

Classic Poetry Series

**Ambrose Bierce**  
**- poems -**

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# Ambrose Bierce(24 June 1842 - 26 December 1913)

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce was an American editorialist, journalist, short story writer, fabulist and satirist. Today, he is probably best-known for his short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and his satirical lexicon *The Devil's Dictionary*. His vehemence as a critic, his motto "Nothing matters" and the sardonic view of human nature that informed his work all earned him the nickname "Bitter Bierce".

Despite his reputation as a searing critic, Bierce was known to encourage younger writers, including poet George Sterling and fiction writer W. C. Morrow. Bierce employed a distinctive style of writing, especially in his stories. His style often embraces an abrupt beginning, dark imagery, vague references to time, limited descriptions, impossible events and the theme of war.

In 1913, Bierce traveled to Mexico to gain first-hand experience of the Mexican Revolution. While traveling with rebel troops, he disappeared without a trace.

## **Biography**

Bierce was born at Horse Cave Creek in Meigs County, Ohio to Marcus Aurelius Bierce (1799–1876) and Laura Sherwood Bierce. His mother was a descendant of William Bradford. His parents were a poor but literary couple who instilled in him a deep love for books and writing. The boy grew up in Kosciusko County, Indiana, attending high school at the county seat, Warsaw.

He was the tenth of thirteen children whose father gave all of them names beginning with the letter "A". In order of birth, the Bierce siblings were Abigail, Amelia, Ann, Addison, Aurelius, Augustus, Almeda, Andrew, Albert, Ambrose, Arthur, Adelia, and Aurelia. He left home at age fifteen to become a "printer's devil" at a small Ohio newspaper

At the outset of the American Civil War, Bierce enlisted in the Union Army's 9th Indiana Infantry Regiment. He participated in the Operations in Western Virginia campaign (1861), was present at the "first battle" at Philippi and received newspaper attention for his daring rescue, under fire, of a gravely wounded comrade at the Battle of Rich Mountain. In February 1862 he was commissioned First Lieutenant, and served on the staff of General William Babcock Hazen as a topographical engineer, making maps of likely battlefields.

Bierce fought at the Battle of Shiloh (April 1862), a terrifying experience that

became a source for several later short stories and the memoir, "What I Saw of Shiloh". In June 1864, he sustained a serious head wound at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, and spent the rest of the summer on furlough, returning to active duty in September. He was discharged from the army in January 1865.

His military career resumed, however, when in mid-1866 he rejoined General Hazen as part of the latter's expedition to inspect military outposts across the Great Plains. The expedition proceeded by horseback and wagon from Omaha, Nebraska, arriving toward year's end in San Francisco, California.

### <b>Personal life</b>

Bierce married Mary Ellen ("Mollie") Day on Christmas Day 1871. They had three children; two sons, Day (1872–1889) and Leigh (1874–1901), and a daughter, Helen (1875–1940). Both of Bierce's sons died before him: Day was shot in a brawl over a woman, and Leigh died of pneumonia related to alcoholism. Bierce separated from his wife in 1888 after discovering compromising letters to her from an admirer, and the couple finally divorced in 1904. Mollie Day Bierce died the following year.

Bierce suffered from lifelong asthma as well as complications arising from his war wounds.

### <b>Journalism</b>

In San Francisco, Bierce received the rank of brevet major before resigning from the Army. He remained in San Francisco for many years, eventually becoming famous as a contributor and/or editor for a number of local newspapers and periodicals, including The San Francisco News Letter, The Argonaut, the Overland Monthly, The Californian and The Wasp. A selection of his crime reporting from The San Francisco News Letter was included in The Library of America anthology True Crime.

Bierce lived and wrote in England from 1872 to 1875, contributing to Fun magazine. His first book, The Fiend's Delight, a compilation of his articles, was published in London in 1873 by John Camden Hotten under the pseudonym "Dod Grile". Returning to the United States, he again took up residence in San Francisco. From 1879 to 1880, he travelled to Rockerville and Deadwood in the Dakota Territory, to try his hand as local manager for a New York mining company, but when the company failed he returned to San Francisco and resumed his career in journalism.

In 1887, he published a column called "Prattle" and became one of the first regular columnists and editorialists to be employed on William Randolph Hearst's newspaper, the San Francisco Examiner, eventually becoming one of the most prominent and influential among the writers and journalists of the West Coast. He remained associated with Hearst Newspapers until 1906.

### <b>Literary works</b>

Bierce was considered a master of pure English by his contemporaries, and virtually everything that came from his pen was notable for its judicious wording and economy of style. He wrote in a variety of literary genres.

His short stories are held among the best of the 19th century, providing a popular following based on his roots. He wrote realistically of the terrible things he had seen in the war in such stories as "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", "The Boarded Window", "Killed at Resaca", and "Chickamauga".

In addition to his ghost and war stories, he also published several volumes of poetry. His Fantastic Fables anticipated the ironic style of grotesquerie that became a more common genre in the 20th century.

One of Bierce's most famous works is his much-quoted book, The Devil's Dictionary, originally an occasional newspaper item which was first published in book form in 1906 as The Cynic's Word Book. It consists of satirical definitions of English words which lampoon cant and political double-talk.

Under the entry "leonine", meaning a single line of poetry with an internal rhyming scheme, he included an apocryphal couplet written by the fictitious "Bella Peeler Silcox" (i.e. Ella Wheeler Wilcox) in which an internal rhyme is achieved in both lines only by mispronouncing the rhyming words:

The electric light invades the dunnest deep of Hades.

Cries Pluto, 'twixt his snores: "O tempora! O mores!"

Bierce's twelve-volume Collected Works were published in 1909, the seventh volume of which consists solely of The Devil's Dictionary, the title Bierce himself preferred to The Cynic's Word Book.

### <b>Disappearance</b>

In October 1913 Bierce, then aged 71, departed Washington, D.C., for a tour of

his old Civil War battlefields. By December he had proceeded through Louisiana and Texas, crossing by way of El Paso into Mexico, which was in the throes of revolution. In Ciudad Juárez he joined Pancho Villa's army as an observer, and in that role he witnessed the Battle of Tierra Blanca.

Bierce is known to have accompanied Villa's army as far as the city of Chihuahua. His last known communication with the world was a letter he wrote there to Blanche Partington, a close friend, dated December 26, 1913. After closing this letter by saying, "As to me, I leave here tomorrow for an unknown destination," he vanished without a trace, becoming one of the most famous disappearances in American literary history. Skeptic Joe Nickell, however, argued in his book *Ambrose Bierce Is Missing and Other Historical Mysteries* (1992) that such a letter had never been found. All that existed was a notebook belonging to his secretary and companion, Ms. Carrie Christiansen – containing a rough summary of a purported letter and her statement that the originals had been destroyed.

Oral tradition in Sierra Mojada, Coahuila, documented by the priest James Lienert, states that Bierce was executed by a firing squad in the town cemetery there. Again, Nickell (1992) finds this story to be rather incredible. He quotes Bierce's friend and biographer Walter Neale as saying that in 1913, Bierce had not ridden for quite some time, was suffering from serious asthma, and had been severely critical of Pancho Villa. Neale concludes that it would have been highly unlikely for Bierce to have gone to Mexico and joined up with Villa.

However, all investigations into his fate have proven fruitless, and Nickell concedes that despite a lack of hard evidence that Bierce had gone to Mexico, there is also none that he had not. Therefore, despite an abundance of theories (including death by suicide), his end remains shrouded in mystery.

### **<b>Legacy and influence</b>**

At least three films have been made of Bierce's story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". A silent film version, *The Bridge*, was made in 1929. A French version called *La Rivière du Hibou*, directed by Robert Enrico, was released in 1962; this black-and-white film faithfully recounts the original narrative using voice-over. Another version, directed by Brian James Egen, was released in 2005.

The French version was aired in 1964 as the final episode of the television series *The Twilight Zone*: "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". A copy of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" appeared in the ABC television series *Lost* ("The Long Con", airdate February 8, 2006). Prior to *The Twilight Zone*, the story had

been adapted as an episode of Alfred Hitchcock Presents.

Another notable film adaptation was made of Bierce's story "Eyes of the Panther". To date at least two versions of this story exist on screen. One version was developed for Shelley Duvall's Nightmare Classics series and was released in 1990. This version runs about 60 minutes and is widely criticized for being too loosely adapted. Another, shorter, version was released in 2006 by director Michael Barton and runs about 23 minutes.

American composer Rodney Waschka II composed an opera, *Saint Ambrose*, based on Bierce's life.

Bierce's disappearance has also been a popular topic. Carlos Fuentes's novel *The Old Gringo* is a fictionalized account of Bierce's disappearance which was later adapted into the film *Old Gringo* (1989), starring Gregory Peck in the title role. Bierce's disappearance and trip to Mexico provide the background for the vampire horror film *From Dusk till Dawn 3: The Hangman's Daughter* (2000), in which Bierce's character plays a central role. Bierce's fate is the subject of Gerald Kersh's "The Oxocho Bottle" (aka "The Secret of the Bottle"), which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* on December 7, 1957, and was reprinted in the anthology *Men Without Bones*. Bierce reappears in the future on Mount Shasta in Robert Heinlein's story, "Lost Legacy."

The short film "Ah! Silenciosa" (1999), starring Jim Beaver as Bierce, weaves elements of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" into a speculation on Bierce's disappearance.

Biographer Richard O'Conner argued that war unleashed the howling demons lurking in the pit of Bierce's soul: "War was the making of Bierce as a man and a writer. [From his grim experience, he became] truly capable of transferring the bloody, headless bodies and boar-eaten corpses of the battlefield onto paper."

Noted essayist Clifton Fadiman wrote: "Bierce was never a great writer. He has painful faults of vulgarity and cheapness of imagination. But...his style, for one thing, will preserve him; and the purity of his misanthropy, too, will help to keep him alive."

Author Alan Gullette argues that Bierce's war tales may be the best writing on war, outranking his contemporary Stephen Crane (author of *The Red Badge of Courage*) and even Ernest Hemingway.

Author Kurt Vonnegut once stated that he considered "Occurrence at Owl Creek

Bridge" the greatest American short story and a work of flawless American genius

# A Bad Night

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

VILLIAM \_a Sen\_  
NEEDLESON \_a Sidniduc\_  
SMILER \_a Scheister\_  
KI-YI \_a Trader\_  
GRIMGHAST \_a Spader\_  
SARALTHIA \_a Love-lorn Nymph\_  
NELLIBRAC \_a Sweetun\_

A BODY; A GHOST; AN UNMENTIONABLE THING; SKULLS;  
HOODOOS; ETC.

\_Scene\_ -a Cemetery in San Francisco.

\_Saralthia, Nellibrac, Grimghast.\_

SARALTHIA:

The red half-moon is dipping to the west,  
And the cold fog invades the sleeping land.  
Lo! how the grinning skulls in the level light  
Litter the place! Methinks that every skull  
Is a most lifelike portrait of my Sen,  
Drawn by the hand of Death; each fleshless pate,  
Cursed with a ghastly grin to eyes unrubbed  
With love's magnetic ointment, seems to mine  
To smile an amiable smile like his  
Whose amiable smile I-I alone  
Am able to distinguish from his leer!  
See how the gathering coyotes flit  
Through the lit spaces, or with burning eyes  
Star the black shadows with a steadfast gaze!  
About my feet the poddy toads at play,  
Bulbously comfortable, try to hop,  
And tumble clumsily with all their warts;  
While pranking lizards, sliding up and down  
My limbs, as they were public roads, impart



A singularly interesting chill.  
The circumstance and passion of the time,  
The cast and manner of the place-the spirit  
Of this confederate environment,  
Command the rights we come to celebrate  
Obedient to the Inspired Hag-  
The seventh daughter of the seventh daughter,  
Who rules all destinies from Minna street,  
A dollar a destiny. Here at this grave,  
Which for my purposes thou, Jack of Spades-  
\_(To Grimghast\_)  
Corrupter than the thing that reeks below-  
Hast opened secretly, we'll work the charm.  
Now what's the hour?  
\_(Distant clock strikes thirteen\_.)  
Enough-hale forth the stiff!

\_(Grimghast by means of a boat-hook stands the coffin on end  
in the excavation; the lid crumbles, exposing the remains of a  
man.)\_

Ha! Master Mouldybones, how fare you, sir?

THE BODY:

Poorly, I thank your ladyship; I miss  
Some certain fingers and an ear or two.  
There's something, too, gone wrong with my inside,  
And my periphery's not what it was.  
How can we serve each other, you and I?

NELLIBRAC:

O what a personable man!

\_(Blushes bashfully, drops her eyes and twists the corner of  
her apron\_.)

SARALTHIA:

Yes, dear,  
A very proper and alluring male,

And quite superior to Lubin Rroyd,  
Who has, however, this distinct advantage-  
He is alive.

GRIMGHAST:

Missus, these yer remains  
Was the boss singer back in '72,  
And used to allers git invites to go  
Down to Swellmont and sing at every feed.  
In t'other Villiam's time, that was, afore  
The gent that you've hooked onto bought the place.

THE BODY \_(singing):\_

Down among the sainted dead  
Many years I lay;  
Beetles occupied my head,  
Moles explored my clay.

There we feasted day and night-  
I and bug and beast;  
They provided appetite  
And I supplied the feast.

The raven is a dicky-bird,

SARALTHIA \_(singing):\_

The jackal is a daisy,

NELLIBRAC \_(singing):\_

The wall-mouse is a worthy third,

A SPOOK \_(singing):\_

But mortals all are crazy.

CHORUS OF SKULLS:

O mortals all are crazy,

Their intellects are hazy;  
In the growing moon they shake their shoon  
And trip it in the mazy.

But when the moon is waning,  
Their senses they're regaining:  
They fall to prayer and from their hair  
Remove the straws remaining.

SARALTHIA:

That's right, Rogues Gallery, pray keep it up:  
Your song recalls my Villiam's 'Auld Lang Syne,'  
What time he came and (like an amorous bird  
That struts before the female of its kind,  
Warbling to cave her down the bank) piped high  
His cracked falsetto out of reach. Enough-  
Now let's to business. Nellibrac, sweet child,  
St. Cloacina's future devotee,  
The time is ripe and rotten-gut the grip!

\_(Nellibrac brings forward a valise and takes from it five  
articles of clothing, which, one by one, she lays upon the points  
of a magic pentagram that has thoughtfully inscribed itself in  
lines of light on the wet grass. The Body holds its late lamented  
nose.)\_

NELLIBRAC \_(singing):\_

Fragrant socks, by Villiam's toes  
Consecrated to the nose;

Shirt that shows the well worn track  
Of the knuckles of his back,

Handkerchief with mottled stains,  
Into which he blew his brains;

Collar crying out for soap-  
Prophet of the future rope;

An unmentionable thing

It would sicken me to sing.

UNMENTIONABLE THING \_(aside):\_

What! \_I\_ unmentionable? Just you wait!  
In all the family journals of the State  
You'll sometime see that I'm described at length,  
With supereditorial grace and strength.

SARALTHIA \_(singing):\_

Throw them in the open tomb  
They will cause his love to bloom  
With an amatory boom!

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE HOODOOS:

Hoodoo, hoodoo, voodoo-vet  
Villiam struggles in the net!  
By the power and intent  
Of the charm his strength is spent!  
By the virtue in each rag  
Blessed by the Inspired Hag  
He will be a willing victim  
Limp as if a donkey kicked him!  
By this awful incantation  
We decree his animation-

By the magic of our art  
Warm the cockles of his heart,  
Villiam, if alive or dead,  
Thou Saralthia shalt wed!

\_(They cast the garments into the grave and push over the coffin. Grimghast fills up the hole. Hoodoos gradually become apparent in a phosphorescent light about the grave, holding one another's back-hair and dancing in a circle.)\_

HOODOO SONG AND DANCE:

O we're the larrikin hoodoos!  
The chirruping, lirruping hoodoos!

We mix things up that the Fates ordain,  
Bring back the past and the present detain,  
Postpone the future and sometimes tether  
The three and drive them abreast together-  
We rollicking, frolicking hoodoos!

To us all things are the same as none  
And nothing is that is under the sun.  
Seven's a dozen and never is then,  
Whether is what and what is when,  
A man is a tree and a cuckoo a cow  
For gold galore and silver enow  
To magical, mystical hoodoos!

SARALTHIA:

What monstrous shadow darkens all the place,

\_(Enter Smyler.)\_

Flung like a doom athwart-ha!-thou?  
Portentous presence, art thou not the same  
That stalks with aspect horrible among  
Small youths and maidens, baring snaggy teeth,  
Champing their tender limbs till crimson spume,  
Flung from, thy lips in cursing God and man,  
Incarnadines the land?

SMYLER:

Thou dammid slut!

\_(Exit Smyler.)\_

NELLIBRAC:

O what a pretty man!

SARALTHIA

Now who is next?  
Of tramps and casuals this graveyard seems

Prolific to a fault!

\_(Enter Needleson, exhaling, prophetically, an odor of decayed eggs and, actually, one of unlaundried linen. He darts an intense regard at an adjacent marble angel and places his open hand behind his ear.)\_

NEEDLESON:

Hay?

\_(Exit Needleson.)\_

NELLIBRAC:

Sweet, sweet male!

I yearn to play at Copenhagen with him!

\_(Blushes diligently and energetically.)\_

CHORUS OF SKULLS:

Hoodoos, hoodoos, disappear-  
Some dread deity draws near!

\_(Exeunt Hoodos.)\_

Smitten with a sense of doom,  
The dead are cowering in the tomb,  
Seas are calling, stars are falling  
And appalling is the gloom!  
Fragmentary flames are flung  
Through the air the trees among!  
Lo! each hill inclines its head-  
Earth is bending 'neath his thread!

\_(On the contrary, enter Villiam on a chip, navigating an odor of mignonette. Saralthia springs forward to put him in her pocket, but he is instantly retracted by an invisible string. She falls headlong, breaking her heart. Reenter Villiam, Needleson, Smyler. All gather about Saralthia, who loudly laments her accident. The Spirit of Tar-and Feathers, rising like a black smoke in their midst, executes a monstrous wink of

graphic and vivid significance, then contemplates them with an obviously baptismal intention. The cross on Lone Mountain takes fire, splendoring the Peninsula. Tableau. Curtain.)

Ambrose Bierce

# A Ballad Of Pikeville

Down in Southern Arizona where the Gila monster thrives,  
And the 'Mescalero,' gifted with a hundred thousand lives,  
Every hour renounces one of them by drinking liquid flame  
The assassinating wassail that has given him his name;  
Where the enterprising dealer in Caucasian hair is seen  
To hold his harvest festival upon his village-green,  
While the late lamented tenderfoot upon the plain is spread  
With a sanguinary circle on the summit of his head;  
Where the cactuses (or cacti) lift their lances in the sun,  
And incautious jackass-rabbits come to sorrow as they run,  
Lived a colony of settlers-old Missouri was the State  
Where they formerly resided at a prehistoric date.

Now, the spot that had been chosen for this colonizing scheme  
Was as waterless, believe me, as an Arizona stream.

The soil was naught but ashes, by the breezes driven free,  
And an acre and a quarter were required to sprout a pea.  
So agriculture languished, for the land would not produce,  
And for lack of water, whisky was the beverage in use-  
Costly whisky, hauled in wagons many a weary, weary day,  
Mostly needed by the drivers to sustain them on their way.  
Wicked whisky! King of Evils! Why, O, why did God create  
Such a curse and thrust it on us in our inoffensive state?

