

ROBERT FROST AT AGNES SCOTT 1962

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PRESIDENT ALSTON: We welcome Mr. Robert Frost back to Agnes Scott College tonight. We're very honored to have him because Robert Frost is one of our greatest Americans....He represents as a great American...APPLAUSE

ROBERT FROST: And the great word in that is "mutuality" isn't it, that is the warmth on both sides. I feel that more and more with my American friends, readers, and all. And I've had time to be misunderstood and then understood and then misunderstood and then understood, you know, it's all in a lifetime. Twenty times here...^{you see} and I have often thought that I like a lot of chances to set myself right with people and yet not try to be too definite and defining, you know, just sort of feel my way with them. I'm an invidious, insidious, no let's say I'm an "insidious nationalist," if you know what that is. You know that without my saying it, it's all scattered through my poems, what a terrible American I am...a terrible-- and that, you get used to it, if you see enough of it, you don't mind it anyway, and you can stand it, no matter what your politics are.

Now I was asked tonight to say a few words, not like that that comes out of Mr. Alston's speech, the word "mutuality" of ^{it} it all is there. This particular college, how well I remember the first time I was here, it all comes back to me many times, faculty and students. And I meet them all over the country, you know, girls, girls from this college. Now I was going to say a few words about a given subject. I've told people once or twice, that I once gave a lecture on how you can tell when you're thinking. And they...and I go round telling them that I

gave that lecture. I haven't repeated it, they're not written down, you know. They asked me, don't I want to give it tonight? And I said, "That's a very expensive lecture LAUGHTER I keep that for Big money ROARS OF LAUGHTER and it's a secret I tell them, how you can tell when you're thinking. But there's a little you can say about it forty times in all sorts of ways and all sorts of things about it. I mean something beyond just opinionating, that's like voting, you know. I vote against women's voting, say, "That's your opinion," "You girls don't believe in voting," I suppose, "That's just your opinion," have you got anymore to say about it than that, you know...and if you haven't got any more to say about it, don't tell me. That's not thinking, that's opinionating. Agreeing with me isn't thinking, that's not what I mean. I tell you... all thinking comes down to this word "sharp" that we use in slang almost. He is very sharp, he is very sharp tonight. That means he missed no chances to be reminded by what was going on, of something interesting related to it. His mind is easily reminded. Well-reminded, he's right up "fresh," that's the best of all things.

Let me give you an example: One of the things I get quoted at me oftenest, (I'm a little tired of it, but it's one of those cases,) I remember when I introduced a free-verse poet once from the platform about twenty or forty years ago, I remember, I forget how long. LAUGHTER I was very friendly with him, but I did happen to say that I...that he wrote free verse, I did happen to say that as for me, you see, just me, I kept saying ME, I attacked myself, I said for ME, I just soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down. LAUGHTER And he didn't

take offense at the time but did after he thought it over... ROARS OF GIGGLES
 And that's the kind of thought that is a sign of thinking, too. That people...
 you say enough, ^{Say} a good one like that and then that gives you a chance to
 get away before they can answer you. LAUGHTER You make a good get-away.
 But afterward he wrote an essay to prove you could play better tennis with
 the net down, LAUGHTER which gives the whole thing away, it shows that
 he didn't know what I meant a-tall. It didn't matter too much.

But the readiness with which you come up, with which you are
 reminded by what's going on, reminded of what is distant in time, books,
 life, and so on. Aptly reminded, the word "reminding" is all there is to
 thinking. And every good thought that counts as a thought is a feat of
 association like that. Just say that for me. That's the heart of it all,
 a feat of association. You make a good apt association, to the pleasure
 of everybody. Now we use the word "happy thought" in the wrong way; it's
 corrupted, it's sunk down. What we really, what it originally meant was
 just that, "happy association" not a cheerful association, not something
 that makes you happy, something that charms you because it's fresh,
 original. The word "original" will do for it (I don't like the word too
 much) I don't know, it's not necessarily great, but it's a fresh, fresh
 reminding. See? And you don't use the word everytime, but...now take a
 couple...I remember one when I was thirteen years old, I've thought of it
 lately. My mother was bothered about the evolutionary talk of that
 time, Darwin and all that. She was more worried than I was. And I've
 never been inclined to meet anything that I didn't care for in the world
 with a head-on contradiction, never, never, today or anyday. My

inclination is to go it one better included in the next thing I say.

I remember saying to her, this evolutionary thing worries you, bothers you, your idea...you were brought up to think that God made man out of mud, don't you? She said "Yes." "This is just a theory that God made man out of prepared mud...ROARS OF LAUGHTER...that's all." That satisfied her though I wasn't half her age.

Now the other...I have to speak with some feeling of sorrow, Robinson Jeffers has just died. My distant friend; I never knew him very well. He kept himself in his tower in California, where I...and I never go to towers. But I admired him. I admired his pessimism, and just for that. That it was a fresh original pessimism, very dark, very. And what a fine figure this is for throwing life away, you know. It's not my figure, but it's his, and a good one, and a bad one--the worse it is the better. He says, "Give your heart to the hawks" (it's the title of the poem) that's all you need. That's all there is to life, "Give your heart to the hawks." He died in that spirit. Touching. Now the thing, I never try to deal with that...I just took it as a good black spot in my thoughts. LAUGHTER But he said something that I took, know almost like...though I was confronted with...that doesn't confront me... I know all that sentiment and other writers--it's an ancient one. "Give your heart to the hawks." It's a pretty way to put it, you know. But he says, "Shine perishing republic" to us "shine perishing republic". I used that...I happened to use it in my new book...which had gone to press before I knew all about his death. Just one line, "Shine perishing republic," what are you going to do with that? Either let it alone or

include it in my book. And the way I included it is that everything that shines, shines by perishing, candles, the sun, and me. Then I don't know what he does with it; that's what I do with it. I think he's darker than that.

