  
As if his neck to shorten, and bent down  
To break the death grip of the hog-eyed one;  
‘Twixt guttural wrath and fast-expiring strength  
Striking his fists against the invulnerable chest  
Of hog-eyed Allen. Then, when some came in  
To part them, others stayed them, and the fight  
Spread among dozens; many valiant souls  
Went down from clubs and bricks.

But tell me, Muse,  
What god or goddess rescued Bengal Mike?  
With one last, mighty struggle did he grasp  
The murderous hands and turning kick his foe.  
Then, as if struck by lightning, vanished all  
The strength from hog—eyed Allen, at his side  
Sank limp those giant arms and o’er his face  
Dread pallor and the sweat of anguish spread.  
And those great knees, invincible but late,

Shook to his weight. And quickly as the lion  
Leaps on its wounded prey, did Bengal Mike  
Smite with a rock the temple of his foe,  
And down he sank and darkness o’er his eyes  
Passed like a cloud.

As when the woodman fells  
Some giant oak upon a summer’s day  
And all the songsters of the forest shrill,  
And one great hawk that has his nestling young  
Amid the topmost branches croaks, as crash  
The leafy branches through the tangled boughs  
Of brother oaks, so fell the hog—eyed one  
Amid the lamentations of the friends  
Of A. D. Blood.

Just then, four lusty men  
Bore the town marshal, on whose iron face  
The purple pall of death already lay,  
To Trainor’s drug store, shot by Jack McGuire.  
And cries went up of “Lynch him!” and the sound  
Of running feet from every side was heard  
Bent on the

## **THE END**

The late Mr. Jonathan Swift Somers, laureate of Spoon River  
planned The Spooniad as an epic in twenty-four books, but

unfortunately did not live to complete even the first book. The fragment was found among his papers by William Marion Reedy and was for the first time published in Reedy's *Mirror* of December 18th, 1914.

# Index of First Lines

## A

A chaplain in the army, 63  
A stepmother drove me from home, embittering me. 57  
After a long day of work in my hot—houses 119  
After I got religion and steadied down 21  
After you have enriched your soul 65  
All they said was true: 69  
All your sorrow, Louise, and hatred of me 39  
Almost the shell of a woman after the surgeon's kn 50  
As a boy, Theodore, you sat for long hours 29  
As to democracy, fellow citizens, 64  
At first I suspected something— 93  
At first you will know not what they mean, 114  
At four o'clock in late October 117

## B

Back and forth, back and forth, to and from the ch 118  
Better than granite, Spoon River, 122

## D

Did you ever find out 28  
Did you ever hear of Editor Whedon 19  
Did you ever see an alligator 120  
Do the boys and girls still go to Siever's 24  
Do you remember, O Delphic Apollo, 124  
Do you remember, passer-by, the path 118

Do you remember when I stood on the steps 33  
Dust of my dust, 95

**E**

Everyone laughed at Col. Prichard 69

**F**

Father, thou canst never know 27  
From Bindle's opera house in the village 26

**H**

Harry Wilmans! You who fell in a swamp 102  
Have you seen walking through the village 13  
He protested all his life long 22  
He ran away and was gone for a year. 72  
Henry got me with child, 15  
Herbert broke our engagement of eight years 38  
Here I lie close to the grave 12  
Horses and men are just alike. 82  
How did you feel, you libertarians, 76  
How does it happen, tell me, 16  
How many times, during the twenty years 85

**I**

I am Minerva, the village poetess, 20  
I began with Sir William Hamilton's lectures. 111  
I belonged to the church, 36  
I, born in Weimar 48  
I bought every kind of machine that's known— 83  
I could not run or play 47  
I grew spiritually fat living off the souls of men 59

I had fiddled all day at the county fair. 44  
I had no objection at all 52  
I have studied many times 39  
I have two monuments besides this granite obelisk: 75  
I inherited forty acres from my Father 37  
I know that he told that I snared his soul 17  
I leaned against the mantel, sick, sick, 32  
I loathed you, Spoon River. 93  
I looked like Abraham Lincoln. 84  
I lost my patronage in Spoon River 58  
I made two fights for the people. 89  
I never saw any difference 33  
I preached four thousand sermons, 51  
I ran away from home with the circus, 36  
I reached the highest place in Spoon River, 91  
I staggered on through darkness, 71  
I tried to win the nomination 81  
I wanted to be County Judge 90  
I wanted to go away to college 78  
I was a gun-smith in Odessa. 99  
I was a lawyer like Harmon Whitney 77  
I was a peasant girl from Germany, 60  
I was among multitudes of children 123  
I was attorney for the "Q" 48  
I was crushed between Altgeld and Armour. 63  
I was just turned twenty-one, 100  
I was not beloved of the villagers, 31  
I was only eight years old; 38  
I was sick, but more than that, I was mad 70  
I was sixteen, and I had the most terrible dreams, 28  
I was the daughter of Lambert Hutchins, 75  
I was the first fruits of the battle of Missionary 23