Once a parson came among them, and a holy man was he;  
With his ailing stomach whisky wouldn't anywise agree;  
So he knelt upon the \_mesa\_ and he prayed with all his chin  
That the Lord would send them water or incline their hearts to gin.

Scarcely was the prayer concluded ere an earthquake shook the land,  
And with copious effusion springs burst out on every hand!  
Merrily the waters gurgled, and the shock which gave them birth  
Fitly was by some declared a temperance movement of the earth.  
Astounded by the miracle, the people met that night  
To celebrate it properly by some religious rite;  
And 'tis truthfully recorded that before the moon had sunk  
Every man and every woman was devotionally drunk.  
A half a standard gallon (says history) per head



Of the best Kentucky prime was at that ceremony shed.  
O, the glory of that country! O, the happy, happy folk.  
By the might of prayer delivered from Nature's broken yoke!  
Lo! the plains to the horizon all are yellowing with rye,  
And the corn upon the hill-top lifts its banners to the sky!  
Gone the wagons, gone the drivers, and the road is grown to grass,  
Over which the incandescent Bourbon did aforetime pass.  
Pikeville (that's the name they've given, in their wild, romantic way,  
To that irrigation district) now distills, statistics say,  
Something like a hundred gallons, out of each recurrent crop,  
To the head of population-and consumes it, every drop!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Bequest To Music

'Let music flourish!' So he said and died.  
Hark! ere he's gone the minstrelsy begins:  
The symphonies ascend, a swelling tide,  
Melodious thunders fill the welkin wide  
The grand old lawyers, chinning on their chins!

Ambrose Bierce

## A Bit Of Science

What! photograph in colors? 'Tis a dream  
And he who dreams it is not otherwise,  
If colors are vibration they but seem,  
And have no being. But if Tyndall lies,  
Why, come, then-photograph my lady's eyes.  
Nay, friend, you can't; the splendor of their blue,  
As on my own beclouded orbs they rest,  
To naught but vibratory motion's due,  
As heart, head, limbs and all I am attest.  
How could her eyes, at rest themselves, be making  
In me so uncontrollable a shaking?

Ambrose Bierce

## A Black-List

'Resolved that we will post,' the tradesmen say,  
'All names of debtors who do never pay.'  
'Whose shall be first?' inquires the ready scribe  
'Who are the chiefs of the marauding tribe?'  
Lo! high Parnassus, lifting from the plain,  
Upon his hoary peak, a noble fane!  
Within that temple all the names are scrolled  
Of village bards upon a slab of gold;  
To that bad eminence, my friend, aspire,  
And copy thou the Roll of Fame, entire.  
Yet not to total shame those names devote,  
But add in mercy this explaining note:  
'These cheat because the law makes theft a crime,  
And they obey all laws but laws of rhyme.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A 'Born Leader Of Men'

Tuckerton Tamerlane Morey Mahosh  
Is a statesman of world-wide fame,  
With a notable knack at rhetorical bosh  
To glorify somebody's name  
Somebody chosen by Tuckerton's masters  
To succor the country from divers disasters  
Portentous to Mr. Mahosh.

Percy O'Halloran Tarpy Cabee  
Is in the political swim.  
He cares not a button for men, not he:  
Great principles captivate him  
Principles cleverly cut out and fitted  
To Percy's capacity, duly submitted,  
And fought for by Mr. Cabee.

Drusus Turn Swinnerton Porfer Fitzurse  
Holds office the most of his life.  
For men nor for principles cares he a curse,  
But much for his neighbor's wife.  
The Ship of State leaks, but he doesn't pump any,  
Messrs. Mahosh, Cabee & Company  
Pump for good Mr. Fitzurse.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Bubble

Mrs. Mehitable Marcia Moore  
Was a dame of superior mind,  
With a gown which, modestly fitting before,  
Was greatly puffed up behind.

The bustle she wore was ingeniously planned  
With an inspiration bright:  
It magnified seven diameters and  
Was remarkably nice and light.

It was made of rubber and edged with lace  
And riveted all with brass,  
And the whole immense interior space  
Inflated with hydrogen gas.

The ladies all said when she hove in view  
Like the round and rising moon:  
'She's a stuck up thing!' which was partly true,  
And men called her the Captive Balloon.

To Manhattan Beach for a bath one day  
She went and she said: 'O dear!  
If I leave off this what will people say?  
I shall look so uncommonly queer!'

So a costume she had accordingly made  
To take it all nicely in,  
And when she appeared in that suit arrayed,  
She was greeted with many a grin.

Proudly and happily looking around,  
She waded out into the wet,  
But the water was very, very profound,  
And her feet and her forehead met!

As her bubble drifted away from the shore,  
On the glassy billows borne,  
All cried: 'Why, where is Mehitable Moore?  
I saw her go in, I'll be sworn!'

Then the bulb it swelled as the sun grew hot,  
Till it burst with a sullen roar,  
And the sea like oil closed over the spot  
Farewell, O Mehitable Moore!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Builder

I saw the devil-he was working free:  
A customs-house he builded by the sea.  
'Why do you this?' The devil raised his head;  
'Churches and courts I've built enough,' he said.

Ambrose Bierce



# A Bulletin

'Lothario is very low,'  
So all the doctors tell.  
Nay, nay, not \_so\_-he will be, though,  
If ever he get well.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Caller

'Why, Goldenson, you're looking very well.'  
Said Death as, strolling through the County Jail,  
He entered that serene assassin's cell  
And hung his hat and coat upon a nail.  
'I think that life in this secluded spot  
Agrees with men of your trade, does it not?'

'Well, yes,' said Goldenson, 'I can't complain:  
Life anywhere-provided it is mine-  
Agrees with me; but I observe with pain  
That still the people murmur and repine.  
It hurts their sense of harmony, no doubt,  
To see a persecuted man grow stout.'

'O no, 'tis not your growing stout,' said Death,  
'Which makes these malcontents complain and scold  
They like you to be, somehow, scant of breath.  
What they object to is your growing old.  
And-though indifferent to lean or fat  
I don't myself entirely favor \_that\_.'

With brows that met above the orbs beneath,  
And nose that like a soaring hawk appeared,  
And lifted lip, uncovering his teeth,  
The Mamikellikiller coldly sneered:  
'O, so you don't! Well, how will you assuage  
Your spongy passion for the blood of age?'

Death with a clattering convulsion, drew  
His coat on, hatted his unmeated pow,  
Unbarred the door and, stepping partly through,  
Turned and made answer: 'I will \_show\_ you how.  
I'm going to the Bench you call Supreme  
And tap the old women who sit there and dream.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Career In Letters

When Liberverm resigned the chair  
Of This or That in college, where  
For two decades he'd gorged his brain  
With more than it could well contain,  
In order to relieve the stress  
He took to writing for the press.  
Then Pondronummus said, 'I'll help  
This mine of talent to devel'p;'  
And straightway bought with coin and credit  
The Thundergust for him to edit.

The great man seized the pen and ink  
And wrote so hard he couldn't think;  
Ideas grew beneath his fist  
And flew like falcons from his wrist.  
His pen shot sparks all kinds of ways  
Till all the rivers were ablaze,  
And where the coruscations fell  
Men uttered words I dare not spell.

Eftsoons with corrugated brow,  
Wet towels bound about his pow,  
Locked legs and failing appetite,  
He thought so hard he couldn't write.  
His soaring fancies, chickenwise,  
Came home to roost and wouldn't rise.  
With dimmer light and milder heat  
His goose-quill staggered o'er the sheet,  
Then dragged, then stopped; the finish came-  
He couldn't even write his name.  
The Thundergust in three short weeks  
Had risen, roared, and split its cheeks.  
Said Pondronummus, 'How unjust!  
The storm I raised has laid my dust!'

When, Moneybagger, you have aught  
Invested in a vein of thought,  
Be sure you've purchased not, instead,  
That salted claim, a bookworm's head.

Ambrose Bierce

## A Celebrated Case

Way down in the Boom Belt lived Mrs. Roselle;  
A person named Petrie, he lived there as well;  
But Mr. Roselle he resided away  
Sing tooral ioral ioral iay.

Once Mrs. Roselle in her room was alone:  
The flesh of her flesh and the bone of her bone  
Neglected the wife of his bosom to woo  
Sing tooral ioral ioral ioo.

Then Petrie, her lover, appeared at the door,  
Remarking: 'My dear; I don't love you no more.'  
'That's awfully rough,' said the lady, 'on me-  
Sing tooral ioral ioral iee.'

'Come in, Mr. Petrie,' she added, 'pray do:  
Although you don't love me no more, I love you.  
Sit down while I spray you with vitriol now  
Sing tooral ioral ioral iow.'

Said Petrie: 'That liquid I know won't agree  
With my beauty, and then you'll no longer love me;  
So spray and be '-O, what a word he did say!-  
Sing tooral ioral ioral iay.

She deluged his head and continued to pour  
Till his bonny blue eyes, like his love, were no more.  
It was seldom he got such a hearty shampoo  
Sing tooral ioral ioral ioo.

Then Petrie he rose and said: 'Mrs. Roselle,  
I have an engagement and bid you farewell.'  
'You see,' she began to explain-but not he!  
Sing tooral, ioral, ioral iee.

The Sheriff he came and he offered his arm,  
Saying, 'Sorry I am for disturbin' you, marm,  
But business is business.' Said she, 'So they say  
Sing tooral, ioral, ioral iay.'

The Judge on the bench he looked awfully stern;  
The District Attorney began to attorn;  
The witnesses lied and the lawyers-O my!-  
Sing tooral, iooral, iooral iyi.

The chap that defended her said: 'It's our claim  
That he loved us no longer and told us the same.  
What else than we did could we decently do?  
Sing tooral, iooral, iooral ioo.'

The District Attorney, sarcastic, replied:  
'We loved you no longer-that can't be denied.  
Not having no eyes we may dote on you now-  
Sing tooral, iooral, iooral iow.'

The prisoner wept to entoken her fears;  
The sockets of Petrie were flooded with tears.  
O heaven-born Sympathy, bully for you!  
Sing tooral, iooral, iooral ioo.

Four jurors considered the prisoner mad,  
And four thought her victim uncommonly bad,  
And four that the acid was all in his eye  
Sing rum tiddy iddity iddity hi.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Challenge

A bull imprisoned in a stall  
Broke boldly the confining wall,  
And found himself, when out of bounds,  
Within a washerwoman's grounds.  
Where, hanging on a line to dry,  
A crimson skirt inflamed his eye.  
With bellowings that woke the dead,  
He bent his formidable head,  
With pointed horns and gnarly forehead;  
Then, planting firm his shoulders horrid,  
Began, with rage made half insane,  
To paw the arid earth amain,  
Flinging the dust upon his flanks  
In desolating clouds and banks,  
The while his eyes' uneasy white  
Betrayed his doubt what foe the bright  
Red tent concealed, perchance, from sight.  
The garment, which, all undismayed,  
Had never paled a single shade,  
Now found a tongue-a dangling sock,  
Left carelessly inside the smock:  
'I must insist, my gracious liege,  
That you'll be pleased to raise the siege:  
My colors I will never strike.  
I know your sex-you're all alike.  
Some small experience I've had  
You're not the first I've driven mad.'

Ambrose Bierce

## A Cheating Preacher

Munhall, to save my soul you bravely try,  
Although, to save my soul, I can't say why.  
'Tis naught to you, to me however much  
Why, bless it! you might save a million such  
Yet lose your own; for still the 'means of grace'  
That you employ to turn us from the place  
By the arch-enemy of souls frequented  
Are those which to ensnare us he invented!  
I do not say you utter falsehoods-I  
Would scorn to give to ministers the lie:  
They cannot fight-their calling has estopped it.  
True, I did not persuade them to adopt it.  
But, Munhall, when you say the Devil dwells  
In all the breasts of all the infidels  
Making a lot of individual Hells  
In gentlemen instinctively who shrink  
From thinking anything that you could think,  
You talk as I should if some world I trod  
Where lying is acceptable to God.  
I don't at all object-forbid it Heaven!  
That your discourse you temperately leaven  
With airy reference to wicked souls  
Cursing impenitent on glowing coals,  
Nor quarrel with your fancy, blithe and fine,  
Which represents the wickedest as mine.  
Each ornament of style my spirit eases:  
The subject saddens, but the manner pleases.  
But when you 'deal damnation round' 'twere sweet  
To think hereafter that you did not cheat.  
Deal, and let all accept what you allot 'em.  
But, blast you! you are dealing from the bottom!

Ambrose Bierce



## A Commuted Sentence

Boruck and Waterman upon their grills  
In Hades lay, with many a sigh and groan,  
Hotly disputing, for each swore his own  
Were clearly keener than the other's ills.  
And, truly, each had much to boast of-bone  
And sinew, muscle, tallow, nerve and skin,  
Blood in the vein and marrow in the shin,  
Teeth, eyes and other organs (for the soul  
Has all of these and even a wagging chin)  
Blazing and coruscating like a coal!  
For Lower Sacramento, you remember,  
Has trying weather, even in mid-December.

Now this occurred in the far future. All  
Mankind had been a million ages dead,  
And each to her reward above had sped,  
Each to his punishment below,-I call  
That quite a just arrangement. As I said,  
Boruck and Waterman in warmest pain  
Crackled and sizzed with all their might and main.  
For, when on earth, they'd freed a scurvy host  
Of crooks from the State prison, who again  
Had robbed and ravaged the Pacific Coast  
And (such the felon's predatory nature)  
Even got themselves into the Legislature.

So Waterman and Boruck lay and roared  
In Hades. It is true all other males  
Felt the like flames and uttered equal wails,  
But did not suffer them; whereas they bored  
Each one the other. But indeed my tale's  
Not getting on at all. They lay and browned  
Till Boruck (who long since his teeth had ground  
Away and spoke Gum Arabic and made  
Stump speeches even in praying) looked around  
And said to Bob's incinerated shade:  
'Your Excellency, this is mighty hard on  
The inventors of the unpardonable pardon.'

The other soul-his right hand all aflame,  
For 'twas with that he'd chiefly sinned, although  
His tongue, too, like a wick was working woe  
To the reserve of tallow in his frame-  
Said, with a sputtering, uncertain flow,  
And with a gesture like a shaken torch:  
'Yes, but I'm sure we'll not much longer scorch.  
Although this climate is not good for Hope,  
Whose joyous wing 'twould singe, I think the porch  
Of Hell we'll quit with a pacific slope.  
Last century I signified repentance  
And asked for commutation of our sentence.'

Even as he spoke, the form of Satan loomed  
In sight, all crimson with reflections's fire,  
Like some tall tower or cathedral spire  
Touched by the dawn while all the earth is gloomed  
In mists and shadows of the night time. 'Sire,'  
Said Waterman, his agitable wick  
Still sputtering, 'what calls you back so quick?  
It scarcely was a century ago  
You left us.' 'I have come to bring,' said Nick,  
'St. Peter's answer (he is never slow  
In correspondence) to your application  
For pardon-pardon me!-for commutation.

'He says that he's instructed to reply  
(And he has so instructed me) that sin  
Like yours-and this poor gentleman's who's in  
For bad advice to you-comes rather high;  
But since, apparently, you both begin  
To feel some pious promptings to the right,  
And fain would turn your faces to the light,  
Eternity seems all too long a term.  
So 'tis commuted to one-half. I'm quite  
Prepared, when that expires, to free the worm  
And quench the fire.' And, civilly retreating,  
He left them holding their protracted meeting.

Ambrose Bierce

## A Controversialist

I've sometimes wished that Ingersoll were wise  
To hold his tongue, nor rail against the skies;  
For when he's made a point some pious dunce  
Like Bartlett of the *\_Bulletin\_* 'replies.'

I brandish no iconoclastic fist,  
Nor enter the debate an atheist;  
But when they say there is a God I ask  
Why Bartlett, then, is suffered to exist.

Even infidels that logic might resent,  
Saying: 'There's no place for his punishment  
That's worse than earth.' But humbly I submit  
That he would make a hell wherever sent.

Ambrose Bierce

## A Coward

By hardihood to rise and fear to strike,  
And fitly to rebuke his sins decrees,  
That, hide from others with what care he please,  
Night sha'n't be black enough nor earth so wide  
That from himself himself can ever hide!  
Hard fate indeed to feel at every breath  
His burden of identity till death!  
No moment's respite from the immortal load,  
To think himself a serpent or a toad,  
Or dream, with a divine, ecstatic glow,  
He's long been dead and canonized a crow!

Ambrose Bierce

## A Critic

That from \_you\_, neighbor! to whose vacant lot  
Each rhyming literary knacker scourges  
His cart-compelling Pegasus to trot,  
As folly, fame or famine smartly urges?

Admonished by the stimulating goad,  
How gaily, lo! the spavined crow-bait prances  
Its cart before it-eager to unload  
The dead-dog sentiments and swill-tub fancies.

Gravely the sweating scavenger pulls out  
The tail-board of his curst imagination,  
Shoots all his rascal rubbish, and, no doubt,  
Thanks Fortune for so good a dumping-station.

To improve your property, the vile cascade  
Your thrift invites-to make a higher level.  
In vain: with tons of garbage overlaid,  
Your baseless bog sinks slowly to the devil.

'Rubbish may be shot here'-familiar sign!  
I seem to see it in your every column.  
You have your wishes, but if I had mine  
'Twould to your editor mean something solemn.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Crocodile

Nay, Peter Robertson, 'tis not for you  
To blubber o'er Max Taubles for he's dead.  
By Heaven! my hearty, if you only knew  
How better is a grave-worm in the head  
Than brains like yours-how far more decent, too,  
A tomb in far Corea than a bed  
Where Peter lies with Peter, you would covet  
His happier state and, dying, learn to love it.

In the recesses of the silent tomb  
No Maunderings of yours disturb the peace.  
Your mental bag-pipe, droning like the gloom  
Of Hades audible, perforce must cease  
From troubling further; and that crack o' doom,  
Your mouth, shaped like a long bow, shall release  
In vain such shafts of wit as it can utter  
The ear of death can't even hear them flutter.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Culinary Candidate

A cook adorned with paper cap,  
Or waiter with a tray,  
May be a worthy kind of chap  
In his way,  
But when we want one for Recorder,  
Then, Mr. Walton, take our order.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Dampened Ardor

The Chinatown at Bakersfield  
Was blazing bright and high;  
The flames to water would not yield,  
Though torrents drenched the sky  
And drowned the ground for miles around  
The houses were so dry.

Then rose an aged preacher man  
Whom all did much admire,  
Who said: 'To force on you my plan  
I truly don't aspire,  
But streams, it seems, might quench these beams  
If turned upon the fire.'

The fireman said: 'This hoary wight  
His folly dares to thrust  
On \_us\_! 'Twere well he felt our might  
Nay, he shall feel our must!  
With jet of wet and small regret  
They laid that old man's dust.

Ambrose Bierce



# A Demagogue

Yawp, yawp, yawp!  
Under the moon and sun.  
It's aye the rabble,  
And I to gabble,  
And hey! for the tale that is never done.

'Chant, chant, chant!  
To woo the reluctant vote.  
I would I were dead  
And my say were said  
And my song were sung to its ultimate note.