"Everything shines by perishing," everything. Somebody...and you've got to remember that. It's...it's a great...great thought, but mine includes his. And how long will the United States shine before it perishes? Well the history of the world, I always say, you know... talking about money...I tell them I always charge more for prophecy than I do for history. LAUGHTER And I don't know how long we're going to last. The song says it shall wave a thousand years. That's a good long time...we've only spent two hundred of it...and thousand is about... you know. If you look in history, it's a good long time, it's longer than most have done it and the great days of a nation are seldom anything like that. You've got to think of that. But what shall we do while we are spending, while we're shining, burning through our lives, you know, that you ask yourself as you look around today. We're squandering our light ^{you know} almost. It's a wonderful shining thing we are. But you wonder about the economy of it, we have to ask the economists. I'm not trying, you know, to frighten you, I'm not scared if you're not. LAUGHTER But a thousand years is all of it, you know, you've got lots of time to turn around in that time. Don't think we're forever, we can't be, nothing is forever. Everything shines to perish. Perishes to shine. So that takes you out of all the little quibbling thoughts of the day.

Here we are, the richest nation in the world, the richest nation the world has ever seen, with the widest diffusion of wealth that the world has ever seen, and shining as such, so that everybody looks in this direction, you know. And if we don't...and if we're troubled by our responsibility of shining to perish, you know, we're a small lot. Petty minded. Big. Let's make it BIG, shine. To measure it all the time, you know, we don't need just to burn like a prairie fire; that would be...That was Tom Paine's idea of democracy. It was going to be a prairie fire that swept the world, you know. This isn't like that, this is a great steady flame like Sirius, like the star Sirius. Like the sun, that we shine. And...nobody knows in the universe anything that isn't spending. You know, one of the strange things of confidence is that the scientists get up for themselves is that something must be coming in. They haven't any evidence of it anywhere, not a glimmer of it, everything is spending. Spending, grand, grand spending. And you know, we're not talking about terms, what the terms are, they're vast terms, little terms and all that.

Well, the point is, though, that's just my handling of something I encounter, you see. I see that "Shine perishing republic" and I know that there's a certain note of pessimism in his poem, without reading further I know just how he'd take it. But I know another way to take it. Everything shines, perishes to shine. That's just what I mean by thinking, that's all there is to thinking. Feat of association. And it's

better never to take anything head-on contradicted if you can sort of outwit it, go it one better, by some liveness in your own mind. Live mind. And remind. Remind. See, when I see him saying that, I think he probably hasn't thought enough about all the universe spending. That's for us, maybe, you know. I don't know, or don't care. But I have to live with it.

Now I'm not going to talk about that. You want to see what an "insidious" nationalist I am (ha, ha) see it's all scattered through my poems, I'll just do it by poems now without using a word ever again.

You know what a woodchuck is? I suppose most of you do, it's a little animal we have a lot of up north. It lives in a gravelly hillocks and all the orchards, and everything, and invades our gardens and all. And a very bright, it's a ^{n?}chucky little animal though it doesn't look very bright. But it's very bright. And they say, it can dodge a bullet. It is thought it can dodge a bullet. It's quick, quick, and gives a little whistle and goes.

My own the woodchuck says
My own strategic retreat,
Is where two rocks almost meet
And still more secure and snug
A two-dog burrow I dug.

With those in mind at my back
I can sit forth exposed to a tack
As one who shrewdly pretends
That he and the world are friends.

A Drumlin Woodchuck

Now just linger over that a minute. I wrote that when we were bowing and scraping to the Japanese and pretending to be friends with them just before Pearl Harbor.

...
 As one who shrewdly pretends
 That he and the world are friends.

All we who prefer to live
 Have a little whistle we give
 And flash at the least alarm
 We dive down under the farm.

We allow some time for guile
 And don't come out for awhile
 Either to eat or drink
 We take occasion to think.

(This is where thinking comes in, you see.)

If after the hunt goes fast
 And the double barrel blasts
 Like war, pestilence
 And the loss of common sense.

If I can with confidence say,
 That still for another day
 Even another year
 I will be there for you, my dear.

It will be because though small
 As measured against the all
 I've been so instinctively thorough
 About my crevice and burrow.

And another that might have gone with that, then I'll leave that little
 subject about my nationalism.

The Infinite's being so wide

(I've been speaking, its being a spending
 thing, but it's very wide, you know.)

The Infinite's being so wide
 Is the reason the Powers provide

(Powers with a capital "P". That means, you
 know, God and all that, but they call it the
 Powers for the fun, for the poetic purposes,
 my poetic purposes.)

Juip Bronze

The Infinite's being so wide
 Is the reason the Powers provide
 For inner defense my hide.
 For next defense outside.