I was the laughing-stock of the village, 110  
 I was the milliner 42  
 I was the only child of Frances Harris of Virginia 60  
 I was the Sunday-school superintendent, 99  
 I was the Widow McFarlane, 66  
 I was well known and much beloved 71  
 I was Willie Metcalf. 114  
 I went to the dances at Chandlerville, 108  
 I went up and down the streets 25  
 I who kept the greenhouse, 111  
 I winged my bird, 74  
 I won the prize essay at school 44  
 I would have been as great as George Eliot 32  
 I would I had thrust my hands of flesh 79  
 I wrote him a letter asking him for old times, sak 108  
 If a man could bite the giant hand 14  
 If I could have lived another year 47  
 If the learned Supreme Court of Illinois 78  
 If you in the village think that my work was a goo 41  
 In a lingering fever many visions come to you: 105  
 In life I was the town drunkard; 16  
 In the last spring I ever knew, 121  
 In the lust of my strength 116  
 Is it true, Spoon River, 88  
 It never came into my mind 40  
 It was just like everything else in life: 70  
 It was moon-light, and the earth sparkled 87  
 It was only a little house of two rooms— 86

## J

Jonas Keene thought his lot a hard one 53

## K

Knowlt Hoheimer ran away to the war 23

## L

l, the scourge-wielder, balance-wrecker, 46

## M

Maurice, weep not, I am not here under this pine t 25  
 Mr. Kessler, you know, was in the army, 73  
 My father who owned the wagon-shop 26  
 My life's blossom might have bloomed on all sides 15  
 My mind was a mirror: 61  
 My mother was for woman's rights 84  
 My name used to be in the papers daily 76  
 My parents thought that I would be 77  
 My thanks, friends of the 92  
 My valiant fight! For I call it valiant, 53  
 My wife lost her health, 34

## N

No other man, unless it was Doc Hill, 22  
 Not "a youth with hoary head and haggard eye", 97  
 Not character, not fortitude, not patience 62  
 Not, where the stairway turns in the dark 109  
 Nothing in life is alien to you: 85

## O

Observe the clasped hands! 80  
 Of John Cabanis, wrath and of the strife 125  
 Often Aner Clute at the gate 35

## *Spoon River Anthology*

Oh many times did Ernest Hyde and I 61  
Oh, you young radicals and dreamers, 120  
Oh! the dew-wet grass of the meadow in North Carol 101  
Once in a while a curious weed unknown to me, 112  
Only the chemist can tell, and not always the chem 19  
Out of a cell into this darkened space— 24  
Out of the lights and roar of cities, 73  
Over and over they used to ask me, 34

### **P**

Passer-by, 56

### **R**

Reading in Ovid the sorrowful story of Itys, 80  
Reverend Wiley advised me not to divorce him 50  
Rhodes, slave! Selling shoes and gingham, 67  
Rich, honored by my fellow citizens, 55

### **S**

Samuel is forever talking of his elm— 112  
Seeds in a dry pod, tick, tick, tick, 49  
She loved me. 72  
She took my strength by minutes, 13  
Silent before the jury 94  
Suppose it is nothing but the hive: 109

### **T**

Take note, passers-by, of the sharp erosions 43  
Tell me, was Altgeld elected Governor? 92  
The bank broke and I lost my savings. 90  
The buzzards wheel slowly 88

The cooper should know about tubs. 40  
The earth keeps some vibration going 37  
The idea danced before us as a flag; 102  
The press of the Spoon River Clarion was wrecked, 66  
The secret of the stars— gravitation. 62  
The sudden death of Eugene Carman 68  
The very fall my sister Nancy Knapp 45  
The white men played all sorts of jokes on me. 89  
The: Prohibitionists made me Town Marshal 29  
Their spirits beat upon mine 20  
There by the window in the old house 106  
There is something about 43  
There would be a knock at the door 83  
They brought me ambrotypes 107  
They called me the weakling, the simpleton, 115  
They first charged me with disorderly conduct, 46  
They got me into the Sunday-school 54  
They have chiseled on my stone the words: 14  
They laughed at me as “Prof. Moon,” 117  
They told me I had three months to live, 122  
They would have lynched me 30  
This I saw with my own eyes: A cliff—swallow 52  
This weeping willow! 110  
To all in the village I seemed, no doubt, 113  
To be able to see every side of every question; 67  
To this generation I would say: 51  
Together in this grave lie Benjamin Pantier, attor 17  
Toward the last 116

### **V**

Vegetarian, non—resistant, free-thinker, in ethics 68  
Very well, you liberals, 58

**W**

We quarreled that morning, 27  
We stand about this place—we, the memories; 96  
Well, don't you see this was the way of it: 45  
Well, Emily Sparks, your prayers were not wasted, 18  
Were you not ashamed, fellow citizens, 31  
What but the love of God could have softened 94  
What will you do when you come to die, 119  
When Fort Sumter fell and the war came 30  
When I died, the circulating library 86  
When I first came to Spoon River 87  
When I went to the city, Mary McNeely, 56  
When my moustache curled, 35  
When Reuben Pantier ran away and threw me 41  
Whenever the Presbyterian bell 113  
Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley, 11  
Where is my boy, my boy 18  
While I was handling Dom Pedro 59  
Who carved this shattered harp on my stone? 121  
Whoever thou art who passeth by 98  
Why did Albert Schirding kill himself 54  
Why was I not devoured by self-contempt, 91  
With our hearts like drifting suns, had we but wal 104

**Y**

Ye aspiring ones, listen to the story of the unkno 65  
Ye who are kicking against Fate, 97  
Ye young debaters over the doctrine 115  
Yes, here I lie close to a stunted rose bush 64  
You are over there, Father Malloy, 96  
You may think, passer-by, that Fate 103

You never understood, 98  
You would not believe, would you 21  
Your red blossoms amid green leaves 106

To return to the Electronic Classics  
Page,  
go to  
[http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/  
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