'Stab, stab, stab!  
Ah! the weapon between my teeth  
I'm sick of the flash of it;  
See how the slash of it  
Misses the foeman to mangle the sheath!

'Boom, boom, boom!  
I'm beating the mammoth drum.  
My nethermost tripes  
I blow into the pipes  
It's oh! for the honors that never come!'

'Twas the dolorous blab  
Of a tramping 'scab'  
'Twas the eloquent Swift  
Of the marvelous gift  
The wild, weird, wonderful gift of gab!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Demand

You promised to paint me a picture,  
Dear Mat,  
And I was to pay you in rhyme.  
Although I am loth to inflict your  
Most easy of consciences, I'm  
Of opinion that fibbing is awful,  
And breaking a contract unlawful,  
Indictable, too, as a crime,  
A slight and all that.

If, Lady Unbountiful, any  
Of that  
By mortals called pity has part  
In your obdurate soul-if a penny  
You care for the health of my heart,  
By performing your undertaking  
You'll succor that organ from breaking  
And spare it for some new smart,  
As puss does a rat.

Do you think it is very becoming,  
Dear Mat,  
To deny me my rights evermore  
And-bless you! if I begin summing  
Your sins they will make a long score!  
You never were generous, madam,  
If you had been Eve and I Adam  
You'd have given me naught but the core,  
And little of that.

Had I been content with a Titian,  
A cat  
By Landseer, a meadow by Claude,  
No doubt I'd have had your permission  
To take it-by purchase abroad.  
But why should I sail o'er the ocean  
For Landseers and Claudes? I've a notion  
All's bad that the critics belaud.  
I wanted a Mat.

Presumption's a sin, and I suffer  
For that:  
But still you \_did\_ say that sometime,  
If I'd pay you enough (here's enough  
That's more than enough) of rhym  
You'd paint me a picture. I pay you  
Hereby in advance; and I pray you  
Condone, while you can, your crime,  
And send me a Mat.

But if you don't do it I warn you,  
Dear Mat,  
I'll raise such a clamor and cry  
On Parnassus the Muses will scorn you  
As mocker of poets and fly  
With bitter complaints to Apollo:  
'Her spirit is proud, her heart hollow,  
Her beauty'-they'll hardly deny,  
On second thought, \_that\_!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Dilemma

Filled with a zeal to serve my fellow men,  
For years I criticised their prose and verges:  
Pointed out all their blunders of the pen,  
Their shallowness of thought and feeling; then  
Damned them up hill and down with hearty curses!

They said: 'That's all that he can do-just sneer,  
And pull to pieces and be analytic.  
Why doesn't he himself, eschewing fear,  
Publish a book or two, and so appear  
As one who has the right to be a critic?

'Let him who knows it all forbear to tell  
How little others know, but show his learning.'  
The public added: 'Who has written well  
May censure freely'-quoting Pope. I fell  
Into the trap and books began out-turning,

Books by the score-fine prose and poems fair,  
And not a book of them but was a terror,  
They were so great and perfect; though I swear  
I tried right hard to work in, here and there,  
(My nature still forbade) a fault or error.

'Tis true, some wretches, whom I'd scratched, no doubt,  
Professed to find-but that's a trifling matter.  
Now, when the flood of noble books was out  
I raised o'er all that land a joyous shout,  
Till I was thought as mad as any hatter!

(Why hatters all are mad, I cannot say.  
'T were wrong in their affliction to revile 'em,  
But truly, you'll confess 'tis very sad  
We wear the ugly things they make. Begad,  
They'd be less mischievous in an asylum!)

'Consistency, thou art a'-well, you're paste!  
When next I felt my demon in possession,  
And made the field of authorship a waste,

All said of me: 'What execrable taste,  
To rail at others of his own profession!'

Good Lord! where do the critic's rights begin  
Who has of literature some clear-cut notion,  
And hears a voice from Heaven say: 'Pitch in'?  
He finds himself-alas, poor son of sin  
Between the devil and the deep blue ocean!

Ambrose Bierce

## A Fair Division

Another Irish landlord gone to grass,  
Slain by the bullets of the tenant class!  
Pray, good agrarians, what wrong requires  
Such foul redress? Between you and the squires  
All Ireland's parted with an even hand  
For you have all the ire, they all the land.

Ambrose Bierce

# A False Prophecy

Dom Pedro, Emperor of far Brazil  
(Whence coffee comes and the three-cornered nut),  
They say that you're imperially ill,  
And threatened with paralysis. Tut-tut!  
Though Emperors are mortal, nothing but  
A nimble thunderbolt could catch and kill  
A man predestined to depart this life  
By the assassin's bullet, bomb or knife.

Sir, once there was a President who freed  
Ten million slaves; and once there was a Czar  
Who freed five times as many serfs. Sins breed  
The means of punishment, and tyrants are  
Hurled headlong out of the triumphal car  
If faster than the law allows they speed.  
Lincoln and Alexander struck a rut;  
\_You\_ freed slaves too. Paralysis-tut-tut!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Fish Commissioner

Great Joseph D. Redding-illustrious name!  
Considered a fish-horn the trumpet of Fame.  
That goddess was angry, and what do you think?  
Her trumpet she filled with a gallon of ink,  
And all through the Press, with a devilish glee,  
She sputtered and spattered the name of J.D.

Ambrose Bierce



# A Fool

Says Anderson, Theosophist:  
'Among the many that exist  
In modern halls,  
Some lived in ancient Egypt's clime  
And in their childhood saw the prime  
Of Karnak's walls.'

Ah, Anderson, if that is true  
'T is my conviction, sir, that you  
Are one of those  
That once resided by the Nile,  
Peer to the sacred Crocodile,  
Heir to his woes.

My judgment is, the holy Cat  
Mews through your larynx (and your hat)  
These many years.  
Through you the godlike Onion brings  
Its melancholy sense of things,  
And moves to tears.

In you the Bull divine again  
Bellows and paws the dusty plain,  
To nature true.  
I challenge not his ancient hate  
But, lowering my knurly pate,  
Lock horns with you.

And though Reincarnation prove  
A creed too stubborn to remove,  
And all your school  
Of Theosophs I cannot scare  
All the more earnestly I swear  
That you're a fool.

You'll say that this is mere abuse  
Without, in fraying you, a use.  
That's plain to see  
With only half an eye. Come, now,

Be fair, be fair,-consider how  
It eases \_me\_!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Growler

Judge Shafter, you're an aged man, I know,  
And learned too, I doubt not, in the law;  
And a head white with many a winter's snow  
(I wish, however that your heart would thaw)  
Claims reverence and honor; but the jaw  
That's always wagging with a word malign,  
Nagging and scolding every one in sight  
As harshly as a jaybird in a pine,  
And with as little sense of wrong and right  
As animates that irritable creature,  
Is not a very venerable feature.

You damn all witnesses, all jurors too  
(And swear at the attorneys, I suppose,  
But that's commendable) 'till all is blue';  
And what it's all about, the good Lord knows,  
Not you; but all the hotter, fiercer glows  
Your wrath for that-as dogs the louder howl  
With only moonshine to incite their rage,  
And bears with more ferocious menace growl,  
Even when their food is flung into the cage.  
Reform, your Honor, and forbear to curse us.  
Lest all men, hearing you, cry: 'Ecce ursus!'

Ambrose Bierce

## A Guest

Death, are you well? I trust you have no cough  
That's painful or in any way annoying  
No kidney trouble that may carry you off,  
Or heart disease to keep you from enjoying  
Your meals-and ours. 'T were very sad indeed  
To have to quit the busy life you lead.

You've been quite active lately for so old  
A person, and not very strong-appearing.  
I'm apprehensive, somehow, that my bold,  
Bad brother gave you trouble in the spearing.  
And my two friends-I fear, sir, that you ran  
Quite hard for them, especially the man.

I crave your pardon: 'twas no fault of mine;  
If you are overworked I'm sorry, very.  
Come in, old man, and have a glass of wine.  
What shall it be-Marsala, Port or Sherry?  
What! just a mug of blood? That's funny grog  
To ask a friend for, eh? Well, take it, hog!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Hasty Inference

The Devil one day, coming up from the Pit,  
All grimy with perspiration,  
Applied to St. Peter and begged he'd admit  
Him a moment for consultation.

The Saint showed him in where the Master reclined  
On the throne where petitioners sought him;  
Both bowed, and the Evil One opened his mind  
Concerning the business that brought him:

'For ten million years I've been kept in a stew  
Because you have thought me immoral;  
And though I have had my opinion of you,  
You've had the best end of the quarrel.

'But now-well, I venture to hope that the past  
With its misunderstandings we'll smother;  
And you, sir, and I, sir, be throned here at last  
As equals, the one to the other.'

'Indeed!' said the Master (I cannot convey  
A sense of his tone by mere letters)  
'What makes you presume you'll be bidden to stay  
Up here on such terms with your betters?'

'Why, sure you can't mean it!' said Satan. 'I've seen  
How Stanford and Crocker you've nourished,  
And Huntington-bless me! the three like a green  
Umbrageous great bay-tree have flourished.

They are fat, they are rolling in gold, they command  
All sources and well-springs of power;  
You've given them houses, you've given them land  
Before them the righteous all cower.'

'What of that?' 'What of that?' cried the Father of Sin;  
'Why, I thought when I saw you were winking  
At crimes such as theirs that perhaps you had been  
Converted to my way of thinking.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Hymn Of The Many

God's people sorely were oppressed,  
I heard their lamentations long;  
I hear their singing, clear and strong,  
I see their banners in the West!

The captains shout the battle-cry,  
The legions muster in their might;  
They turn their faces to the light,  
They lift their arms, they testify:

'We sank beneath the Master's thong,  
Our chafing chains were ne'er undone;  
Now clash your lances in the sun  
And bless your banners with a song!

'God bides his time with patient eyes  
While tyrants build upon the land;  
He lifts his face, he lifts his hand,  
And from the stones his temples rise.

'Now Freedom waves her joyous wing  
Beyond the foemen's shields of gold.  
March forward, singing, for, behold,  
The right shall rule while God is king!'

Ambrose Bierce

## A Jack-At-All-Views

So, Estee, you are still alive! I thought  
That you had died and were a blessed ghost  
I know at least your coffin once was bought  
With Railroad money; and 'twas said by most  
Historians that Stanford made a boast  
The seller 'threw you in.' That goes for naught  
Man takes delight in fancy's fine inventions,  
And woman too, 'tis said, if they are French ones.

Do you remember, Estee-ah, 'twas long  
And long ago!-how fierce you grew and hot  
When anything impeded the straight, strong,  
Wild sweep of the great billow you had got  
Atop of, like a swimmer bold? Great Scott!  
How fine your wavemanship! How loud your song  
Of 'Down with railroads!' When the wave subsided  
And left you stranded you were much divided.

Then for a time you were content to wade  
The waters of the 'robber barons' moat.  
To fetch, and carry was your humble trade,  
And ferry Stanford over in a boat,  
Well paid if he bestowed the kindly groat  
And spoke you fair and called you pretty maid.  
And when his stomach seemed a bit unsteady  
You got your serviceable basin ready.

Strange man! how odd to see you, smug and spruce,  
There at Chicago, burrowed in a Chair,  
Not made to measure and a deal too loose,  
And see you lift your little arm and swear  
Democracy shall be no more! If it's a fair  
And civil question, and not too abstruse,  
Were you elected as a 'robber baron,'  
Or as a Communist whose teeth had hair on?

Ambrose Bierce



## A Lacking Factor

'You acted unwisely,' I cried, 'as you see  
By the outcome.' He calmly eyed me:  
'When choosing the course of my action,' said he,  
'I had not the outcome to guide me.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Lifted Finger

What! \_you\_ whip rascals?-\_you\_, whose gutter blood  
Bears, in its dark, dishonorable flood,  
Enough of prison-birds' prolific germs  
To serve a whole eternity of terms?  
\_You\_, for whose back the rods and cudgels strove  
Ere yet the ax had hewn them from the grove?  
\_You\_, the De Young whose splendor bright and brave  
Is phosphorescence from another's grave  
Till now unknown, by any chance or luck,  
Even to the hearts at which you, feebly struck?  
\_You\_ whip a rascal out of office?-\_you  
Whose leadless weapon once ignobly blew  
Its smoke in six directions to assert  
Your lack of appetite for others' dirt?

Practice makes perfect: when for fame you thirst,  
Then whip a rascal. Whip a cripple first.  
Or, if for action you're less free than bold  
Your palms both brimming with dishonest gold  
Entrust the castigation that you've planned,  
As once before, to woman's idle hand.  
So in your spirit shall two pleasures join  
To slake the sacred thirst for blood and coin.  
Blood? Souls have blood, even as the body hath,  
And, spilled, 'twill fertilize the field of wrath.  
Lo! in a purple gorge of yonder hills,  
Where o'er a grave a bird its day-song stills,  
A woman's blood, through roses ever red,  
Mutely appeals for vengeance on your head.  
Slandered to death to serve a sordid end,  
She called you murderer and called me friend.

Now, mark you, libeler, this course if you  
Dare to maintain, or rather to renew;  
If one short year's immunity has made  
You blink again the perils of your trade  
The ghastly sequence of the maddened 'knave,'  
The hot encounter and the colder grave;  
If the grim, dismal lesson you ignore

While yet the stains are fresh upon your floor,  
And calmly march upon the fatal brink  
With eyes averted to your trail of ink,  
Counting unkind the services of those  
Who pull, to hold you back, your stupid nose,  
The day for you to die is not so far,  
Or, at the least, to live the thing you are!

Pregnant with possibilities of crime,  
And full of felons for all coming time,  
Your blood's too precious to be lightly spilt  
In testimony to a venial guilt.  
Live to get whelpage and preserve a name  
No praise can sweeten and no lie unshame.  
Live to fulfill the vision that I see  
Down the dim vistas of the time to be:  
A dream of clattering beaks and burning eyes  
Of hungry ravens glooming all the skies;  
A dream of gleaming teeth and foetid breath  
Of jackals wrangling at the feast of death;  
A dream of broken necks and swollen tongues  
The whole world's gibbets loaded with De Youngs!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Literary Hangman

Beneath his coat of dirt great Neilson loves  
To hide the avenging rope.  
He handles all he touches without gloves,  
Excepting soap.

Ambrose Bierce

## 'A Literary Method'

His poems Riley says that he indites  
Upon an empty stomach. Heavenly Powers,  
Feed him throat-full: for what the beggar writes  
Upon his empty stomach empties ours!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Long-Felt Want

Dimly apparent, through the gloom  
Of Market-street's opaque simoom,  
A queue of people, parti-sexed,  
Awaiting the command of 'Next!'  
A sidewalk booth, a dingy sign:  
'Teeth dusted nice-five cents a shine.'

Ambrose Bierce

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Ambrose Bierce

# A Man

Pennoyer, Governor of Oregon,  
Casting to South his eye across the bourne  
Of his dominion (where the Palmiped,  
With leathers 'twixt his toes, paddles his marsh,  
Amphibious) saw a rising cloud of hats,  
And heard a faint, far sound of distant cheers  
Below the swell of the horizon. 'Lo,'  
Cried one, 'the President! the President!'  
All footed webwise then took up the word-  
The hill tribes and the tribes lacustrine and  
The folk riparian and littoral,  
Cried with one voice: 'The President! He comes!'  
And some there were who flung their headgear up  
In emulation of the Southern mob;  
While some, more soberly disposed, stood still  
And silently had fits; and others made  
Such reverent genuflexions as they could,  
Having that climate in their bones. Then spake  
The Court Dunce, humbly, as became him: 'Sire,  
If thou, as heretofore thou hast, wilt deign  
To reap advantage of a fool's advice  
By action ordered after nature's way,  
As in thy people manifest (for still  
Stupidity's the only wisdom) thou  
Wilt get thee straight unto to the border land  
To mark the President's approach with such  
Due, decent courtesy as it shall seem  
We have in custom the best warrant for.'

Pennoyer, Governor of Oregon,  
Eyeing the storm of hats which darkened all  
The Southern sky, and hearing far hurrahs  
Of an exulting people, answered not.  
Then some there were who fell upon their knees,  
And some upon their Governor, and sought  
Each in his way, by blandishment or force,  
To gain his action to their end. 'Behold,'  
They said, 'thy brother Governor to South  
Met him even at the gateway of his realm,



Crook-kneed, magnetic-handed and agrin,  
Backed like a rainbow-all things done in form  
Of due observance and respect. Shall we  
Alone of all his servitors refuse  
Swift welcome to our master and our lord?'

Pennoyer, Governor of Oregon,  
Answered them not, but turned his back to them  
And as if speaking to himself, the while  
He started to retire, said: 'He be damned!'

To that High Place o'er Portland's central block,  
Where the Recording Angel stands to view  
The sinning world, nor thinks to move his feet  
Aside and look below, came flocking up  
Inferior angels, all aghast, and cried:  
'Pennoyer, Governor of Oregon,  
Has said, O what an awful word!-too bad  
To be by us repeated!' 'Yes, I know,'  
Said the superior bird-'I heard it too,  
And have already booked it. Pray observe.'  
Splitting the giant tome, whose covers fell  
Apart, o'ershadowing to right and left  
The Eastern and the Western world, he showed  
The newly written entry, black and big,  
Upon the credit side of thine account,  
Pennoyer, Governor of Oregon.

Ambrose Bierce

# A 'Mass' Meeting

It was a solemn rite as e'er  
Was seen by mortal man.  
The celebrants, the people there,  
Were all Republican.

There Estee bent his grizzled head,  
And General Dimond, too,  
And one-'twas Reddick, some one said,  
Though no one clearly knew.

I saw the priest, white-robed and tall  
(Assistant, Father Stow)-  
He was the pious man men call  
Dan Burns of Mexico.

Ah, 'twas a high and holy rite  
As any one could swear.  
'What does it mean?' I asked a wight  
Who knelt apart in prayer.

'A mass for the repose,' he said,  
'Of Colonel Markham's'--'What,  
Is gallant Colonel Markham dead?  
'Tis sad, 'tis sad, God wot!'

'A mass'-repeated he, and rose  
To go and kneel among  
The worshipers-'for the repose  
Of Colonel Markham's tongue.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Merciful Governor

Standing within the triple wall of Hell,  
And flattening his nose against a grate  
Behind whose brazen bars he'd had to dwell  
A thousand million ages to that date,  
Stoneman bewailed his melancholy fate,  
And his big tear-drops, boiling as they fell,  
Had worn between his feet, the record mentions,  
A deep depression in the 'good intentions.'

Imperfectly by memory taught how  
For prayer in Hell is a lost art-he prayed,  
Uplifting his incinerated brow  
And flaming hands in supplication's aid.  
'O grant,' he cried, 'my torment may be stayed  
In mercy, some short breathing spell allow!  
If one good deed I did before my ghosting,  
Spare me and give Delmas a double roasting.'

Breathing a holy harmony in Hell,  
Down through the appalling clamors of the place,  
Charming them all to willing concord, fell  
A Voice ineffable and full of grace:  
'Because of all the law-defying race  
One single malefactor of the cell  
Thou didst not free from his incarceration,  
Take thou ten thousand years of condonation.'