I build ~~as is~~ myself this time
 Of wood or granite or lime
 A wall too hard for crime
 Either to breach or climb.

Then a number of us agree
 On a national boundary.
 And that defense makes three
 Between too much and me.

See it begins with my skin, I didn't name my clothes, my housewalls; my skin first, my clothes next, the housewall next, then all sorts of groups like this, you know. Groups, groups, groups, up to national boundaries on a number of us agree on. And that defense, I only counted three, "that defense makes three against too much and me." And that's what you've got to realize. And now I'll leave the subject.

Another of these things, (these) happy thoughts I had years ago was: all life is cellular, even the communists have cells, LAUGHTER and in your body or outside of your body your life is all cellular and it's walls making and breaking, you see some walls going and you think they're gone for good. But no, there's others coming. And while I'm talking to you, the cells of my body are making and breaking, you know, so they say in a certain number of years, I am made out of an entirely different me. LAUGHTER Well that's fun, isn't it?

You know, I've had to say lately to myself what I'm around for. I'm around for my poems chiefly. But I'm around, and I'm not around preaching, I'm not around teaching, I just found this out. I'm

around looking for kindred spirits, see. For their comfort and mine. And I do it on a percentage basis. LAUGHTER That's what is, I'm wandering around like butterflies in the air, you know, looking for kindred spirits, that's all, not preaching and teaching. You don't have to agree with anything, you don't have to get mad at me because I don't get mad at you. And I'm not out for any particular cause, I belong to causes; but I'm very, very, very happy in my relation to 'em. I got asked in a big audience in Boston the other day if I was interested in this Birch movement. What do you suppose I said? "Hell, no!" LAUGHTER Just like/^{that,} and you know why? Because I, our aims may be the same but we know better how to do them. We're trying to save this republic, make this republic burn not too fast, you know. To shine just right. That's our aim, that's their aim too, right moderation. You are sorry for them that they don't see better than that.

All right now I've shown you sort of what I'd call, in a loose scattered way, not loose but a scattered way about what I mean by thinking. Not arguing, not pressing, no ^{resenting,} that I've shown myself as a person sharply reminded of this, that, and the other thing in the universe. When I'm feeling right. Sometimes when I'm feeling right and I just wonder where it's gone, that's all there is to it. The condition that makes you kind of sharp, about being reminded. And you sometimes blame yourself when you should have been reminded, by somebody else is better, does it for you.

In history, just one word more, there was a great historian named Gibbon, and I remember reading very young in a little preface to

THE HISTORY OF ROME, THE DECLINE AND FALL, a little preface about him years ago. As he was dying he was still at, they said, still at his old historical parallels. He was always being reminded of one thing by another. He died, with a parallel, surprising people with his parallels. You see, connections, associations, you see, that had a lot to do with my life. Just thinking, just beginning to see that. That's when you're good, mentally good, your parallels are good. Your line. You go seeking it sometimes, for a certain amount of it, for consolation. Just as I seek companionship, I go looking back over the years when Rome declined from a republic into a democracy. Queer democracy. Very like the Russian democracy. Tyrants at the head of it but all the people were more united than they've ever been before in the republic, all the millions of people. I go. I've just been over that period, with that approach and Julius Caesar, ^{ended the republic} when the empire began as a great democracy under tyrants. Something for me to think about. I was brought up to not see that, I was brought up in another way. Another kind of talk, these things dawn on you. That's what I mean, these things dawn on you. When you're in a good mood things dawn on you. Like that. All right, let's forget any theme a-tall. I was asked to read one before I forget it.

Every single one I ever wrote has some sort of morality to it, if you look, you know. Political or otherwise. All sorts of things like that. This one is called, **THE NEED OF BEING VERSED IN COUNTRY THINGS.** (Not being a lost city soul) what have I got. And I've lived in cities, born in cities, brought up in cities, and all that,

but here now I am preaching about it and talking about--just as if I meant business. But you couldn't get me to take sides with the country against the city in any way except in a pleasant, poetic way, like this.

The house had gone to bring again
To the midnight sky a sunset glow.
Now the chimney was all the house that stood,
Like a pistil after the petals go.

*The Need of
Being Viewed
CP 300*

The barn opposed across the way,
That would have joined the house in flame
Had it been the will of the wind, was left
To bear forsaken the place's name.

(No house left.)

No more...

(This barn)

No more it opened with all one end
For teams that came by the stony road
To drum on the floor with hurried ~~sic~~ scurrying hoofs
And brush the mow with the summer load.

The birds that came to it through the air
At broken windows flew out and in,
Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh
From too much dwelling on what has been.

Yet for them the lilac renewed its leaf
And the aged elm, though touched with fire;
And the dry pump flung up an ~~empty~~ ~~sic~~ arm

(No not an empty arm)

The dry pump flung up an awkward arm;
And the fence post carried a strand of wire.

For them there was...

(That's the birds)

For them there was really nothing sad.
But though they rejoiced in the nest they kept,

One had to be versed in country things
Not to believe the phoebes wept.

(People go around, and see that you don't;
you're not supposed to see all that at
once. But you must have, (and I'm not
going to insist on it.) But you see the
point again.)

For them...

The birds that came to it through the air
At broken windows flew out and in,
Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh
From too much dwelling on what has been.

Yet for them the lilac renewed its leaf,
And the aged elm, though touched with fire;
And the dry pump flung up an awkward arm;
And the fence post carried a strand of wire.

For them there was really nothing sad.

(For the birds)

But though they rejoiced in the nest they kept,
One had to be versed in country things
Not to believe the phoebes wept.

Now let's see...I'll just go ahead now, I'm not going to talk about
'em, too much.

Sal. Poems
194

DESERT PLACES

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it--it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness
 Will be more lonely ere it will be less--
 A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
 With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
 Between stars--on stars where no human race is.
 I have it in me so much nearer home
 To scare myself with my own desert places.

And...some of these are old ones. I'll guess I'll say a new one to you.
 See, these range, all of them, I'm just going to range around--not trying
 to keep to any theme. This one has a long name: LINES WRITTEN IN
 DEJECTION ON THE EVE OF GREAT SUCCESS (just before we get to the moon,
 you know.) We'll be there next week.

LINES WRITTEN IN DEJECTION ON THE
 EVE OF GREAT SUCCESS

sel. P. 318

I once had a cow that jumped over the moon,
 Not onto the moon, but over,
 I don't know what made her so lunar a loom;
 All she'd been having was clover.

LAUGHTER

That was back in the days of my godmother Goose.
 But though we are goosier now,
 And all tanked up with mineral juice,
 We haven't caught up with my cow.

ROARS OF LAUGHTER

Mind you, I played safe, you see. I said, "On the eve of great success."
 So we may be there tomorrow. Might as well laugh 'til we get there.

LAUGHTER

Then, one that goes with that just about tools and weapons. People have been saying a great deal to me about turning everything new in science, you know, into domestic economy, instead of killing each other with it--and you know ^{all} about that. And the turning of tools... weapons into tools. Well this is the opposite, just for the fun of it...

At the end of the row
I stepped on the toe
Of an unemployed hoe.
It rose in offence
And struck me a blow
In the seat of my sense.

*My objection is
ITC p. 70*

LAUGHTER

It wasn't to blame
But I called it a name,
And I must say it dealt
Me a blow that I felt
Like malice prepense.
You may say I am *sic* a fool
But wasn't there *sic* a rule
The weapon should be
Turned into a tool?
But *sic* what do we see?
The first tool I step on
Turned into a weapon.

LAUGHTER

Those are new ones, you know. Here's a tiny little one. Let's say a couple of tiny little ones, one old one like, called DUST OF SNOW

Sac. P. p. 138

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

(That's oh, of all the poems I ever had
misunderstood, that's the worst.) LAUGHTER
(You know, can you imagine doing any harm here,
I said)

A chance...Give my heart
A change of mood.

(It was a pleasant thing to have all that snow in
the face, you know, I thought it was. And spray
of snow. And yet somebody's written about it:
"Terrible sinister poem.")

LAUGHTER

(Can you see why, can you see how you manage that?
He's...This professor said this made very, very
sinister...He'd read this--accepted it, you see,
"Very sinister." I says, "Sinister?" I knew
what he was going to say but I acted as if I
didn't. He said, "Crow--dark bird--eat hemlock--
Socrates.")

LAUGHTER

(And then...They don't even know, that's out of
ignorance. They don't even know what a hemlock
tree is, you know. It wasn't a hemlock tree
that they poisoned Socrates with. Terrible!)

LAUGHTER

Then another little...very recent one, that's back in the middle of the
book. Another little two-or-three stanzaed thing, I'll say it very
slowly. If you had pencils with you, I'd say this one slow enough for
you to write it down. You want to try it? Some of you?

For...The girls...I never did this but once before, I tried it once
with this same little poem, I just, just take, it's just fresh, I wrote
it January 12. It was fresh then. And I got the newness of it on
me, you see. So I'm going to give it, pass it along. It's got no
name. It would^{be}/ground out, coursed with a name, I think. It's like

this: it's again a country thing, you have to know a little about
the country....

ITC
101

In winter in the woods alone

(That's first verse, I'll give it
to you line by line.)

In winter in the woods alone
Against

(I'll watch you) LAUGHTER
(I'll keep my eye on you.
But get the lines right,
they're going to be exact
lines.) LAUGHTER

Lot of people don't know what verses, and poetry are, you know--they
run 'em ^{right} out just like prose and then wonder what you're doing. LAUGHTER

In winter in the woods alone
Against the trees I go

(next line)

I mark a maple for my own
And lay the maple low.

(one stanza)

At four o'clock I shoulder axe
At four o'clock I shoulder axe

.....

And in the afterglow
And in the afterglow

.....

I link a line of shadowy tracks

(Notice the rhyme all the time so
it will show you where the lines are.)
LAUGHTER

Repeat

Across the tinted snow.

(...I...next stanza...Three stanzas it is.)

I see

(You're going to have to spell "nature" with
a capital "N" to please me, will you?) LAUGHTER
The next line, I say

I see for Nature no defeat
In one tree's overthrow
Or for myself in my retreat

....

For yet another blow.

(That's the whole poem. If you've got all
the rhymes right. One of the things you
will notice, I kept for the middle one...
I kept the "O" sound all the way through.
I'll say it to you now as a whole; you
look at it and see if you've got it right.)