Back from their fastenings began to shoot  
The rusted bolts; with dreadful roar, the gate  
Laboriously turned; and, black with soot,  
The extinguished spirit passed that awful strait,  
And as he legged it into space, elate,  
Muttered: 'Yes, I remember that galoot  
I'd signed his pardon, ready to allot it,  
But stuck it in my desk and quite forgot it.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Military Incident

Dawn heralded the coming sun  
Fort Douglas was computing  
The minutes-and the sunrise gun  
Was manned for his saluting.

The gunner at that firearm stood,  
The which he slowly loaded,  
When, bang!-I know not how it could,  
But sure the charge exploded!

Yes, to that veteran's surprise  
The gun went off sublimely,  
And both his busy arms likewise  
Went off with it, untimely.

Then said that gunner to his mate  
(He was from Ballyshannon):  
'Bedad, the sun's a minute late,  
Accardin' to this cannon!'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Morning Fancy

I drifted (or I seemed to) in a boat  
Upon the surface of a shoreless sea  
Whereon no ship nor anything did float,  
Save only the frail bark supporting me;  
And that-it was so shadowy-seemed to be  
Almost from out the very vapors wrought  
Of the great ocean underneath its keel;  
And all that blue profound appeared as naught  
But thicker sky, translucent to reveal,  
Miles down, whatever through its spaces glided,  
Or at the bottom traveled or abided.

Great cities there I saw-of rich and poor,  
The palace and the hovel; mountains, vales,  
Forest and field, the desert and the moor,  
Tombs of the good and wise who'd lived in jails,  
And seas of denser fluid, white with sails  
Pushed at by currents moving here and there  
And sensible to sight above the flat  
Of that opaquer deep. Ah, strange and fair  
The nether world that I was gazing at  
With beating heart from that exalted level,  
And-lest I founder-trembling like the devil!

The cities all were populous: men swarmed  
In public places-chattered, laughed and wept;  
And savages their shining bodies warmed  
At fires in primal woods. The wild beast leapt  
Upon its prey and slew it as it slept.  
Armies went forth to battle on the plain  
So far, far down in that unfathomed deep  
The living seemed as silent as the slain,  
Nor even the widows could be heard to weep.  
One might have thought their shaking was but laughter;  
And, truly, most were married shortly after.

Above the wreckage of that silent fray  
Strange fishes swam in circles, round and round  
Black, double-finned; and once a little way

A bubble rose and burst without a sound  
And a man tumbled out upon the ground.  
Lord! 'twas an eerie thing to drift apace  
On that pellucid sea, beneath black skies  
And o'er the heads of an undrowning race;  
And when I woke I said-to her surprise  
Who came with chocolate, for me to drink it:  
'The atmosphere is deeper than you think it.'

Ambrose Bierce

## A 'Mute Inglorious Milton'

'O, I'm the Unaverage Man,  
But you never have heard of me,  
For my brother, the Average Man, outran  
My fame with rapiditee,  
And I'm sunk in Oblivion's sea,  
But my bully big brother the world can span  
With his wide notorietee.  
I do everything that I can  
To make 'em attend to me,  
But the papers ignore the Unaverage Man  
With a weird uniformitee.'

So sang with a dolorous note  
A voice that I heard from the beach;  
On the sable waters it seemed to float  
Like a mortal part of speech.  
The sea was Oblivion's sea,  
And I cried as I plunged to swim:  
'The Unaverage Man shall reside with me.'  
But he didn't-I stayed with him!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Nightmare

I dreamed that I was dead. The years went by:  
The world forgot that such a man as I  
Had ever lived and written: other names  
Were hailed with homage, in their turn to die.

Out of my grave a giant beech upgrew.  
Its roots transpierced my body, through and through,  
My substance fed its growth. From many lands  
Men came in troops that giant tree to view.

'T was sacred to my memory and fame  
My monument. But Allen Forman came,  
Filled with the fervor of a new untruth,  
And carved upon the trunk his odious name!

Ambrose Bierce



# A Paradox

'If life were not worth having,' said the preacher,  
'T would have in suicide one pleasant feature.'  
'An error,' said the pessimist, 'you're making:  
What's not worth having cannot be worth taking.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Partisan's Protest

O statesmen, what would you be at,  
With torches, flags and bands?  
You make me first throw up my hat,  
And then my hands.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Patter Song

There was a cranky Governor  
His name it wasn't Waterman.  
For office he was hotter than  
The love of any lover, nor  
Was Boruck's threat of aiding him  
Effective in dissuading him  
This pig-headed, big-headed, singularly self-conceited Governor Nonwaterman.

To citrus fairs, *\_et caetera\_*,  
He went about philandering,  
To pride of parish pandering.  
He knew not any better-ah,  
His early education had  
Not taught the abnegation fad  
The wool-witted, bull-witted, fabulously feeble-minded king of gabble-gandering!

He conjured up, *\_ad libitum\_*,  
With postures energetical,  
One day (this is prophetic!)  
His graces, to exhibit 'em.  
He straddled in each attitude,  
Four parallels of latitude  
The slab-footed, crab-footed, galloping gregarian, of presence unaesthetical!  
An ancient cow, perceiving that  
His powers of agility  
Transcended her ability  
(A circumstance for grieving at)  
Upon her horns engrafted him  
And to the welkin wafted him  
The high-rolling, sky-rolling, hurtling hallelujah-lad of peerless volatility!

Ambrose Bierce

## A Pickbrain

What! imitate me, friend? Suppose that you  
With agony and difficulty do  
What I do easily-what then? You've got  
A style I heartily wish \_I\_ had not.  
If I from lack of sense and you from choice  
Grieve the judicious and the unwise rejoice,  
No equal censure our deserts will suit  
We both are fools, but you're an ape to boot!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Poet's Father

Welcker, I'm told, can boast a father great  
And honored in the service of the State.  
Public Instruction all his mind employs  
He guides its methods and its wage enjoys.  
Prime Pedagogue, imperious and grand,  
He waves his ferule o'er a studious land  
Where humming youth, intent upon the page,  
Thirsting for knowledge with a noble rage,  
Drink dry the whole Pierian spring and ask  
To slake their fervor at his private flask.  
Arrested by the terror of his frown,  
The vaulting spit-ball drops untimely down;  
The fly impaled on the tormenting pin  
Stills in his awful glance its dizzy din;  
Beneath that stern regard the chewing-gum  
Which writhed and squeaked between the teeth is dumb;  
Obedient to his will the dunce-cap flies  
To perch upon the brows of the unwise;  
The supple switch forsakes the parent wood  
To settle where 'twill do the greatest good,  
Puissant still, as when of old it strove  
With Solomon for spitting on the stove  
Learned Professor, variously great,  
Guide, guardian, instructor of the State  
Quick to discern and zealous to correct  
The faults which mar the public intellect  
From where of Siskiyou the northern bound  
Is frozen eternal to the sunless ground  
To where in San Diego's torrid clime  
The swarthy Greaser swelters in his grime  
Beneath your stupid nose can you not see  
The dunce whom once you dandled on your knee?  
O mighty master of a thousand schools,  
Stop teaching wisdom, or stop breeding fools.

Ambrose Bierce

## A Poet's Hope

'Twas a weary-looking mortal, and he wandered near the portal  
Of the melancholy City of the Discontented Dead.  
He was pale and worn exceeding and his manner was unheeding,  
As if it could not matter what he did nor what he said.

'Sacred stranger'-I addressed him with a reverence befitting  
The austere, unintermitting, dread solemnity he wore;  
'Tis the custom, too, prevailing in that vicinage when hailing  
One who possibly may be a person lately 'gone before'

'Sacred stranger, much I ponder on your evident dejection,  
But my carefulest reflection leaves the riddle still unread.  
How do you yourself explain your dismal tendency to wander  
By the melancholy City of the Discontented Dead?'

Then that solemn person, pausing in the march that he was making,  
Roused himself as if awaking, fixed his dull and stony eye  
On my countenance and, slowly, like a priest devout and holy,  
Chanted in a mournful monotone the following reply:

'O my brother, do not fear it; I'm no disembodied spirit  
I am Lampton, the Slang Poet, with a price upon my head.  
I am watching by this portal for some late lamented mortal  
To arise in his disquietude and leave his earthy bed.

'Then I hope to take possession and pull in the earth above me  
And, renouncing my profession, ne'er be heard of any more.  
For there's not a soul to love me and no living thing respects me,  
Which so painfully affects me that I fain would 'go before.'

Then I felt a deep compassion for the gentleman's dejection,  
For privation of affection would refrigerate a frog.  
So I said: 'If nothing human, and if neither man nor woman  
Can appreciate the fashion of your merit-buy a dog.'

Ambrose Bierce

## A Political Apostate

Good friend, it is with deep regret I note  
The latest, strangest turning of your coat;  
Though any way you wear that mental clout  
The seamy side seems always to be out.  
Who could have thought that you would e'er sustain  
The Southern shotgun's arbitrary reign!  
Your sturdy hand assisting to replace  
The broken yoke on a delivered race;  
The ballot's purity no more your care,  
With equal privilege to dark and fair.  
To Yesterday a traitor, to To-day  
You're constant but the better to betray  
To-morrow. Your convictions all are naught  
But the wild asses of the world of thought,  
Which, flying mindless o'er the barren plain,  
Perceive at last they've nothing so to gain,  
And, turning penitent upon their track,  
Economize their strength by flying back.

Ex-champion of Freedom, battle-lunged,  
No more, red-handed, or at least red-tongued,  
Brandish the javelin which by others thrown  
Clove Sambo's heart to quiver in your own!  
Confess no more that when his blood was shed,  
And you so sympathetically bled,  
The bow that spanned the mutual cascade  
Was but the promise of a roaring trade  
In offices. Your fingering now the trigger  
Shows that you \_knew\_ your Negro was a nigger!  
\_Ad hominem\_ this \_argumentum\_ runs:  
Peace!-let us fire another kind of guns.

I grant you, friend, that it is very true  
The Blacks are ignorant-and sable, too.  
What then? One way of two a fool must vote,  
And either way with gentlemen of note  
Whose villain feuds the fact attest too well  
That pedagogues nor vice nor error quell.  
The fiercest controversies ever rage

When Miltons and Salmasii engage.  
No project wide attention ever drew  
But it disparted all the learned crew.  
As through their group the cleaving line's prolonged  
With fiery combatants each field is thronged.  
In battle-royal they engage at once  
For guidance of the hesitating dunce.  
The Titans on the heights contend full soon  
On this side Webster and on that Calhoun,  
The monstrous conflagration of their fight  
Startling the day and splendoring the night!  
Both are unconquerable- one is right.  
Will't keep the pigmy, if we make him strong,  
From siding with a giant in the wrong?  
When Genius strikes for error, who's afraid  
To arm poor Folly with a wooden blade?  
O Rabelais, you knew it all!-your good  
And honest judge (by men misunderstood)  
Knew to be right there was but one device  
Less fallible than ignorance-the dice.  
The time must come-Heaven expedite the day!  
When all mankind shall their decrees obey,  
And nations prosper in their peaceful sway.

Ambrose Bierce



# A Political Violet

Come, Stanford, let us sit at ease  
And talk as old friends do.  
You talk of anything you please,  
And I will talk of you.

You recently have said, I hear,  
That you would like to go  
To serve as Senator. That's queer!  
Have you told William Stow?

Once when the Legislature said:  
'Go, Stanford, and be great!'  
You lifted up your Jovian head  
And everlooked the State.

As one made leisurely awake,  
You lightly rubbed your eyes  
And answered: 'Thank you-please to make  
A note of my surprise.

'But who are they who skulk aside,  
As to get out of reach,  
And in their clothing strive to hide  
Three thousand dollars each?

'Not members of your body, sure?  
No, that can hardly be:  
All statesmen, I suppose, are pure.  
What! there are rogues? Dear me!'

You added, you'll recall, that though  
You were surprised and pained,  
You thought, upon the whole, you'd go,  
And in that mind remained.

Now, what so great a change has wrought  
That you so frankly speak  
Of 'seeking' honors once unsought  
Because you 'scorned to seek'?

Do you not fear the grave reproof  
In good Creed Haymond's eye?  
Will Stephen Gage not stand aloof  
And pass you coldly by?

O, fear you not that Vrooman's lich  
Will rise from earth and point  
At you a scornful finger which  
May lack, perchance, a joint?

Go, Stanford, where the violets grow,  
And join their modest train.  
Await the work of William Stow  
And be surprised again.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Possibility

If the wicked gods were willing  
(Pray it never may be true!)  
That a universal chilling  
Should ensue  
Of the sentiment of loving,  
If they made a great undoing  
Of the plan of turtle-doving,  
Then farewell all poet-lore,  
Evermore.  
If there were no more of billing  
There would be no more of cooing  
And we all should be but owls  
Lonely fowls  
Blinking wonderfully wise,  
With our great round eyes  
Sitting singly in the gloaming and no longer two and two,  
As unwilling to be wedded as unpracticed how to woo;  
With regard to being mated,  
Asking still with aggravated  
Ungrammatical acerbity: 'To who? To who?'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Prayer [sweet Spirit Of Cesspool, Hear A Mother's Prayer]

Sweet Spirit of Cesspool, hear a mother's prayer:  
Her terrors pacify and offspring spare!  
Upon Silurians alone let fall  
(And God in Heaven have mercy on them all!)  
The red revenges of your fragrant breath,  
Hot with the flames invisible of death.  
Sing in each nose a melody of smells,  
And lead them snoutwise to their several hells!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Promised Fast Train

I turned my eyes upon the Future's scroll  
And saw its pictured prophecies unroll.

I saw that magical life-laden train  
Flash its long glories o'er Nebraska's plain.

I saw it smoothly up the mountain glide.  
'O happy, happy passengers!' I cried.

For Pleasure, singing, drowned the engine's roar,  
And Hope on joyous pinions flew before.

Then dived the train adown the sunset slope-  
Pleasure was silent and unseen was Hope.

Crashes and shrieks attested the decay  
That greed had wrought upon that iron way.

The rusted rails broke down the rotting ties,  
And clouds of flying spikes obscured the skies.

My coward eyes I drew away, distressed,  
And fixed them on the terminus to-West,

Where soon, its melancholy tale to tell,  
One bloody car-wheel wobbled in and fell!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Question Of Eligibility

It was a bruised and battered chap  
The victim of some dire mishap,  
Who sat upon a rock and spent  
His breath in this ungay lament:

'Some wars-I've frequent heard of such  
Has beat the everlastin' Dutch!  
But never fight was fit by man  
To equal this which has began  
In our (I'm in it, if you please)  
Academy of Sciences.  
For there is various gents belong  
To it which go persistent wrong,  
And loving the debates' delight  
Calls one another names at sight.  
Their disposition, too, accords  
With fighting like they all was lords!  
Sech impulses should be withstood:  
'Tis scientific to be good.

"Twas one of them, one night last week,  
Rose up his figure for to speak:  
'Please, Mr. Chair, I'm holding here  
A resolution which, I fear,  
Some ancient fossils that has bust  
Their cases and shook off their dust  
To sit as Members here will find  
Unpleasant, not to say unkind.'  
And then he read it every word,  
And silence fell on all which heard.  
That resolution, wild and strange,  
Proposed a fundamental change,  
Which was that idiots no more  
Could join us as they had before!

'No sooner was he seated than  
The members rose up, to a man.  
Each chap was primed with a reply  
And tried to snatch the Chairman's eye.

They stomped and shook their fists in air,  
And, O, what words was uttered there!

'The Chair was silent, but at last  
He hove up his proportions vast  
And stilled them tumults with a look  
By which the undauntedest was shook.  
He smiled sarcastical and said:  
'If Argus was the Chair, instead  
Of me, he'd lack enough of eyes  
Each orator to recognize!  
And since, denied a hearing, you  
Might maybe undertake to do  
Each other harm before you cease,  
I've took some steps to keep the peace:  
I've ordered out-alas, alas,  
That Science e'er to such a pass  
Should come!-I've ordered out-the gas!'

'O if a tongue or pen of fire  
Was mine I could not tell entire  
What the ensuin' actions was.  
When swollered up in darkness' jaws  
We fit and fit and fit and fit,  
And everything we felt we hit!  
We gouged, we scratched and we pulled hair,  
And O, what words was uttered there!  
And when at last the day dawn came  
Three hundred Scientists was lame;  
Two hundred others couldn't stand,  
They'd been so careless handled, and  
One thousand at the very least  
Was spread upon the floor deceased!  
'Twere easy to exaggerate,  
But lies is things I mortal hate.

'Such, friends, is the disaster sad  
Which has befel the Cal. Acad.  
And now the question is of more  
Importance than it was before:  
Shall vacancies among us be  
To idiots threw open free?'

Ambrose Bierce



# A Railroad Lackey

Ben Truman, you're a genius and can write,  
Though one would not suspect it from your looks.  
You lack that certain spareness which is quite  
Distinctive of the persons who make books.  
You show the workmanship of Stanford's cooks  
About the region of the appetite,  
Where geniuses are singularly slight.  
Your friends the Chinamen are understood,  
Indeed, to speak of you as 'belly good.'

Still, you can write-spell, too, I understand  
Though how two such accomplishments can go,  
Like sentimental schoolgirls, hand in hand  
Is more than ever I can hope to know.  
To have one talent good enough to show  
Has always been sufficient to command  
The veneration of the brilliant band  
Of railroad scholars, who themselves, indeed,  
Although they cannot write, can mostly read.

There's Towne and Fillmore, Goodman and Steve Gage,  
Ned Curtis of Napoleonic face,  
Who used to dash his name on glory's page  
'A.M.' appended to denote his place  
Among the learned. Now the last faint trace  
Of Nap. is all obliterate with age,  
And Ned's degree less precious than his wage.  
He says: 'I done it,' with his every breath.  
'Thou canst not say I did it,' says Macbeth.

Good land! how I run on! I quite forgot  
Whom this was meant to be about; for when  
I think upon that odd, unearthly lot  
Not quite Creedhaymonds, yet not wholly men  
I'm dominated by my rebel pen  
That, like the stubborn bird from which 'twas got,  
Goes waddling forward if I will or not.  
To leave your comrades, Ben, I'm now content:  
I'll meet them later if I don't repent.

You've writ a letter, I observe-nay, more,  
You've published it-to say how good you think  
The coolies, and invite them to come o'er  
In thicker quantity. Perhaps you drink  
No corporation's wine, but love its ink;  
Or when you signed away your soul and swore  
On railroge battle-fields to shed your gore  
You mentally reserved the right to shed  
The raiment of your character instead.

You're naked, anyhow: unragged you stand  
In frank and stark simplicity of shame.  
And here upon your flank, in letters grand,  
The iron has marked you with your owner's name.  
Needless, for none would steal and none reclaim.  
But 'Leland \$tanford' is a pretty brand,  
Wrought by an artist with a cunning hand  
But come-this naked unreserve is flat:  
Don your habiliment-you're fat, you're fat!

Ambrose Bierce

## A Rear Elevation

Once Moses (in Scripture the story is told)  
Entreated the favor God's face to behold.  
Compassion divine the petition denied  
Lest vision be blasted and body be fried.  
Yet this much, the Record informs us, took place:  
Jehovah, concealing His terrible face,  
Protruded His rear from behind a great rock,  
And edification ensued without shock.  
So godlike Salvini, lest worshipers die,  
Averting the blaze of his withering eye,  
Tempers his terrors and shows to the pack  
Of feeble adorers the broad of his back.  
The fires of their altars, which, paled and declined  
Before him, burn all the more brightly behind.  
O happy adorers, to care not at all  
Where fawning may tickle or lip-service fall!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Rendezvous

Nightly I put up this humble petition:  
'Forgive me, O Father of Glories,  
My sins of commission, my sins of omission,  
My sins of the Mission Dolores.'