In winter in the woods alone
Against the trees I go
I mark a maple for my own
And lay the maple low.

At four o'clock I shoulder axe
And in the afterglow
I link a line of shadowy tracks
Across the tinted snow.

I see for Nature no defeat
In one tree's overthrow
Or for myself in my retreat
For yet another blow.

(That's all of it.)

That goes with the little ones that I've scattered all through the books.

Then I'll say an old one to you that you've heard discussed...
and...now often...mistreated, misjudged and judged, right and wrong
and everything.

This is called STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING. You're not going to write this down. LAUGHTER That one you keep for me, will you? Don't ask me to autograph it. LAUGHTER But just keep it for me. I've delivered it just once before, I just took a notion that I'd do that with a poem. I never did it before. I just thought it would be kind of fun...dictate, dictate a poem. LAUGHTER

*Stopping by Woods
CP 275
Sel P 140*

Whose woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

(We won't go into that one.)

And another little one, a newer one, again, that I'd like you to make this that kind of thing, I want you to know...I value the poems for politics and religion, everything I've been talking about to begin with and ideas and aptitude and everything, that's part of the thing. But I also just enjoy making the rhyme and meter, you know, you mustn't neglect that. I belong...you know, they say...I'll agree that there might be more poetry in prose, and free verse if you want,

but I'm very much committed to the institution called verse. That's what's the matter with me. And I want you not to miss my interest in the verse; it's in that little one I dictated to you. Just to me, just the pleasure of it, get notice of the thing. That first stanza inspired all the rest of it, it went off so nice, you know. When they go off, that's what you live for. Why do you write poetry, just for that for me, you know. I'd say. Though the other thing, I might say, just to have ideas. (Hee, hee, too, so--words I can divide it in.) Sometimes I talk so much one way that you think I'm wrong, and then I talk ~~the~~ other way, then you think I'm wrong then, too. LAUGHTER This...I'll get these little rhymes, here. I'll say the first stanza to you so you'll ^{next} see what I've got to live up to for the whole poem.

The first stanza. This one is called AWAY. That one that I just said to you has been called a death poem. But I didn't intend that for a dead poem. But this is probably meant for one.

AWAY

Now I out walking
The world desert,
And my shoe and my stocking
Do me no hurt.

(That's a little stanza, I'll repeat that.)

Now I out walking

(Walking and stocking I've rhymed and
desert and hurt.)

Now I out walking
The world desert,
Any my shoe and my stocking
Do me no hurt

(That was the first time they didn't. LAUGHTER do me
no hurt.)

See P. 215
ITC

I leave behind

(I've got to keep that little stanza for a rhyme
for it to all rhyme together short like that.
You see it's great fun.)

I leave behind
Good friend in town.
Let them get well-wined
And go lie down.

Don't think I leave
For the outer dark
Like Adam and Eve
Put out of the Park.

LAUGHTER

Forget the myth.
There is no one I
Am put out with
Or put out by.

Unless I'm wrong
I but obey
The (words) of a song:
I'm---bound---away!

And I may return
If dissatisfied
With what I learn
From having died.

That's a little longer than the other one. It's the same sort of breather. I've just been...occupied a good deal with thoughts and talk about wildernesses for Mr. Udall. He's my friend. And he wants to declare everything a wilderness inside (ha) me. He's a young fellow, very fresh, and fills me with interest. I'm getting to be just like Thoreau and Daniel Boone. I just happen to notice the very first poem in this book is about the longing I have always had to get really lost in a wilderness, and I never succeeded in doing it.

It's funny I must call his attention to this to show I am in on this,
before I got it from him. I don't know this one by heart, so long ago.

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,

(Just like the Sequoias, you know, great
big things that don't quiver in the wind.)

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

I should not be withheld but that some day
Into their vastness I should steal away
Fearless of ever finding open land,
Or highway where the slow wheel pours with sand.

I do not see why I should e'er come back,
=sic=

(This is my old writing, very young,
written in the nineties, this was.)

I do not see why I should e'er turn back,
Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me, who should miss me here
And long to know if still I held them dear.

They would not find me changed from him they know--
Only more sure of all I thought was true.

Is this working all right? It's coming into--I hear it very loud myself.

Is everything all right? POUFF. LAUGHTER. Then another one like
this. This is another new one.

I opened the door so my last look
Should be taken outside a house and book.

(That's regular, that's me, I'm always
doing that at night.)

Into My Ocean
Sal P. 5
C. P. 5

One More Beauty
JTC p. 24

I opened the door so my last look
 Should be taken outside a house and book.
 Before I gave up seeing and slept
 I said I would see how Sirius kept
 His watch-dog eyes «sic» on what remained
 To be gone into it «sic» if not explained.
 But scarcely was my door ajar,
 When past the leg I thrust for bar
 Slipped in to be my problem guest,
 Not a heavenly dog made manifest,
 But an earthly dog of the carriage breed;
 Who, having failed of the modern speed,
 Now asked asylum--and I was stirred
 To be the one so dog-preferred.

LAUGHTER

He dumped himself like a bag of bones,
 He sighed himself a couple of groans,
 And head to tail then firmly curled
 Like swearing off on the traffic world.
 I set him water, I set him food.
 He rolled an eye with gratitude
 (Or merely manners it may have been),
 But never so much as lifted chin.
 His hard tail loudly smacked the floor
 As if beseeching me, "Please, no more,
 I can't explain--tonight at least."
 His brow was perceptibly trouble-creased.
 So I spoke in terms of adoption thus:
 "Gustie, old boy, Dalmatian Gus,
 You're right, there's nothing to discuss.
 Don't try to tell me what's on your mind,
 The sorrow of having been left behind,
 Or the sorrow of having run away.
 All that can wait for the light of day.
 Meanwhile feel obligation-free.
 Nobody has to confide in me."
 'Twas too one-sided a dialogue,
 And I wasn't sure I was talking dog.

LAUGHTER

I gave up «sic» baffled. But all the same
 In fancy, I ratified his name,
 Gustie, Dalmatian Gus, that is,
 And started shaping my life to his,
 Finding him in his right supplies
 With finding him with his «sic»
 Daily exercise. «sic»

(I left out a line there, I think.)

Next morning the minute I was about
 He was at the door to be let out
 With an air that said, "I have paid my call.
 You mustn't feel hurt if now I'm all
 For getting back or somewhere *sic* further on."
 I opened the door and he was gone.
 I was to taste a *sic* little the grief,
 That comes of dogs' lives being so brief,
 Only a fraction of ours at most.
 He might have been the dream of a ghost
 In spite of the way his tail had smacked
 My floor so hard and matter-of-fact.
 And things have been going so strangely since
 I wouldn't be too hard to convince,
 I might almost *sic* claim, he was Sirius
 (Thinkiof presuming to call him Gus)
 The star itself, Heaven's brightest *sic* star,
 Not a meteorite, but an avatar,
 Who had made(an) overnight descent
 To show by deeds that *sic* he didn't resent
 My having depended on him so long,
 And yet done nothing about it in song.
 A symbol was all he could hope to convey,
 An intimation, a shot of ray,
 The *sic* meaning I was supposed to seek,
 And finding, wasn't disposed to speak.

...Not going to tell you anyway. Then an old fashioned one, that's
 a new one. This has another animal in it:

THE RUNAWAY. This is the first poem I ever mentioned a horse in, I think. I did this years and years ago, without knowing much about a Morgan Horse. I know we had a word around it for a Morgan horse, but it wasn't a true Morgan, just a chunky little horse. And you know, the presence of that in the poem has led me to know all about Morgan horses, breed 'em, and do everything else; poetry leads the way, you see.

Sep. P.
P. 138

Once when the snow of the year was beginning to fall,

(I think I get too close to these things. «The microphone»)

Once when the snow of the year was beginning to fall,
We stopped by a mountain pasture to say, 'Whose colt?'

A little Morgan had one forefoot on the wall,
The other curled at his breast. He dipped his head
And snorted to us. «sic» And then he had to bolt.
We heard the miniature thunder where he fled,
And we saw him, or thought we saw him, dim and grey,
Like a shadow against the curtain of falling flakes.
'I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow.
He isn't winter-broken. It isn't play
With the little fellow at all. He's running away.
I doubt if even his mother could tell him, "Sakes,
It's only weather." He'd think she didn't know!
Where is his mother? He can't be out alone.'
And now he comes again with clatter of stone,
And mounts the wall again with whited eyes
And all his tail that isn't hair up straight.
He shudders his coat as if to throw off flies.
'Whoever it is that leaves him out so late,
When everything else «sic» have gone to stall and bin,
Ought to be told to come and take him in.'

And speaking again, as I read you these poems, nearly every one of them means a friendship. That one means a friendship, perhaps I ought not say names. But nearly every one as I go through them, I remember some day when someone put his finger right on what I was doing with it.

Not what. I meant what I was doing, Learned Hand, as a matter of fact ^{that} was,

one of my great friends. It's almost as if it began just in that poem.

Let me see the time.

I ought to read you one longish one. If 've got time. LAUGHTER
This one that Mr. Alston spoke of, I ought to say that one for him. That's
his poem. Now I'd better be sure I have it with me. I think I know it
but I'd better have it ready....I think I almost know it by heart. But
I'd rather have it in front of me anyway. This is called ACQUAINTED WITH
THE NIGHT and it's again about my being an endless walker.

See P. 161

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain--and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky.

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right
I have been one acquainted with the night.

That again, that poem belongs to him now, Mr. Alston, what he said to
me tonight. There's an answer to somebody in that poem. You see, I
always claim I'm not arguing, but it was too. ^{to} George Russell, A. E.,
the Irish poet, who was always saying "The time is not right." Ever
so often he would say, "The time is not right." Grand old fellow but
the thought the time was not right. LAUGHTER So I said, I put that in
there for him. The clock in the sky:

And further still at an unearthly height,
 (Just a clock up in the tower, you know)
 One luminary clock against the sky.
 Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.

I don't think he ever noticed it. LAUGHTER I didn't mean it for an argument anyway. Now shall I read one longish one? APPLAUSE I talk too much. Part of the way, part of the intimacy that your President spoke of is just that, lately, I've just been with three or four thousand up in Minnesota and two or three thousand up here in Athens, all around in Boston, great big audiences, and for gracious sakes, it just seems as if I was in small company at home. I make myself more and more at home. That's because I'm getting used to it, you know. I used to be scared to death. LAUGHTER But I think maybe, I'll read you the first one I was known for. ...drops paper and a student hands it to him. ...Manuscript very precious.