Ambrose Bierce

## A Reply To A Letter

O nonsense, parson-tell me not they thrive  
And jubilate who follow your dictation.  
The good are the unhappiest lot alive  
I know they are from careful observation.  
If freedom from the terrors of damnation  
Lengthens the visage like a telescope,  
And lacrymation is a sign of hope,  
Then I'll continue, in my dreadful plight,  
To tread the dusky paths of sin, and grope  
Contentedly without your lantern's light;  
And though in many a bog beslubbered quite,  
Refuse to flay me with ecclesiastic soap.

You say 'tis a sad world, seeing I'm condemned,  
With many a million others of my kidney.  
Each continent's Hammed, Japheted and Shemmed  
With sinners-worldlings like Sir Philip Sidney  
And scoffers like Voltaire, who thought it bliss  
To simulate respect for Genesis  
Who bent the mental knee as if in prayer,  
But mocked at Moses underneath his hair,  
And like an angry gander bowed his head to hiss.

Seeing such as these, who die without contrition,  
Must go to-beg your pardon, sir-perdition,  
The sons of light, you tell me, can't be gay,  
But count it sin of the sort called omission  
The groan to smother or the tear to stay  
Or fail to-what is that they live by?-pray.  
So down they flop, and the whole serious race is  
Put by divine compassion on a praying basis.

Well, if you take it so to heart, while yet  
Our own hearts are so light with nature's leaven,  
You'll weep indeed when we in Hades sweat,  
And you look down upon us out of Heaven.  
In fancy, lo! I see your wailing shades  
Thronging the crystal battlements. Cascades  
Of tears spring singing from each golden spout,

Run roaring from the verge with hoarser sound,  
Dash downward through the glimmering profound,  
Quench the tormenting flame and put the Devil out!

Presumptuous ass! to you no power belongs  
To pitchfork me to Heaven upon the prongs  
Of a bad pen, whose disobedient sputter,  
With less of ink than incoherence fraught  
Befits the folly that it tries to utter.  
Brains, I observe, as well as tongues, can stutter:  
You suffer from impediment of thought.

When next you 'point the way to Heaven,' take care:  
Your fingers all being thumbs, point, Heaven knows where!  
Farewell, poor dunce! your letter though I blame,  
Bears witness how my anger I can tame:  
I've called you everything except your hateful name!

Ambrose Bierce

## A Retort

As vicious women think all men are knaves,  
And shrew-bound gentlemen discourse of slaves;  
As reeling drunkards judge the world unsteady  
And idlers swear employers ne'er get ready  
Thieves that the constable stole all they had,  
The mad that all except themselves are mad;  
So, in another's clear escutcheon shown,  
Barnes rails at stains reflected from his own;  
Prates of 'docility,' nor feels the dark  
Ring round his neck-the Ralston collar mark.  
Back, man, to studies interrupted once,  
Ere yet the rogue had merged into the dunce.  
Back, back to Yale! and, grown with years discreet,  
The course a virgin's lust cut short, complete.  
Go drink again at the Pierian pool,  
And learn-at least to better play the fool.  
No longer scorn the draught, although the font,  
Unlike Pactolus, waters not Belmont.

Ambrose Bierce

# A 'scion Of Nobility'

Come, sisters, weep!-our Baron dear,  
Alas! has run away.  
If always we had kept him here  
He had not gone astray.

Painter and grainer it were vain  
To say he was, before;  
And if he were, yet ne'er again  
He'll darken here a door.

We mourn each matrimonial plan  
Even tradesmen join the cry:  
He was so promising a man  
Whenever he did buy.

He was a fascinating lad,  
Deny it all who may;  
Even moneyed men confess he had  
A very taking way.

So from our tables he is gone  
Our tears descend in showers;  
We loved the very fat upon.  
His kidneys, for 'twas ours.

To women he was all respect  
To duns as cold as ice;  
No lady could his suit reject,  
No tailor get its price.

He raised our hope above the sky;  
Alas! alack! and O!  
That one who worked it up so high  
Should play it down so low!

Ambrose Bierce



# A Serenade

'Sas agapo sas agapo,'  
He sang beneath her lattice.  
"Sas agapo'?' she murmured-'O,  
I wonder, now, what \_that\_ is!

Was she less fair that she did bear  
So light a load of knowledge?  
Are loving looks got out of books,  
Or kisses taught in college?

Of woman's lore give me no more  
Than how to love,-in many  
A tongue men brawl: she speaks them all  
Who says 'I love,' in any.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Silurian Holiday

'Tis Master Fitch, the editor;  
He takes an holiday.  
Now wherefore, venerable sir,  
So resolutely gay?

He lifts his head, he laughs aloud,  
Odzounds! 'tis drear to see!  
'Because the Boodle-Scribbler crowd  
Will soon be far from me.

'Full many a year I've striven well  
To freeze the caitiffs out  
By making this good town a Hell,  
But still they hang about.

'They maken mouths and eke they grin  
At the dollar limit game;  
And they are holpen in that sin  
By many a wicked dame.

'In sylvan bowers hence I'll dwell  
My bruised mind to ease.  
Farewell, ye urban scenes, farewell!  
Hail, unfamiliar trees!'

Forth Master Fitch did bravely hie,  
And all the country folk  
Besought him that he come not nigh  
The deadly poison oak!

He smiled a cheerful smile (the day  
Was straightway overcast)  
The poison oak along his way  
Was blighted as he passed!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Soaring Toad

So, Governor, you would not serve again  
Although we'd all agree to pay you double.  
You find it all is vanity and pain  
One clump of clover in a field of stubble  
One grain of pleasure in a peck of trouble.  
'Tis sad, at your age, having to complain  
Of disillusion; but the fault is whose  
When pigmies stumble, wearing giants' shoes?

I humbly told you many moons ago  
For high preferment you were all unfit.  
A clumsy bear makes but a sorry show  
Climbing a pole. Let him, judicious, sit  
With dignity at bottom of his pit,  
And none his awkwardness will ever know.  
Some beasts look better, and feel better, too,  
Seen from above; and so, I think, would you.

Why, you were mad! Did you suppose because  
Our foolish system suffers foolish men  
To climb to power, make, enforce the laws,  
And, it is whispered, break them now and then,  
We love the fellows and respect them when  
We've stilled the volume of our loud hurrahs?  
When folly blooms we trample it the more  
For having fertilized it heretofore.

Behold yon laborer! His garb is mean,  
His face is grimy, but who thinks to ask  
The measure of his brains? 'Tis only seen  
He's fitted for his honorable task,  
And so delights the mind. But let him bask  
In droll prosperity, absurdly clean  
Is that the man whom we admired before?  
Good Lord, how ignorant, and what a bore!

Better for you that thoughtless men had said  
(Noting your fitness in the humbler sphere):  
'Why don't they make him Governor?' instead

Of, 'Why the devil did they?' But I fear  
My words on your inhospitable ear  
Are wasted like a sermon to the dead.  
Still, they may profit you if studied well:  
You can't be taught to think, but may to spell.

Ambrose Bierce

## A Social Call

Well, well, old Father Christmas, is it you,  
With your thick neck and thin pretense of virtue?  
Less redness in the nose-nay, even some blue  
Would not, I think, particularly hurt you.  
When seen close to, not mounted in your car,  
You look the drunkard and the pig you are.

No matter, sit you down, for I am not  
In a gray study, as you sometimes find me.  
Merry? O, no, nor wish to be, God wot,  
But there's another year of pain behind me.  
That's something to be thankful for: the more  
There are behind, the fewer are before.

I know you, Father Christmas, for a scamp,  
But Heaven endowed me at my soul's creation  
With an affinity to every tramp  
That walks the world and steals its admiration.  
For admiration is like linen left  
Upon the line-got easiest by theft.

Good God! old man, just think of it! I've stood,  
With brains and honesty, some five-and-twenty  
Long years as champion of all that's good,  
And taken on the mazzard thwacks a-plenty.  
Yet now whose praises do the people bawl?  
Those of the fellows whom I live to maul!

Why, this is odd!-the more I try to talk  
Of you the more my tongue grows egotistic  
To prattle of myself! I'll try to balk  
Its waywardness and be more altruistic.  
So let us speak of others-how they sin,  
And what a devil of a state they 're in!

That's all I have to say. Good-bye, old man.  
Next year you possibly may find me scolding  
Or miss me altogether: Nature's plan  
Includes, as I suppose, a final folding

Of these poor empty hands. Then dropp a tear  
To think they'll never box another ear.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Society Leader

'The Social World'! O what a world it is  
Where full-grown men cut capers in the German,  
Cotillion, waltz, or what you will, and whizz  
And spin and hop and sprawl about like mermen!  
I wonder if our future Grant or Sherman,  
As these youths pass their time, is passing his  
If eagles ever come from painted eggs,  
Or deeds of arms succeed to deeds of legs.

I know they tell us about Waterloo:  
How, 'foremost fighting,' fell the evening's  
dancers.  
I don't believe it: I regard it true  
That soldiers who are skillful in 'the Lancers'  
Less often die of cannon than of cancers.  
Moreover, I am half-persuaded, too,  
That David when he danced before the Ark  
Had the reporter's word to keep it dark.

Ed. Greenway, you fatigue. Your hateful name  
Like maiden's curls, is in the papers daily.  
You think it, doubtless, honorable fame,  
And contemplate the cheap distinction gaily,  
As does the monkey the blue-painted tail he  
Believes becoming to him. 'Tis the same  
With men as other monkeys: all their souls  
Crave eminence on any kind of poles.  
But cynics (barking tribe!) are all agreed  
That monkeys upon poles performing capers  
Are not exalted, they are only 'treed.'  
A glory that is kindled by the papers  
Is transient as the phosphorescent vapors  
That shine in graveyards and are seen, indeed,  
But while the bodies that supply the gas  
Are turning into weeds to feed an ass.

One can but wonder sometimes how it feels  
To be an ass—a beast we beat condignly  
Because, like yours, his life is in his heels

And he is prone to use them unbenignly.  
The ladies (bless them!) say you dance divinely.  
I like St. Vitus better, though, who deals  
His feet about him with a grace more just,  
And hops, not for he will, but for he must.

Doubtless it gratifies you to observe  
Elbowy girls and adipose mamas  
All looking adoration as you swerve  
This way and that; but prosperous papas  
Laugh in their sleeves at you, and their ha-has,  
If heard, would somewhat agitate your nerve.  
And dames and maids who keep you on their  
shelves  
Don't seem to want a closer tie themselves.

Gods! what a life you live!-by day a slave  
To your exacting back and urgent belly;  
Intent to earn and vigilant to save  
By night, attired so sightly and so smelly,  
With countenance as luminous as jelly,  
Bobbing and bowing! King of hearts and knave  
Of diamonds, I'd bet a silver brick  
If brains were trumps you'd never take a trick.

Ambrose Bierce



## A Song In Praise

Hail, blessed Blunder! golden idol, hail!  
Clay-footed deity of all who fail.  
Celestial image, let thy glory shine,  
Thy feet concealing, but a lamp to mine.  
Let me, at seasons opportune and fit,  
By turns adore thee and by turns commit.  
In thy high service let me ever be  
(Yet never serve thee as my critics me)  
Happy and fallible, content to feel  
I blunder chiefly when to thee I kneel.  
But best felicity is his thy praise  
Who utters unaware in works and ways  
Who *\_laborare est orare\_* proves,  
And feels thy suasion wheresoe'er he moves,  
Serving thy purpose, not thine altar, still,  
And working, for he thinks it his, thy will.  
If such a life with blessings be not fraught,  
I envy Peter Robertson for naught.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Spade

Precursor of our woes, historic spade,  
What dismal records burn upon thy blade!  
On thee I see the maculating stains  
Of passengers' commingled blood and brains.  
In this red rust a widow's curse appears,  
And here an orphan tarnished thee with tears.  
Upon thy handle sanguinary bands  
Reveal the clutching of thine owner's hands  
When first he wielded thee with vigor brave  
To cut a sod and dig a people's grave  
(For they who are debauched are dead and ought,  
In God's name, to be hid from sight and thought.)  
Within thee, as within a magic glass,  
I seem to see a foul procession pass  
Judges with ermine dragging in the mud  
And spotted here and there with guiltless blood;  
Gold-greedy legislators jingling bribes;  
Kept editors and sycophantic scribes;  
Liars in swarms and plunderers in tribes;  
They fade away before the night's advance,  
And fancy figures thee a devil's lance  
Gleaming portentous through the misty shade,  
While ghosts of murdered virtues shriek about my blade!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Study In Gray

I step from the door with a shiver  
(This fog is uncommonly cold)  
And ask myself: What did I give her?  
The maiden a trifle gone-old,  
With the head of gray hair that was gold.

Ah, well, I suppose 'twas a dollar,  
And doubtless the change is correct,  
Though it's odd that it seems so much smaller  
Than what I'd a right to expect.  
But you pay when you dine, I reflect.

So I walk up the street-'twas a saunter  
A score of years back, when I strolled  
From this door; and our talk was all banter  
Those days when her hair was of gold,  
And the sea-fog less searching and cold.

I button my coat (for I'm shaken,  
And fevered a trifle, and flushed  
With the wine that I ought to have taken,)  
Time was, at this coat I'd have blushed,  
Though truly, 'tis cleverly brushed.

A score? Why, that isn't so very  
Much time to have lost from a life.  
There's reason enough to be merry:  
I've not fallen down in the strife,  
But marched with the drum and the fife.

If Hope, when she lured me and beckoned,  
Had pushed at my shoulders instead,  
And Fame, on whose favors I reckoned,  
Had laureled the worthiest head,  
I could garland the years that are dead.

Believe me, I've held my own, mostly  
Through all of this wild masquerade;  
But somehow the fog is more ghostly

To-night, and the skies are more grayed,  
Like the locks of the restaurant maid.

If ever I'd fainted and faltered  
I'd fancy this did but appear;  
But the climate, I'm certain, has altered  
Grown colder and more austere  
Than it was in that earlier year.

The lights, too, are strangely unsteady,  
That lead from the street to the quay.  
I think they'll go out-and I'm ready  
To follow. Out there in the sea  
The fog-bell is calling to me.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Vision Of Climate

I dreamed that I was poor and sick and sad,  
Broken in hope and weary of my life;  
My ventures all miscarrying-naught had  
For all my labor in the heat and strife.  
And in my heart some certain thoughts were rife  
Of an unsummoned exit. As I lay  
Considering my bitter state, I cried:  
'Alas! that hither I did ever stray.  
Better in some fair country to have died  
Than live in such a land, where Fortune never  
(Unless he be successful) crowns Endeavor.'

Then, even as I lamented, lo! there came  
A troop of Presences-I knew not whence  
Nor what they were: thought cannot rightly name  
What's known through spiritual evidence,  
Reported not by gross material sense.  
'Why come ye here?' I seemed to cry (though naught  
My sleeping tongue did utter) to the first  
'What are ye?-with what woful message fraught?  
Ye have a ghastly look, as ye had burst  
Some sepulcher in memory. Weird creatures,  
I'm sure I'd know you if ye had but features.'

Some subtle organ noted the reply  
(Inaudible to ear of flesh the tone):  
'The Finest Climate in the World am I,  
From Siskiyou to San Diego known  
From the Sierra to the sea. The zone  
Called semi-tropical I've pulled about  
And placed it where it does most good, I trust.  
I shake my never-failing bounty out  
Alike upon the just and the unjust.'  
'That's very true,' said I, 'but when 'tis shaken  
My share by the unjust is ever taken.'

'Permit me,' it resumed, 'now to present  
My eldest son, the Champagne Atmosphere,  
And others to rebuke your discontent

The Mammoth Squash, Strawberry All the Year,  
The fair No Lightning-flashing only here  
The Wholesome Earthquake and Italian Sky,  
With its Unstriking Sun; and last, not least,  
The Compos Mentis Dog. Now, ingrate, try  
To bring a better stomach to the feast:  
When Nature makes a dance and pays the piper,  
To be unhappy is to be a viper!

'Why, yet,' said I, 'with all your blessings fine  
(And Heaven forbid that I should speak them ill)  
I yet am poor and sick and sad. Ye shine  
With more of splendor than of heat: for still,  
Although my will is warm, my bones are chill.'  
'Then warm you with enthusiasm's blaze  
Fortune waits not on toil,' they cried; 'O then  
Join the wild chorus clamoring our praise  
Throw up your beaver and throw down you pen!'  
'Begone!' I shouted. They bewent, a-smirking,  
And I, awakening, fell straight a-working.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Vision Of Doom

I stood upon a hill. The setting sun  
Was crimson with a curse and a portent,  
And scarce his angry ray lit up the land  
That lay below, whose lurid gloom appeared  
Freaked with a moving mist, which, reeking up  
From dim tarns hateful with some horrid ban,  
Took shapes forbidden and without a name.  
Gigantic night-birds, rising from the reeds  
With cries discordant, startled all the air,  
And bodiless voices babbled in the gloom-  
The ghosts of blasphemies long ages stilled,  
And shrieks of women, and men's curses. All  
These visible shapes, and sounds no mortal ear  
Had ever heard, some spiritual sense  
Interpreted, though brokenly; for I  
Was haunted by a consciousness of crime,  
Some giant guilt, but whose I knew not. All  
These things malign, by sight and sound revealed,  
Were sin-begotten; that I knew-no more  
And that but dimly, as in dreadful dreams  
The sleepy senses babble to the brain  
Imperfect witness. As I stood a voice,  
But whence it came I knew not, cried aloud  
Some words to me in a forgotten tongue,  
Yet straight I knew me for a ghost forlorn,  
Returned from the illimited inane.  
Again, but in a language that I knew,  
As in reply to something which in me  
Had shaped itself a thought, but found no words,  
It spake from the dread mystery about:  
'Immortal shadow of a mortal soul  
That perished with eternity, attend.  
What thou beholdest is as void as thou:  
The shadow of a poet's dream-himself  
As thou, his soul as thine, long dead,  
But not like thine outlasted by its shade.  
His dreams alone survive eternity  
As pictures in the unsubstantial void.  
Excepting thee and me (and we because

The poet wove us in his thought) remains  
Of nature and the universe no part  
Or vestige but the poet's dreams. This dread,  
Unspeakable land about thy feet, with all  
Its desolation and its terrors-lo!  
'T is but a phantom world. So long ago  
That God and all the angels since have died  
That poet lived-yourself long dead-his mind  
Filled with the light of a prophetic fire,  
And standing by the Western sea, above  
The youngest, fairest city in the world,  
Named in another tongue than his for one  
Ensainted, saw its populous domain  
Plague-smitten with a nameless shame. For there  
Red-handed murder rioted; and there  
The people gathered gold, nor cared to loose  
The assassin's fingers from the victim's throat,  
But said, each in his vile pursuit engrossed:  
'Am I my brother's keeper? Let the Law  
Look to the matter.' But the Law did not.  
And there, O pitiful! the babe was slain  
Within its mother's breast and the same grave  
Held babe and mother; and the people smiled,  
Still gathering gold, and said: 'The Law, the Law,'  
Then the great poet, touched upon the lips  
With a live coal from Truth's high altar, raised  
His arms to heaven and sang a song of doom  
Sang of the time to be, when God should lean  
Indignant from the Throne and lift his hand,  
And that foul city be no more!-a tale,  
A dream, a desolation and a curse!  
No vestige of its glory should survive  
In fact or memory: its people dead,  
Its site forgotten, and its very name  
Disputed.'