Detail of its third Man
 N.B. Sel. O. p. 25

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
 Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
 She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
 To meet him in the doorway with the news
 And put him on his guard. 'Silas is back.'
 She pushed Warren *«sic»* with her out through the door *«sic»*
 And shut it after her. 'Be kind,' she said.
 She took the market things from Warren's arms
 And set them on the porch, then drew him down
 To sit beside her on the wooden steps.

'When was I ever anything but kind to him?
 But I'll not have the fellow back,' he said.

(You know, I'm not reading that well, I hear my own voice too much. I'm not going to read it. I can't do it.

I'll read some shorter thing to you. One shorter one, that voice comes back to me, so I don't feel confident, I don't know what's the matter with me. So often that happens with these blessed things.

LAUGHTER

Ha, Ha. I don't know. I take modern life as it comes. I think that might help me... ^{you} 1

LAUGHTER

This one of my short ones that I wrote way back in the nineties and this has one spot in it about poetry, what it is, and this is a farmy one. When I was living in...working as a farmer, I...those years I worked for other people before I farmed a little myself.

I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the levelled ^{scene} ?

CLICK--click (around the microphone)

(That's much better. Thank you. I don't hear it so much.)

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been,--alone,

'As all must be,' I said within my heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

But as I said it, swiftly ^{as} passed me by
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o'er night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round,
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply,
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry;

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

«sic» (stanza skipped)

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

(That's the definition of poetry right there, you know.)

Now yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

Then let me say a couplet or two to you in farewell, some of these will

be in my new book. One of them I just...popped into my head:

It takes all sorts of in and outdoor schooling
To get accustomed to my kind of fooling.
_{sic}

LAUGHTER

And then another, that I, a prayer, you know...after I...in my new book
this comes after some of my things about science and all that, religion;
but I wind up with just this couplet:

Forgive, Oh Lord
My little jokes on thee
And I'll forgive thy
Great big one on me.

LAUGHTER

That's a good deal of your talk in poetry--jokes like that, one thing,
or another...(I don't know)...all...I'm going to leave you with that.
Good night. APPLAUSE

I had Orders. LAUGHTER BIRCHES and MENDING WALLS

APPLAUSE

So'll stop a minute to tell you another private affair. Somebody pushing
his own affairs wanted to put up a mockery of the wall...between East
and West Germany, a mockery of it, and a picture of it, and an image of
it, I think. Something like that, you know, with barbed wires showing,
and MY LINE printed under it: "Something there is that doesn't love a
wall," and it was expected to make such fun of East Germany that they'd
give up the wall; but we got them stopped, got this fellow stopped by

the government. Had to get him stopped...that isn't going to be set up in Germany and ...use my line; but I couldn't have stopped, stopped him... the government stopped him. Shall I say that one first? You know, it isn't meant to be used that way; you love to have your poetry quoted and used in good ways, but what fool business that would,...fool business to think that you could fool the Germans out of that, you know. Ridiculous thing. Going to have a bust of me there, too, I think. LAUGHTER
I guess for the Germans to shoot at. ROARS OF LAUGHTER

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we work *«sic»*
To each the boulders that have fallen to each,
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:

(That's about as long as they last.)

'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'

«sic» (line skipped)

Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple-trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 'Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offence.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

Somebody in England said to me, that was the most troublesome line he ever encountered in poetry. And I said, "Don't blame me for it, it's a quotation from one of the most ancient books in the world." "Good fences make good neighbours." And he said "Oah?" ROARS OF LAUGHTER I could have said more to him but I didn't.

Now the BIRCHES one is another that's been through many adventures, as many as any of them that I've had. I can say it by heart, but you know what I'm going to do tonight, I'm going to read it to see if I'm still saying it right. LAUGHTER I haven't read it for forty years.

When I see birches bend to left and right
 Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
 I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
 But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
 As *sic* Ice-storms do. *Sic* Often you must have seen them
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
 After a rain. They click upon themselves

As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
 As the stirs ~~«sic»~~ cracks and crazes their enamel.
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
 Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--
 Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
 You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
 They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
 And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
 So low for long, they never right themselves;
 You may see their trunks arching in the woods
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
 But I was going to say when Truth broke in
 With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
 I should prefer to have had ~~«sic»~~ some boy bend them
 As he went out or ~~«sic»~~ in to fetch the cows--
 Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
 Whose only play was what he found himself,
 Summer or winter, and could play alone.
 One by one he subdued his father's trees
 By riding them down over and over again
 Until he took the stiffness out of them,
 And not one...one but hung limp, not one was left
 For him to conquer. He learned all there was
 To learn about not launching out too soon
 And so not carrying the tree away
 Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
 To the top branches, climbing carefully
 With the same pains you use to fill a cup
 Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
 Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
 Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
 So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
 And so I dream of going back to be.
 It's when I'm weary of considerations,
 And life is too much like a pathless wood
 Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.
 I'd like to get away from earth awhile
 And then come back to it and begin over.
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me
 And...half grant what I wish and snatch me away
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.
 I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
 Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Goodnight.