'Was the prophecy fulfilled?'  
The sullen disc of the declining sun  
Was crimson with a curse and a portent,  
And scarce his angry ray lit up the land  
That lay below, whose lurid gloom appeared  
Freaked with a moving mist, which, reeking up



From dim tarns hateful with a horrid ban,  
Took shapes forbidden and without a name.  
Gigantic night-birds, rising from the reeds  
With cries discordant, startled all the air,  
And bodiless voices babbled in the gloom.  
But not to me came any voice again;  
And, covering my face with thin, dead hands,  
I wept, and woke, and cried aloud to God!

Ambrose Bierce

# A Vision Of Resurrection

I had a dream. The habitable earth  
Its continents and islands, all were bare  
Of cities and of forests. Naught remained  
Of its old aspect, and I only knew  
(As men know things in dreams, unknowing how)  
That this was earth and that all men were dead.  
On every side I saw the barren land,  
Even to the distant sky's inclosing blue,  
Thick-pitted all with graves; and all the graves  
Save one were open-not as newly dug,  
But rather as by some internal force  
Riven for egress. Tombs of stone were split  
And wide agape, and in their iron decay  
The massive mausoleums stood in halves.  
With mildewed linen all the ground was white.  
Discarded shrouds upon memorial stones  
Hung without motion in the soulless air.  
While greatly marveling how this should be  
I heard, or fancied that I heard, a voice,  
Low like an angel's, delicately strong,  
And sweet as music.

- 'Spirit,' it said, 'behold  
The burial place of universal Man!  
A million years have rolled away since here  
His sheeted multitudes (save only some  
Whose dark misdeeds required a separate  
And individual arraignment) rose  
To judgment at the trumpet's summoning  
And passed into the sky for their award,  
Leaving behind these perishable things  
Which yet, preserved by miracle, endure  
Till all are up. Then they and all of earth,  
Rock-hearted mountain and storm-breasted sea,  
River and wilderness and sites of dead  
And vanished capitals of men, shall spring  
To flame, and naught shall be for evermore!  
When all are risen that wonder will occur.  
'Twas but ten centuries ago the last

But one came forth-a soul so black with sin,  
Against whose name so many crimes were set  
That only now his trial is at end.  
But one remains.'

Straight, as the voice was stilled  
That single rounded mound cracked lengthwise  
And one came forth in grave-clothes. For a space  
He stood and gazed about him with a smile  
Superior; then laying off his shroud  
Disclosed his two attenuated legs  
Which, like parentheses, bent outwardly  
As by the weight of saintliness above,  
And so sprang upward and was lost to view  
Noting his headstone overthrown, I read:  
'Sacred to memory of George K. Fitch,  
Deacon and Editor-a holy man  
Who fell asleep in Jesus, full of years  
And blessedness. The dead in Christ rise first.'

Ambrose Bierce

# A Voluptuary

Who's this that lispeth in the thickening throng  
Which crowds to claim distinction in my song?  
Fresh from 'the palms and temples of the South,'  
The mixed aromas quarrel in his mouth:  
Of orange blossoms this the lingering gale,  
And that the odor of a spicy tale.  
Sir, in thy pleasure-dome down by the sea  
(No finer one did Kubla Khan decree)  
Where, Master of the Revels, thou dost stand  
With joys and mysteries on either hand,  
Dost keep a poet to report the rites  
And sing the tale of those Elysian nights?  
Faith, sir, I'd like the place if not too young.  
I'm no great bard, but-I can hold my tongue.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Warning

Cried Age to Youth: 'Abate your speed!  
The distance hither's brief indeed.'  
But Youth pressed on without delay  
The shout had reached but half the way

Ambrose Bierce

# A Welcome

Because you call yourself Knights Templar, and  
There's neither Knight nor Temple in the land,  
Because you thus by vain pretense degrade  
To paltry purposes traditions grand,

Because to cheat the ignorant you say  
The thing that's not, elated still to sway  
The crass credulity of gaping fools  
And women by fantastical display,

Because no sacred fires did ever warm  
Your hearts, high knightly service to perform  
A woman's breast or coffer of a man  
The only citadel you dare to storm,

Because while railing still at lord and peer,  
At pomp and fuss-and-feathers while you jeer,  
Each member of your order tries to graft  
A peacock's tail upon his barren rear,

Because that all these things are thus and so,  
I bid you welcome to our city. Lo!  
You're free to come, and free to stay, and free  
As soon as it shall please you, sirs-to go.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Wet Season

The rain is fierce, it flogs the earth,  
And man's in danger.  
O that my mother at my birth  
Had borne a stranger!  
The flooded ground is all around.  
The depth uncommon.  
How blest I'd be if only she  
Had borne a salmon.

If still denied the solar glow  
'T were bliss ecstatic  
To be amphibious-but O,  
To be aquatic!  
We're worms, men say, o' the dust, and they  
That faith are firm of.  
O, then, be just: show me some dust  
To be a worm of.

The pines are chanting overhead  
A psalm uncheering.  
It's O, to have been for ages dead  
And hard of hearing!  
Restore, ye Pow'rs, the last bright hours  
The dial reckoned;  
'Twas in the time of Egypt's prime  
Rameses II.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Whipper-In

Dudley, great placeman, man of mark and note,  
Worthy of honor from a feeble pen  
Blunted in service of all true, good men,  
You serve the Lord-in courses, \_table d'hote:  
Au, naturel, \_ as well as \_a la Nick  
'Eat and be thankful, though it make you sick.'

O, truly pious caterer, forbear  
To push the Saviour and Him crucified  
\_(Brochette\_ you'd call it) into their inside  
Who're all unused to such ambrosial fare.  
The stomach of the soul makes quick revulsion  
Of aught that it has taken on compulsion.

I search the Scriptures, but I do not find  
That e'er the Spirit beats with angry wings  
For entrance to the heart, but sits and sings  
To charm away the scruples of the mind.  
It says: 'Receive me, please; I'll not compel'  
Though if you don't you will go straight to Hell!

Well, that's compulsion, you will say. 'T is true:  
We cower timidly beneath the rod  
Lifted in menace by an angry God,  
But won't endure it from an ape like you.  
Detested simian with thumb prehensile,  
Switch \_me\_ and I would brain you with my pencil!

Face you the Throne, nor dare to turn your back  
On its transplendency to flog some wight  
Who gropes and stumbles in the infernal night  
Your ugly shadow lays along his track.  
O, Thou who from the Temple scourged the sin,  
Behold what rascals try to scourge it in!

Ambrose Bierce



# A Word To The Unwise

Charles Main, of Main & Winchester, attend  
With friendly ear the chit-chat of a friend  
Who knows you not, yet knows that you and he  
Travel two roads that have a common end.

We journey forward through the time allowed,  
I humbly bending, you erect and proud.  
Our heads alike will stable soon the worm  
The one that's lifted, and the one that's bowed.

You in your mausoleum shall repose,  
I where it pleases Him who sleep bestows;  
What matter whether one so little worth  
Shall stain the marble or shall feed the rose?

Charles Main, I had a friend who died one day.  
A metal casket held his honored clay.  
Of cyclopean architecture stood  
The splendid vault where he was laid away.

A dozen years, and lo! the roots of grass  
Had burst asunder all the joints; the brass,  
The gilded ornaments, the carven stones  
Lay tumbled all together in a mass.

A dozen years! That taxes your belief.  
Make it a thousand if the time's too brief.  
'Twill be the same to you; when you are dead  
You cannot even count your days of grief.

Suppose a pompous monument you raise  
Till on its peak the solar splendor blaze  
While yet about its base the night is black;  
But will it give your glory length of days?

Say, when beneath your rubbish has been thrown,  
Some rogue to reputation all unknown  
Men's backs being turned-should lift his thieving hand,  
Efface your name and substitute his own.

Whose then would be the monument? To whom  
Would be the fame? Forgotten in your gloom,  
Your very name forgotten-ah, my friend,  
The name is all that's rescued by the tomb.

For memory of worth and work we go  
To other records than a stone can show.  
These lacking, naught remains; with these  
The stone is needless for the world will know.

Then build your mausoleum if you must,  
And creep into it with a perfect trust;  
But in the twinkling of an eye the plow  
Shall pass without obstruction through your dust.

Another movement of the pendulum,  
And, lo! the desert-haunting wolf shall come,  
And, seated on the spot, shall howl by night  
O'er rotting cities, desolate and dumb.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Wreath Of Immortelles

LORING PICKERING

\_(After Pope)\_

Here rests a writer, great but not immense,  
Born destitute of feeling and of sense.  
No power he but o'er his brain desired  
How not to suffer it to be inspired.  
Ideas unto him were all unknown,  
Proud of the words which, only, were his own.  
So unreflecting, so confused his mind,  
Torpid in error, indolently blind,  
A fever Heaven, to quicken him, applied,  
But, rather than revive, the sluggard died.

\* \* \* \* \*

A WATER-PIRATE

Pause, stranger-whence you lightly tread  
Bill Carr's immoral part has fled.  
For him no heart of woman burned,  
But all the rivers' heads he turned.  
Alas! he now lifts up his eyes  
In torment and for water cries,  
Entreating that he may procure  
One dropp to cool his parched McClure!

\* \* \* \* \*

C.P. BERRY

Here's crowbait!-ravens, too, and daws  
Flock hither to advance their caws,  
And, with a sudden courage armed,  
Devour the foe who once alarmed-

In life and death a fair deceit:  
Nor strong to harm nor good to eat.  
King bogey of the scarecrow host,  
When known the least affrighting most,  
Though light his hand (his mind was dark)  
He left on earth a straw Berry mark.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE REV. JOSEPH

He preached that sickness he could floor  
By prayer and by commanding;  
When sick himself he sent for four  
Physicians in good standing.  
He was struck dead despite their care,  
For, fearing their dissension,  
He secretly put up a prayer,  
Thus drawing God's attention.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cynic perforce from studying mankind  
In the false volume of his single mind,  
He damned his fellows for his own unworth,  
And, bad himself, thought nothing good on earth.  
Yet, still so judging and so erring still,  
Observing well, but understanding ill,  
His learning all was got by dint of sight,  
And what he learned by day he lost by night.  
When hired to flatter he would never cease  
Till those who'd paid for praises paid for peace.  
Not wholly miser and but half a knave,  
He yearned to squander but he lived to save,  
And did not, for he could not, cheat the grave.  
\_Hic jacet\_ Pixley, scribe and muleteer:  
Step lightly, stranger, anywhere but here.

\* \* \* \* \*

McAllister, of talents rich and rare,

Lies at this spot at finish of his race.  
Alike to him if it is here or there:  
The one spot that he cared for was the ace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here lies Joseph Redding, who gave us the catfish.  
He dined upon every fish except that fish.  
'Twas touching to hear him expounding his fad  
With a heart full of zeal and a mouth full of shad.  
The catfish miaowed with unspeakable woe  
When Death, the lone fisherman, landed their Jo.

\* \* \* \* \*

Judge Sawyer, whom in vain the people tried  
To push from power, here is laid aside.  
Death only from the bench could ever start  
The sluggish load of his immortal part.

\* \* \* \* \*

John Irish went, one luckless day,  
To loaf and fish at San Jose.  
He got no loaf, he got no fish:  
They brained him with an empty dish!  
They laid him in this place asleep-  
O come, ye crocodiles, and weep.

\* \* \* \* \*

In Sacramento City here  
This wooden monument we rear  
In memory of Dr. May,  
Whose smile even Death could not allay.  
He's buried, Heaven alone knows where,  
And only the hyenas care;  
This May-pole merely marks the spot  
Where, ere the wretch began to rot,  
Fame's trumpet, with its brazen bray,  
Bawled; 'Who (and why) was Dr. May?'

\* \* \* \* \*

Dennis Spencer's mortal coil  
Here is laid away to spoil-  
Great riparian, who said  
Not a stream should leave its bed.  
Now his soul would like a river  
Turned upon its parching liver.

\* \* \* \* \*

For those this mausoleum is erected  
Who Stanford to the Upper House elected.  
Their luck is less or their promotion slower,  
For, dead, they were elected to the Lower.

\* \* \* \* \*

Beneath this stone lies Reuben Lloyd,  
Of breath deprived, of sense devoid.  
The Templars' Captain-General, he  
So formidable seemed to be,  
That had he not been on his back  
Death ne'er had ventured to attack.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here lies Barnes in all his glory-  
Master he of oratOry.  
When he died the people weeping,  
(For they thought him only sleeping)  
Cried: 'Although he now is quiet  
And his tongue is not a riot,  
Soon, the spell that binds him breaking,  
He a motion will be making.  
Then, alas, he'll rise and speak  
In support of it a week.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Rash mortal! stay thy feet and look around  
This vacant tomb as yet is holy ground;

But soon, alas! Jim Fair will occupy  
These premises-then, holiness, good-bye!

\* \* \* \* \*

Here Salomon's body reposes;  
Bring roses, ye rebels, bring roses.  
Set all of your drumsticks a-rolling,  
Discretion and Valor extolling:  
Discretion-he always retreated  
And Valor-the dead he defeated.  
Brings roses, ye loyal, bring roses:  
As patriot here he re-poses.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Waterman ended his bright career  
He left his wet name to history here.  
To carry it with him he did not care:  
'Twould tantalize spirits of statesmen There.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here lie the remains of Fred Emerson Brooks,  
A poet, as every one knew by his looks  
Who hadn't unluckily met with his books.

On civic occasions he sprang to the fore  
With poems consisting of stanzas three score.  
The men whom they deafened enjoyed them the more.

Of reason his fantasy knew not the check:  
All forms of inharmony came at his beck.  
The weight of his ignorance fractured his neck.

In this peaceful spot, so the grave-diggers say,  
With pen, ink and paper they laid him away-  
The Poet-elect of the Judgment Day.

\* \* \* \* \*

George Perry here lies stiff and stark,

With stone at foot and stone at head.  
His heart was dark, his mind was dark  
'Ignorant ass!' the people said.

Not ignorant but skilled, alas,  
In all the secrets of his trade:  
He knew more ways to be an ass  
Than any ass that ever brayed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here lies the last of Deacon Fitch,  
Whose business was to melt the pitch.  
Convenient to this sacred spot  
Lies Sammy, who applied it, hot.  
'Tis hard-so much alike they smell

One's grave from t'other's grave to tell,  
But when his tomb the Deacon's burst  
(Of two he'll always be the first)  
He'll see by studying the stones  
That he's obtained his proper bones,  
Then, seeking Sammy's vault, unlock it,  
And put that person in his pocket.

\* \* \* \* \*

Beneath this stone O'Donnell's tongue's at rest  
Our noses by his spirit still addressed.  
Living or dead, he's equally Satanic  
His noise a terror and his smell a panic.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Gabriel blows a dreadful blast  
And swears that Time's forever past,  
Days, weeks, months, years all one at last,  
Then Asa Fiske, laid here, distressed,  
Will beat (and skin his hand) his breast:  
There'll be no rate of interest!

\* \* \* \* \*



Step lightly, stranger: here Jerome B. Cox  
Is for the second time in a bad box.  
He killed a man-the labor party rose  
And showed him by its love how killing goes.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Vrooman here lay down to sleep,  
The other dead awoke to weep.  
'Since he no longer lives,' they said  
'Small honor comes of being dead.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Here Porter Ashe is laid to rest  
Green grows the grass upon his breast.  
This patron of the turf, I vow,  
Ne'er served it half so well as now.

\* \* \* \* \*

Like a cold fish escaping from its tank,  
Hence fled the soul of Joe Russel, crank.  
He cried: 'Cold water!' roaring like a beast.  
'Twas thrown upon him and the music ceased.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here Estee rests. He shook a basket,  
When, like a jewel from its casket,  
Fell Felton out. Said Estee, shouting  
With mirth; 'I've given you an outing.'  
Then told him to go back. He wouldn't.  
Then tried to \_put\_ him back. He couldn't.  
So Estee died (his blood congealing  
In Felton's growing shadow) squealing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mourn here for one Bruner, called Elwood.  
He doesn't-he never did-smell good

To noses of critics and scholars.  
If now he'd an office to sell could  
He sell it? O, no-where (in Hell) could  
He find a cool four hundred dollars?

\* \* \* \* \*

Here Stanford lies, who thought it odd  
That he should go to meet his God.  
He looked, until his eyes grew dim,  
For God to hasten to meet him.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Wreath Of Immortelles

Judge Sawyer, whom in vain the people tried  
To push from power, here is laid aside.  
Death only from the bench could ever start  
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In all the secrets of his trade:  
He knew more ways to be an ass  
Than any ass that ever brayed.

Ambrose Bierce

# A Year's Casualties

Slain as they lay by the secret, slow,  
Pitiless hand of an unseen foe,  
Two score thousand old soldiers have crossed  
The river to join the loved and lost.  
In the space of a year their spirits fled,  
Silent and white, to the camp of the dead.

One after one, they fall asleep  
And the pension agents awake to weep,  
And orphaned statesmen are loud in their wail  
As the souls flit by on the evening gale.  
O Father of Battles, pray give us release  
From the horrors of peace, the horrors of peace!

Ambrose Bierce

# Accepted

Charles Shortridge once to St. Peter came.  
'Down!' cried the saint with his face aflame;  
'Tis writ that every hardy liar  
Shall dwell forever and ever in fire!  
'That's what I said the night that I died,'  
The sinner, turning away, replied.  
'What! \_you\_ said that?' cried the saint-'what! what!  
\_You\_ said 'twas so writ? Then, faith, 'tis \_not!\_  
I'm a devil at quoting, but I begin  
To fail in my memory. Pray walk in.'

Ambrose Bierce

## Ad Cattonum

I know not, Mr. Catton, who you are,  
Nor very clearly why; but you go far  
To show that you are many things beside  
A Chilean Consul with a tempting hide;  
But what they are I hardly could explain  
Without afflicting you with mental pain.  
Your name (gods! what a name the muse to woo  
Suggesting cats, and hinting kittens, too!)  
Points to an origin-perhaps Maltese,  
Perhaps Angoran-where the wicked cease  
From fiddling, and the animals that grow  
The strings that groan to the tormenting bow  
Live undespoiled of their insides, resigned  
To give their name and nature to mankind.  
With Chilean birth your name but poorly tallies;  
The test is-Did you ever sell tamales?

It matters very little, though, my boy,  
If you're from Chile or from Illinois;  
You can't, because you serve a foreign land,  
Spit with impunity on ours, expand,  
Cock-turkeywise, and strut with blind conceit,  
All heedless of the hearts beneath your feet,  
Fling falsehoods as a sower scatters grain  
And, for security, invoke disdain.  
Sir, there are laws that men of sense observe,  
No matter whence they come nor whom they serve  
The laws of courtesy; and these forbid  
You to malign, as recently you did,  
As servant of another State, a State  
Wherein your duties all are concentrate;  
Branding its Ministers as rogues-in short,  
Inviting cuffs as suitable retort.

Chileno or American, 'tis one  
Of any land a citizen, or none  
If like a new Thersites here you rail,  
Loading with libels every western gale,  
You'll feel the cudgel on your scurvy hump

Impinging with a salutary thump.  
'Twill make you civil or 'twill make you jump!

Ambrose Bierce

## Ad Moodium

Tut! Moody, do not try to show  
To gentlemen and ladies  
That if they have not 'Faith,' they'll go  
Headlong to Hades.

Faith is belief; and how can I  
Have that by being willing?  
This dime I cannot, though I try,  
Believe a shilling.

Perhaps you can. If so, pray do-  
Believe you own it, also.  
But what seems evidence to you  
I may not call so.

Heaven knows I'd like the Faith to think  
This little vessel's contents  
Are liquid gold. I see 'tis ink  
For writing nonsense.

Minds prone to Faith, however, may  
Come now and then to sorrow:  
They put their trust in truth to-day,  
In lies to-morrow.

No doubt the happiness is great  
To think as one would wish to;  
But not to swallow every bait,  
As certain fish do.

To think a snake a cord, I hope,  
Would bolden and delight me;  
But some day I might think a rope  
Would chase and bite me.

'Curst Reason! Faith forever blest!'  
You're crying all the season.  
Well, who decides that Faith is best?  
Why, Mr. Reason.



He's right or wrong; he answers you  
According to your folly,  
And says what you have taught him to,  
Like any polly.

Ambrose Bierce

## Adair Welcker, Poet

The Swan of Avon died-the Swan  
Of Sacramento'll soon be gone;  
And when his death-song he shall coo,  
Stand back, or it will kill you too.

Ambrose Bierce

# Again

Well, I've met her again-at the Mission.  
She'd told me to see her no more;  
It was not a command-a petition;  
I'd granted it once before.

Yes, granted it, hoping she'd write me.  
Repenting her virtuous freak-  
Subdued myself daily and nightly  
For the better part of a week.

And then ('twas my duty to spare her  
The shame of recalling me) I  
Just sought her again to prepare her  
For an everlasting good-bye.

O, that evening of bliss-shall I ever  
Forget it?-with Shakespeare and Poe!  
She said, when 'twas ended: 'You're never  
To see me again. And now go.'

As we parted with kisses 'twas human  
And natural for me to smile  
As I thought, 'She's in love, and a woman:  
She'll send for me after a while.'

But she didn't; and so-well, the Mission  
Is fine, picturesque and gray;  
It's an excellent place for contrition  
And sometimes she passes that way.

That's how it occurred that I met her,  
And that's ah there is to tell-  
Except that I'd like to forget her  
Calm way of remarking: 'I'm well.'

It was hardly worth while, all this keying  
My soul to such tensions and stirs  
To learn that her food was agreeing  
With that little stomach of hers.

Ambrose Bierce

# Alone

In contact, lo! the flint and steel,  
By sharp and flame, the thought reveal  
That he the metal, she the stone,  
Had cherished secretly alone.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Actor

Some one ('tis hardly new) has oddly said  
The color of a trumpet's blare is red;  
And Joseph Emmett thinks the crimson shame  
On woman's cheek a trumpet-note of fame.  
The more the red storm rises round her nose  
The more her eyes averted seek her toes,  
He fancies all the louder he can hear  
The tube resounding in his spacious ear,  
And, all his varied talents to exert,  
Darkens his dullness to display his dirt.  
And when the gallery's indecent crowd,  
And gentlemen below, with hisses loud,  
In hot contention (these his art to crown,  
And those his naked nastiness to drown)  
Make such a din that cheeks erewhile aflame  
Grow white and in their fear forget their shame,  
With impudence imperial, sublime,  
Unmoved, the patient actor bides his time,  
Till storm and counter-storm are both allayed,  
Like donkeys, each by t'other one outbrayed.  
When all the place is silent as a mouse  
One slow, suggestive gesture clears the house!

Ambrose Bierce

# An Alibi

A famous journalist, who long  
Had told the great unheaded throng  
Whate'er they thought, by day or night.  
Was true as Holy Writ, and right,  
Was caught in-well, on second thought,  
It is enough that he was caught,  
And being thrown in jail became  
The fuel of a public flame.

'\_Vox populi vox Dei\_', said  
The jailer. Inxling bent his head  
Without remark: that motto good  
In bold-faced type had always stood  
Above the columns where his pen  
Had rioted in praise of men  
And all they said-provided he  
Was sure they mostly did agree.  
Meanwhile a sharp and bitter strife  
To take, or save, the culprit's life  
Or liberty (which, I suppose,  
Was much the same to him) arose  
Outside. The journal that his pen  
Adorned denounced his crime-but then  
Its editor in secret tried  
To have the indictment set aside.  
The opposition papers swore  
His father was a rogue before,  
And all his wife's relations were  
Like him and similar to her.  
They begged their readers to subscribe  
A dollar each to make a bribe  
That any Judge would feel was large  
Enough to prove the gravest charge  
Unless, it might be, the defense  
Put up superior evidence.  
The law's traditional delay  
Was all too short: the trial day  
Dawned red and menacing. The Judge  
Sat on the Bench and wouldn't budge,

And all the motions counsel made  
Could not move \_him\_-and there he stayed.  
'The case must now proceed,' he said,  
'While I am just in heart and head,  
It happens-as, indeed, it ought-  
Both sides with equal sums have bought  
My favor: I can try the cause  
Impartially.' (Prolonged applause.)

The prisoner was now arraigned  
And said that he was greatly pained  
To be suspected-\_he\_, whose pen  
Had charged so many other men  
With crimes and misdemeanors! 'Why,'  
He said, a tear in either eye,  
'If men who live by crying out  
'Stop thief!' are not themselves from doubt  
Of their integrity exempt,  
Let all forego the vain attempt  
To make a reputation! Sir,  
I'm innocent, and I demur.'  
Whereat a thousand voices cried  
Amain he manifestly lied-  
\_Vox populi\_ as loudly roared  
As bull by \_picadores\_ gored,  
In his own coin receiving pay  
To make a Spanish holiday.

The jury-twelve good men and true  
Were then sworn in to see it through,  
And each made solemn oath that he  
As any babe unborn was free  
From prejudice, opinion, thought,  
Respectability, brains-aught  
That could disqualify; and some  
Explained that they were deaf and dumb.  
A better twelve, his Honor said,  
Was rare, except among the dead.  
The witnesses were called and sworn.  
The tales they told made angels mourn,  
And the Good Book they'd kissed became  
Red with the consciousness of shame.



Whenever one of them approached  
The truth, 'That witness wasn't coached,  
Your Honor!' cried the lawyers both.  
'Strike out his testimony,' quoth  
The learned judge: 'This Court denies  
Its ear to stories which surprise.  
I hold that witnesses exempt  
From coaching all are in contempt.'  
Both Prosecution and Defense  
Applauded the judicial sense,  
And the spectators all averred  
Such wisdom they had never heard:  
'Twas plain the prisoner would be  
Found guilty in the first degree.  
Meanwhile that wight's pale cheek confessed  
The nameless terrors in his breast.  
He felt remorseful, too, because  
He wasn't half they said he was.  
'If I'd been such a rogue,' he mused  
On opportunities unused,  
'I might have easily become  
As wealthy as Methusalum.'  
This journalist adorned, alas,  
The middle, not the Bible, class.

With equal skill the lawyers' pleas  
Attested their divided fees.  
Each gave the other one the lie,  
Then helped him frame a sharp reply.

Good Lord! it was a bitter fight,  
And lasted all the day and night.  
When once or oftener the roar  
Had silenced the judicial snore  
The speaker suffered for the sport  
By fining for contempt of court.  
Twelve jurors' noses good and true  
Unceasing sang the trial through,  
And even *\_vox populi\_* was spent  
In rattles through a nasal vent.  
Clerk, bailiff, constables and all

Heard Morpheus sound the trumpet call  
To arms-his arms-and all fell in  
Save counsel for the Man of Sin.  
That thaumaturgist stood and swayed  
The wand their faculties obeyed-  
That magic wand which, like a flame.  
Leapt, wavered, quivered and became  
A wonder-worker-known among  
The ignoble vulgar as a Tongue.

How long, O Lord, how long my verse  
Runs on for better or for worse  
In meter which o'ermasters me,  
Octosyllabically free!  
A meter which, the poets say,  
No power of restraint can stay;  
A hard-mouthed meter, suited well  
To him who, having naught to tell,  
Must hold attention as a trout  
Is held, by paying out and out  
The slender line which else would break  
Should one attempt the fish to take.  
Thus tavern guides who've naught to show  
But some adjacent curio  
By devious trails their patrons lead  
And make them think 't is far indeed.  
Where was I?

While the lawyer talked  
The rogue took up his feet and walked:  
While all about him, roaring, slept,  
Into the street he calmly stepped.  
In very truth, the man who thought  
The people's voice from heaven had caught  
God's inspiration took a change  
Of venue-it was passing strange!  
Straight to his editor he went  
And that ingenious person sent  
A Negro to impersonate  
The fugitive. In adequate  
Disguise he took his vacant place  
And buried in his arms his face.

When all was done the lawyer stopped  
And silence like a bombshell dropped  
Upon the Court: judge, jury, all  
Within that venerable hall  
(Except the deaf and dumb, indeed,  
And one or two whom death had freed)  
Awoke and tried to look as though  
Slumber was all they did not know.

And now that tireless lawyer-man  
Took breath, and then again began:  
'Your Honor, if you did attend  
To what I've urged (my learned friend  
Nodded concurrence) to support  
The motion I have made, this court  
May soon adjourn. With your assent  
I've shown abundant precedent  
For introducing now, though late,  
New evidence to exculpate  
My client. So, if you'll allow,  
I'll prove an alibi!' 'What?-how?'  
Stammered the judge. 'Well, yes, I can't  
Deny your showing, and I grant  
The motion. Do I understand  
You undertake to prove-good land!-  
That when the crime-you mean to show  
Your client wasn't there?' 'O, no,  
I cannot quite do that, I find:  
My alibi's another kind  
Of alibi,-I'll make it clear,  
Your Honor, that he isn't here.'  
The Darky here upreared his head,  
Tranquillity affrighted fled  
And consternation reigned instead!

Ambrose Bierce

# An Anarchist

False to his art and to the high command  
God laid upon him, Markham's rebel hand  
Beats all in vain the harp he touched before:  
It yields a jingle and it yields no more.  
No more the strings beneath his finger-tips  
Sing harmonies divine. No more his lips,  
Touched with a living coal from sacred fires,  
Lead the sweet chorus of the golden wires.  
The voice is raucous and the phrases squeak;  
They labor, they complain, they sweat, they reek!  
The more the wayward, disobedient song  
Errs from the right to celebrate the wrong,  
More diligently still the singer strums,  
To drown the horrid sound, with all his thumbs.  
Gods, what a spectacle! The angels lean  
Out of high Heaven to view the sorry scene,  
And Israfel, 'whose heart-strings are a lute,'  
Though now compassion makes their music mute,  
Among the weeping company appears,  
Pearls in his eyes and cotton in his ears.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Apologue

A traveler observed one day  
A loaded fruit-tree by the way.  
And reining in his horse exclaimed:  
'The man is greatly to be blamed  
Who, careless of good morals, leaves  
Temptation in the way of thieves.  
Now lest some villain pass this way  
And by this fruit be led astray  
To bag it, I will kindly pack  
It snugly in my saddle-sack.'  
He did so; then that Salt o' the Earth  
Rode on, rejoicing in his worth.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Art Critic

Ira P. Rankin, you've a nasal name  
I'll sound it through 'the speaking-trump of fame,'  
And wondering nations, hearing from afar  
The brazen twang of its resounding jar,  
Shall say: 'These bards are an uncommon class  
They blow their noses with a tube of brass!'  
Rankin! ye gods! if Influenza pick  
Our names at christening, and such names stick,  
Let's all be born when summer suns withstand  
Her prevalence and chase her from the land,  
And healing breezes generously help  
To shield from death each ailing human whelp!  
'What's in a name?' There's much at least in yours  
That the pained ear unwillingly endures,  
And much to make the suffering soul, I fear,  
Envy the lesser anguish of the ear.

So you object to Cytherea! Do,  
The picture was not painted, sir, for you!  
Your\_ mind to gratify and taste address,  
The masking dove had been a dove the less.  
Provincial censor! all untaught in art,  
With mind indecent and indecent heart,  
Do you not know-nay, why should I explain?  
Instruction, argument alike were vain  
I'll show you reasons when you show me brain.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Augury

Upon my desk a single spray,  
With starry blossoms fraught.  
I write in many an idle way,  
Thinking one serious thought.

'O flowers, a fine Greek name ye bear,  
And with a fine Greek grace.'  
Be still, O heart, that turns to share  
The sunshine of a face.

'Have ye no messages-no brief,  
Still sign: 'Despair', or 'Hope'?'  
A sudden stir of stem and leaf-  
A breath of heliotrope!

Ambrose Bierce

## An Average

I ne'er could be entirely fond  
Of any maiden who's a blonde,  
And no brunette that e'er I saw  
Had charms my heart's whole  
warmth to draw.

Yet sure no girl was ever made  
Just half of light and half of shade.  
And so, this happy mean to get,  
I love a blonde and a brunette.

Ambrose Bierce



# An Enemy To Law And Order

A is defrauded of his land by B,  
Who's driven from the premises by C.  
D buys the place with coin of plundered E.  
'That A's an Anarchist!' says F to G.

Ambrose Bierce

## An Epitaph [hangman's Hands Laid In This Tomb An]

Hangman's hands laid in this tomb an  
Imp of Satan's getting, whom an  
Ancient legend says that woman  
Never bore-he owed his birth  
To Sin herself. From Hell to Earth  
She brought the brat in secret state  
And laid him at the Golden gate,  
And they named him Henry Vrooman.  
While with mortals here he stayed,  
His father frequently he played.  
Raised his birth-place and in other  
Playful ways begot his mother.

Ambrose Bierce

## An Epitaph [here Lies Greer Harrison, A Well Cracked Louse]

Here lies Greer Harrison, a well cracked louse  
So small a tenant of so big a house!  
He joyed in fighting with his eyes (his fist  
Prudently pendent from a peaceful wrist)  
And loved to loll on the Parnassian mount,  
His pen to suck and all his thumbs to count,  
What poetry he'd written but for lack  
Of skill, when he had counted, to count back!  
Alas, no more he'll climb the sacred steep  
To wake the lyre and put the world to sleep!  
To his rapt lip his soul no longer springs  
And like a jaybird from a knot-hole sings.  
No more the clubmen, pickled with his wine,  
Spread wide their ears and hiccough 'That's divine!'  
The genius of his purse no longer draws  
The pleasing thunders of a paid applause.  
All silent now, nor sound nor sense remains,  
Though riddances of worms improve his brains.  
All his no talents to the earth revert,  
And Fame concludes the record: 'Dirt to dirt!'

Ambrose Bierce

## An Example

They were two deaf mutes, and they loved and they  
Resolved to be groom and bride;  
And they listened to nothing that any could say,  
Nor ever a word replied.

From wedlock when warned by the married men,  
Maintain an invincible mind:  
Be deaf and dumb until wedded-and then  
Be deaf and dumb and blind.

Ambrose Bierce

## An 'Exhibit'

Goldenson hanged! Well, Heaven forbid  
That I should smile above him:  
Though truth to tell, I never did  
Exactly love him.

It can't be wrong, though, to rejoice  
That his unpleasing capers  
Are ended. Silent is his voice  
In all the papers.

No longer he's a show: no more,  
Bear-like, his den he's walking.  
No longer can he hold the floor  
When I'd be talking.

The laws that govern jails are bad  
If such displays are lawful.  
The fate of the assassin's sad,  
But ours is awful!

What! shall a wretch condemned to die  
In shame upon the gibbet  
Be set before the public eye  
As an 'exhibit'?

His looks, his actions noted down,  
His words if light or solemn,  
And all this hawked about the town  
So much a column?

The press, of course, will publish news  
However it may get it;  
But blast the sheriff who'll abuse  
His powers to let it!

Nay, this is not ingratitude;  
I'm no reporter, truly,  
Nor yet an editor. I'm rude  
Because unruly

Because I burn with shame and rage  
Beyond my power of telling  
To see assassins in a cage  
And keepers yelling.

'Walk up! Walk up!' the showman cries:  
'Observe the lion's poses,  
His stormy mane, his glooming eyes.  
His-hold your noses!'

How long, O Lord, shall Law and Right  
Be mocked for gain or glory,  
And angels weep as they recite  
The shameful story?

Ambrose Bierce

# An Exile

'Tis the census enumerator  
A-singing all forlorn:  
It's ho! for the tall potater,  
And ho! for the clustered corn.  
The whiffle-tree bends in the breeze and the fine  
Large eggs are a-ripening on the vine.

'Some there must be to till the soil  
And the widow's weeds keep down.  
I wasn't cut out for rural toil  
But they \_won't\_ let me live in town!  
They 're not so many by two or three,  
As they think, but ah! they 're too many for me.'

Thus the census man, bowed down with care,  
Warbled his wood-note high.  
There was blood on his brow and blood in his hair,  
But he had no blood in his eye.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Explanation

'I never yet exactly could determine  
Just how it is that the judicial ermine  
Is kept so safely from predacious vermin.'

'It is not so, my friend: though in a garret  
'Tis kept in camphor, and you often air it,  
The vermin will get into it and wear it.'

Ambrose Bierce



# An Idler

Who told Creed Haymond he was witty?-who  
Had nothing better in this world to do?  
Could no greased pig's appeal to his embrace  
Kindle his ardor for the friendly chase?  
Did no dead dog upon a vacant lot,  
Bloated and bald, or curdled in a clot,  
Stir his compassion and inspire his arms  
To hide from human eyes its faded charms?

If not to works of piety inclined,  
Then recreation might have claimed his mind.  
The harmless game that shows the feline greed  
To cinch the shorts and make the market bleed  
Is better sport than victimizing Creed;  
And a far livelier satisfaction comes  
Of knowing Simon, autocrat of thumbs.  
If neither worthy work nor play command  
This gentleman of leisure's heart and hand,  
Then Mammon might his idle spirit lift  
By hope of profit to some deed of thrift.  
Is there no cheese to pare, no flint to skin,  
No tin to mend, no glass to be put in,  
No housewife worthy of a morning visit,  
Her rags and sacks and bottles to solicit?  
Lo! the blind sow's precarious pursuit  
Of the aspiring oak's familiar fruit!  
'Twould more advantage any man to steal  
This easy victim's undefended meal  
Than tell Creed Haymond he has wit, and so  
Expose the state to his narcotic flow!