APPLAUSE

He says (Mr. Alston) DEPARTMENTAL, that's some more funny business...APPLAUSE...to go with the one about the cow. You know, I've got another poem that I'm^{not} going to say to you. It's about the milky way, you know, I call that a cow path. LAUGHTER The milky way is a cowpath, but I'm not going to say that tonight. I'm very interested in science. LAUGHTER And I'm not making fun of it, I'm teasing it a little,...some of my best friends, you know, are criminals. LAUGHTER But ah, the funniest thing is that I am getting personal again, I went to Lawrence where I was...went to high school. Just been there. And... the mayor brought me there, met him in Washington, and he wanted me to come up and have a celebration or something. I went. And I had one Irish teacher, in my day, in my class of '92. And I think all their teachers are Irish there now. It's a grand Irish city and the mayor and everybody had a fine old time. But the first Irish teacher I had was one of the first people that impressed me with a poem. I thought she wrote it herself. She put it on the board in the room where I sat, she wasn't teaching me, and it's been in my head ever since she wrote it there. And it took me three or four years to find out it wasn't hers; it was written by somebody Collins. She didn't put any name on it, written by Collins, an Irish, an English-Irish poet...Now all is Irish and Catholic and everything, you know. What a country we are, too, you know, all the generosity. I had a fine time with that crowd up

there, and they're all...ALL religious, you know. I'm not irreligious, it's just I'm not just the same religion. You know what I said about the election that (Miss Favorite) asked me the day after it? I'd been interested in the president's election. They asked me what I thought of it. I said, "It's a triumph of Protestantism over itself." They didn't print it in the paper. LAUGHTER They thought that...they didn't get that...you know. Well now, let's just say one of these:

Sarcastic Science she would like to know,
In her complacent ministry of fear,

(That's a quotation from an older poem: COMPLACENT
MINISTRY OF FEAR. Got us all scared, you know.)

How we propose to get away from here
When she has made things so we have to go
Or be wiped out. Will she be asked to show
Us how by rocket we may hope to steer
Through temperature...temperature of absolute zero *sic*
To some star off there, say a half light-year *sic*
Through temperature of absolute zero?

(I left out a line...That's the first part of
the song, and then the answer to that:)

Why wait for science to supply the how

(By getting away.)

When any amateur can tell it now?
The way to get *sic* away should be the same
sic Fifty billion *sic* years ago when we came--
If anyone remembers how that was.
I have a theory, but it hardly does.

LAUGHTER

That's modern, you know. Then another:

A theory if you hold it hard enough
 And long enough gets rated as a creed:
 Such as that flesh is something we can slough
 So that the mind can be entirely freed.
 Then when the arms and legs have atrophied,
 And brain's «sic» all that is «sic» left of mortal stuff,
 We can lie on the seabeach «sic» with the seaweed
 And take our daily tide bath «sic» smooth and rough.
 There once we lay as blobs of jellyfish
 At evolution's opposite extreme.
 But now as blobs of brain we «sic» lie and dream,
 With only one vestigial creature wish:
 Oh, may the tide be soon enough at high
 To keep our abstract verse from getting «sic» dry.

LAUGHTER

These are what you call "for the Ned of it." Here's another one, a familiar one:

An ant on the table cloth
 Ran into a dormant moth
 Of many times his size.
 He showed not the least surprise.
 His business wasn't with such.
 He gave it scarcely a touch,
 And was off on his duty run.
 But «sic» if he encountered one
 Of the hive's enquiry squad
 Whose work is to find out God
 And the nature of time and space,
 He would put him onto the case.
 Ants are a curious race;
 One crossing with hurried tread
 The body of one of their dead
 Isn't given a moment's arrest--
 Seems not even impressed.
 But he no doubt reports to any
 With whom he crosses antennae,
 And they no doubt report
 To the higher up at court.
 Then word goes forth in Formic:

(That's acid language, you know.)

LAUGHTER

Then word goes forth...

(The critics use it.)

Then word goes forth in Formic:
'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
Our selfless forager Jerry.

(That's socialism in lone line. You see, you have
to watch them.) LAUGHTER

Our selfless forager Jerry.
Will the special Janizary
Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary
Go bring him home to his people.
Lay him in state on a sepal.
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
'This is the word of your Queen.'
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician;
And taking formal position
With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle,
And heaving him high in air,
Carries him out of there.
No one stands round to stare.
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.

ROARS OF APPLAUSE AND LAUGHTER

Love (?) all the time; and I wonder which thing he'd love:(?) dogs or
cats or monkeys. And I've just learned that I've had a more remote
ancestor of a more remote ancestor of mine, than I've ever heard of
before. A billion years ago, my ancestors, a small shrimp is eating
lichens on the rocks. My ancestor, yours too, so you needn't be hurt.

LAUGHTER

Shrimp, you know...when I'm called a shrimp, I know where I got that.
But's a funny world about it all. And I have had a very good time
with you. And it is, as I say, discrimination, is all you want of
your life, some other thing...But oh, yes, my final figures is this:

That in this world we're like swimmers
And we've got two motions,
One is reaching forward to what we desire
And what we love with our arms.
And the other is kicking off
What we don't like with our feet.
And we've got to do both, you know.

You've got to learn what is hate-able and what's loveable. You can't
love it all. You've got to hate, you, what I'm saying to you, accept
and reject and remember, I'm not asking you to take any stock in me.
Goodnight.

APPLAUSE