Ambrose Bierce

# An Imposter

Must you, Carnegie, evermore explain  
Your worth, and all the reasons give again  
Why black and red are similarly white,  
And you and God identically right?  
Still must our ears without redress submit  
To hear you play the solemn hypocrite  
Walking in spirit some high moral level,  
Raising at once his eye-balls and the devil?  
Great King of Cant! if Nature had but made  
Your mouth without a tongue I ne'er had prayed  
To have an earless head. Since she did not,  
Bear me, ye whirlwinds, to some favored spot  
Some mountain pinnacle that sleeps in air  
So delicately, mercifully rare  
That when the fellow climbs that giddy hill,  
As, for my sins, I know at last he will,  
To utter twaddle in that void inane  
His soundless organ he will play in vain.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Inscription

A conqueror as provident as brave,  
He robbed the cradle to supply the grave.  
His reign laid quantities of human dust:  
He fell upon the just and the unjust.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Inscription (For A Proposed Monument In Washington)

Erected to 'Boss' Shepherd by the dear  
Good folk he lived and moved among in peace  
Guarded on either hand by the police,  
With soldiers in his front and in his rear.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Inscription (For A Statue Of Napoleon, At West Point)

A famous conqueror, in battle brave,  
Who robbed the cradle to supply the grave.  
His reign laid quantities of human dust:  
He fell upon the just and the unjust.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Interpretation

Now Lonergan appears upon the boards,  
And Truth and Error sheathe their lingual swords.  
No more in wordy warfare to engage,  
The commentators bow before the stage,  
And bookworms, militant for ages past,  
Confess their equal foolishness at last,  
Reread their Shakspeare in the newer light  
And swear the meaning's obvious to sight.  
For centuries the question has been hot:  
Was Hamlet crazy, or was Hamlet not?  
Now, Lonergan's illuminating art  
Reveals the truth of the disputed 'part,'  
And shows to all the critics of the earth  
That Hamlet was an idiot from birth!

Ambrose Bierce

# An Obituarian

Death-poet Pickering sat at his desk,  
Wrapped in appropriate gloom;  
His posture was pensive and picturesque,  
Like a raven charming a tomb.

Enter a party a-drinking the cup  
Of sorrow-and likewise of woe:  
'Some harrowing poetry, Mister, whack up,  
All wrote in the key of O.

'For the angels has called my old woman hence  
From the strife (where she fit mighty free).  
It's a nickel a line? Cond-n the expense!  
For wealth is now little to me.'

The Bard of Mortality looked him through  
In the piercingest sort of a way:  
'It is much to me though it's little to you  
I've taken a wife to-day.'

So he twisted the tail of his mental cow  
And made her give down her flow.  
The grief of that bard was long-winded, somehow-  
There was reams and reamses of woe.

The widower man which had buried his wife  
Grew lily-like round each gill,  
For she turned in her grave and came back to life  
Then he cruel ignored the bill!

Then Sorrow she opened her gates a-wide,  
As likewise did also Woe,  
And the death-poet's song, as is heard inside,  
Is sang in the key of O.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Offer Of Marriage

Once I 'dript into the future far as human eye could see,'  
And saw-it was not Sandow, nor John Sullivan, but she  
The Emancipated Woman, who was weeping as she ran  
Here and there for the discovery of Expurgated Man.  
But the sun of Evolution ever rose and ever set,  
And that tardiest of mortals hadn't evolved yet.  
Hence the tears that she cascaded, hence the sighs that tore apart  
All the tendinous connections of her indurated heart.  
Cried Emancipated Woman, as she wearied of the search:  
'In Advancing I have left myself distinctly in the lurch!  
Seeking still a worthy partner, from the land of brutes and dudes  
I have penetrated rashly into manless solitudes.  
Now without a mate of any kind where am I?-that's to say,  
Where shall I be to-morrow?-where exert my rightful sway  
And the purifying strength of my emancipated mind?  
Can solitude be lifted up, vacuity refined?  
Calling, calling from the shadows in the rear of my Advance  
From the Region of Unprogress in the Dark Domain of Chance  
Long I heard the Unevolvable beseeching my return  
To share the degradation he's reluctant to unlearn.  
But I fancy I detected-though I pray it wasn't that  
A low reverberation, like an echo in a hat.  
So I've held my way regardless, evolving year by year,  
Till I'm what you now behold me-or would if you were here  
A condensed Emancipation and a Purifier proud  
An Independent Entity appropriately loud!  
Independent? Yes, in spirit, but (O, woful, woful state!)  
Doomed to premature extinction by privation of a mate  
To extinction or reversion, for Unexpurgated Man  
Still awaits me in the backward if I sicken of the van.  
O the horrible dilemma!-to be odiously linked  
With an Undeveloped Species, or become a Type Extinct!'

As Emancipated Woman wailed her sorrow to the air,  
Stalking out of desolation came a being strange and rare  
Plato's Man!-bipedal, featherless from mandible to rump,  
Its wings two quillless flippers and its tail a plumeless stump.  
First it scratched and then it clucked, as if in hospitable terms  
It invited her to banquet on imaginary worms.



Then it strutted up before her with a lifting of the head,  
And in accents of affection and of sympathy it said:  
'My estate is some 'at 'umble, but I'm qualified to draw  
Near the hymeneal altar and whack up my heart and claw  
To Emancipated Anything as walks upon the earth;  
And them things is at your service for whatever they are worth.  
I'm sure to be congenial, marm, nor e'er deserve a scowl  
I'm Emancipated Rooster, I am Expurgated Fowl!'

From the future and its wonders I withdrew my gaze, and then  
Wrote this wild unfestive prophecy about the Coming Hen.

Ambrose Bierce

# An Undress Uniform

The apparel does not proclaim the man  
Polonius lied like a partisan,  
And Salomon still would a hero seem  
If (Heaven dispel the impossible dream!)  
He stood in a shroud on the hangman's trap,  
His eye burning holes in the black, black cap.  
And the crowd below would exclaim again:  
'He's ready to fall for his country again!'

Ambrose Bierce

# An Unmerry Christmas

Christmas, you tell me, comes but once a year.  
One place it never comes, and that is here.  
Here, in these pages no good wishes spring,  
No well-worn greetings tediously ring  
For Christmas greetings are like pots of ore:  
The hollower they are they ring the more.  
Here shall no holly cast a spiny shade,  
Nor mistletoe my solitude invade,  
No trinket-laden vegetable come,  
No jorum steam with Sheolate of rum.  
No shrilling children shall their voices rear.  
Hurrah for Christmas without Christmas cheer!

No presents, if you please-I know too well  
What Herbert Spencer, if he didn't tell  
(I know not if he did) yet might have told  
Of present-giving in the days of old,  
When Early Man with gifts propitiated  
The chiefs whom most he doubted, feared and hated,  
Or tendered them in hope to reap some rude  
Advantage from the taker's gratitude.  
Since thus the Gift its origin derives  
(How much of its first character survives  
You know as well as I) my stocking's tied,  
My pocket buttoned-with my soul inside.  
I save my money and I save my pride.

Dinner? Yes; thank you-just a human body  
Done to a nutty brown, and a tear toddy  
To give me appetite; and as for drink,  
About a half a jug of blood, I think,  
Will do; for still I love the red, red wine,  
Coagulating well, with wrinkles fine  
Fretting the satin surface of its flood.  
O tope of kings-divine Falernian-blood!

Duse take the shouting fowls upon the limb,  
The kneeling cattle and the rising hymn!  
Has not a pagan rights to be regarded-

His heart assaulted and his ear bombarded  
With sentiments and sounds that good old Pan  
Even in his demonium would ban?

No, friends-no Christmas here, for I have sworn  
To keep my heart hard and my knees unworn.  
Enough you have of jester, player, priest:  
I as the skeleton attend your feast,  
In the mad revelry to make a lull  
With shaken finger and with bobbing skull.  
However you my services may flout,  
Philosophy disdain and reason doubt,  
I mean to hold in customary state,  
My dismal revelry and celebrate  
My yearly rite until the crack o' doom,  
Ignore the cheerful season's warmth and bloom  
And cultivate an oasis of gloom.

Ambrose Bierce

# Another Plan

Editor Owen, of San Jose,  
Commonly known as 'our friend J.J.'  
Weary of scribbling for daily bread,  
Weary of writing what nobody read,  
Slept one day at his desk and dreamed  
That an angel before him stood and beamed  
With compassionate eyes upon him there.

Editor Owen is not so fair  
In feature, expression, form or limb  
But glances like that are familiar to him;  
And so, to arrive by the shortest route  
At his visitor's will he said, simply: 'Toot.'  
'Editor Owen,' the angel said,  
'Scribble no more for your daily bread.  
Your intellect staggers and falls and bleeds,  
Weary of writing what nobody reads.  
Eschew now the quill-in the coming years  
Homilize man through his idle ears.  
Go lecture!' 'Just what I intended to do,'  
Said Owen. The angel looked pained and flew.

Editor Owen, of San Jose,  
Commonly known as 'our friend J.J.'  
Scribbling no more to supply his needs,  
Weary of writing what nobody reads,  
Passes of life each golden year  
Speaking what nobody comes to hear.

Ambrose Bierce

## Another Way

I lay in silence, dead. A woman came  
And laid a rose upon my breast, and said,  
'May God be merciful.' She spoke my name,  
And added, 'It is strange to think him dead.

'He loved me well enough, but 't was his way  
To speak it lightly.' Then, beneath her breath:  
'Besides' -I knew what further she would say,  
But then a footfall broke my dream of death.

To-day the words are mine. I lay the rose  
Upon her breast, and speak her name, and deem  
It strange indeed that she is dead. God knows  
I had more pleasure in the other dream.

Ambrose Bierce

# Arbor Day

Hasten, children, black and white  
Celebrate the yearly rite.  
Every pupil plant a tree:  
It will grow some day to be  
Big and strong enough to bear  
A School Director hanging there.

Ambrose Bierce

# Arboriculture

You may say they won't grow, and say they'll decay-  
Say it again till you're sick of the say,  
Get up on your ear, blow your blaring bazoo  
And hire a hall to proclaim it; and you  
May stand on a stump with a lifted hand  
As a pine may stand or a redwood stand,  
And stick to your story and cheek it through.  
But I point with pride to the far divide  
Where the Snake from its groves is seen to glide  
To Mariposa's arboreal suit,  
And the shaggy shoulders of Shasta Butte,  
And the feathered firs of Siskiyou;  
And I swear as I sit on my marvelous hair  
I roll my marvelous eyes and swear,  
And sneer, and ask where would your forests be  
To-day if it hadn't been for me!  
Then I rise tip-toe, with a brow of brass,  
Like a bully boy with an eye of glass;  
I look at my gum sprouts, red and blue,  
And I say it loud and I say it low:  
'They know their man and you bet they'll grow!'

Ambrose Bierce



# Arma Virumque

'Ours is a Christian Army'; so he said  
A regiment of bangomen who led.  
'And ours a Christian Navy,' added he  
Who sailed a thunder-junk upon the sea.  
Better they know than men unwarlike do  
What is an army and a navy, too.  
Pray God there may be sent them by-and-by  
The knowledge what a Christian is, and why.  
For somewhat lamely the conception runs  
Of a brass-buttoned Jesus firing guns.

Ambrose Bierce

# Art

For Gladstone's portrait five thousand pounds  
Were paid, 't is said, to Sir John Millais.  
I cannot help thinking that such fine pay  
Transcended reason's uttermost bounds.

For it seems to me uncommonly queer  
That a painted British statesman's price  
Exceeds the established value thrice  
Of a living statesman over here.

Ambrose Bierce

# Arthur Mcewen

Posterity with all its eyes  
Will come and view him where he lies.  
Then, turning from the scene away  
With a concerted shrug, will say:  
'H'm, Scarabaeus Sisyphus  
What interest has that to us?  
We can't admire at all, at all,  
A tumble-bug without its ball.'  
And then a sage will rise and say:  
'Good friends, you err-turn back, I pray:  
This freak that you unwisely shun  
Is bug and ball rolled into one.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Aspirants Three

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

\_QUICK\_:

DE YOUNG \_a Brother to Mushrooms\_

\_DEAD\_:

SWIFT \_an Heirloom\_

ESTEE \_a Relic\_

\_IMMORTALS\_:

THE SPIRIT OF BROKEN HOPES. THE AUTHOR.

\_MISCELLANEOUS\_:

A TROUPE OF COFFINS. THE MOON. VARIOUS COLORED FIRES.

\_Scene\_-The Political Graveyard at Bone Mountain.

DE YOUNG:

This is the spot agreed upon. Here rest  
The sainted statesman who upon the field  
Of honor have at various times laid down  
Their own, and ended, ignominious,  
Their lives political. About me, lo!  
Their silent headstones, gilded by the moon,  
Half-full and near her setting-midnight. Hark!  
Through the white mists of this portentous night  
(Which throng in moving shapes about my way,  
As they were ghosts of candidates I've slain,  
To fray their murderer) my open ear,  
Spacious to maw the noises of the world,  
Engulfs a footstep.  
(\_Enter Estee from his tomb.\_)  
Ah, 'tis he, my foe,  
True to appointment; and so here we fight  
Though truly 'twas my firm belief that he  
Would send regrets, or I had not been here.

ESTEE:

O moon that hast so oft surprised the deeds  
Whereby I rose to greatness!-tricksy orb,  
The type and symbol of my politics,  
Now draw my ebbing fortunes to their flood,  
As, by the magic of a poultice, boils  
That burn ambitions with defeated fires  
Are lifted into eminence.

(\_Sees De Young.\_)

What? you!

Faith, if I had suspected you would come  
From the fair world of politics wherein  
So lately you were whelped, and which, alas,  
I vainly to revisit strive, though still  
Rapped on the rotting head and bidden sleep  
Till Resurrection's morn,-if I had thought  
You would accept the challenge that I flung  
I would have seen you damned ere I came forth  
In the night air, shroud-clad and shivering,  
To fight so mean a thing! But since you're here,  
Draw and defend yourself. By gad, we'll \_see\_  
Who'll be Postmaster-General!

DE YOUNG:

We will-

I'll fight (for I am lame) with any blue  
And redolent remain that dares aspire  
To wreck the Grand Old Grandson's cabinet.  
Here's at you, nose-gay!

(\_They draw tongues and are about to fight, when from an  
adjacent whited sepulcher, enter Swift.\_)

SWIFT:

Hold! put up your tongues!  
Within the confines of this sacred spot  
Broods such a holy calm as none may break  
By clash of weapons, without sacrilege.

(\_Beats down their tongues with a bone.\_)  
Madmen! what profits it? For though you fought  
With such heroic skill that both survived,  
Yet neither should achieve the prize, for I  
Would wrest it from him. Let us not contend,  
But friendliwise by stipulation fix  
A slate for mutual advantage. Why,  
Having the pick and choice of seats, should we  
Forego them all but one? Nay, we'll take three,  
And part them so among us that to each  
Shall fall the fittest to his powers. In brief,  
Let us establish a Portfolio Trust.

ESTEE:

Agreed.

DE YOUNG:

Aye, truly, 'tis a greed-and one  
The offices imperfectly will sate,  
But I'll stand in.

SWIFT:

Well, so 'tis understood,  
As you're the junior member of the Trust,  
Politically younger and undead,  
Speak, Michael: what portfolio do you choose?

DE YOUNG:

I've thought the Postal service best would serve  
My interest; but since I have my pick,  
I'll take the War Department. It is known  
Throughout the world, from Market street to Pine,  
(For a Chicago journal told the tale)  
How in this hand I lately took my life  
And marched against great Buckley, thundering  
My mandate that he count the ballots fair!  
Earth heard and shrank to half her size! Yon moon,  
Which rivaled then a liver's whiteness, paused

That night at Butchertown and daubed her face  
With sheep's blood! Then my serried rank I drew  
Back to my stronghold without loss. To mark  
My care in saving human life and limb,  
The Peace Society bestowed on me  
Its leather medal and the title, too,  
Of Colonel. Yes, my genius is for war. Good land!  
I naturally dote on a brass band!

(\_Sings.\_)

O, give me a life on the tented field,  
Where the cannon roar and ring,  
Where the flag floats free and the foemen yield  
And bleed as the bullets sing.  
But be it not mine to wage the fray  
Where matters are ordered the other way,  
For that is a different thing.

O, give me a life in the fierce campaign-  
Let it be the life of my foe:  
I'd rather fall upon him than the plain;  
That service I'd fain forego.  
O, a warrior's life is fine and free,  
But a warrior's death-ah me! ah me!  
That's a different thing, you know.

ESTEE:

Some claim I might myself advance to that  
Portfolio. When Rebellion raised its head,  
And you, my friends, stayed meekly in your shirts,  
I marched with banners to the party stump,  
Spat on my hands, made faces fierce as death,  
Shook my two fists at once and introduced  
Brave resolutions terrible to read!  
Nay, only recently, as you do know,  
I conquered Treason by the word of mouth,  
And slew, with Samson's weapon, the whole South!

SWIFT:

You once fought Stanford, too.

ESTEE:

Enough of that-  
Give me the Interior and I'll devote  
My mind to agriculture and improve  
The breed of cabbages, especially  
The *\_Brassica Celeritatis\_*, named  
For *\_you\_* because in days of long ago  
You sold it at your market stall,-and, faith,  
'Tis said you were an honest huckster then.  
I'll be Attorney-General if you  
Prefer; for know I am a lawyer too!

SWIFT:

I never have heard that!-did you, De Young?

DE YOUNG:

Never, so help me! And I swear I've heard  
A score of Judges say that he is not.

SWIFT (*\_to Estee\_*):

You take the Interior. I might aspire  
To military station too, for once  
I led my party into Pixley's camp,  
And he paroled me. I defended, too,  
The State of Oregon against the sharp  
And bloody tooth of the Australian sheep.  
But I've an aptitude exceeding neat  
For bloodless battles of diplomacy.  
My cobweb treaty of Exclusion once,  
Through which a hundred thousand coolies sailed,  
Was much admired, but most by Colonel Bee.  
Though born a tinker I'm a diplomat  
From old Missouri, and I-ha! what's that?

(*\_Exit Moon. Enter Blue Lights on all the tombs, and a circle of Red Fire on the grass; in the center the Spirit of Broken Hopes, and round about, a Troupe of*



Coffins, dancing and singing.\_)

CHORUS OF COFFINS:

Two bodies dead and one alive-  
Yo, ho, merrily all!  
Now for boodle strain and strive-  
Buzzards all a-warble, O!  
Prophets three, agape for bread;  
Raven with a stone instead-  
Providential raven!  
Judges two and Colonel one-  
Run, run, rustics, run!  
But it's O, the pig is shaven,  
And oily, oily all!

(\_Exeunt Coffins, dancing. The Spirit of Broken Hopes advances, solemnly pointing at each of the Three Worthies in turn.\_)

SPIRIT OF BROKEN HOPES:

Governor, Governor, editor man,  
Rusty, musty, spick-and-span,  
Harlequin, harridan, dicky-dout,  
Demagogue, charlatan-o, u, t, OUT!  
(\_De Young falls and sleeps.\_)

Antimonopoler, diplomat,  
Railroad lackey, political rat,  
One, two, three-SCAT!  
(\_Swift falls and sleeps.\_)

Boycotting chin-worker, working to woo  
Fortune, the fickle, to smile upon \_you\_,  
Jo-coated acrobat, shuttle-cock-SHOO!  
(\_Estee falls and sleeps.\_)

Now they lie in slumber sweet,  
Now the charm is all complete,  
Hasten I with flying feet  
Where beyond the further sea  
A babe upon its mother's knee

Is gazing into skies afar  
And crying for a golden star.  
I'll drag a cloud across the blue  
And break that infant's heart in two!

(\_Exeunt the Spirit of Broken Hopes and the Red and Blue Fires. Re-enter Moon.\_)

ESTEE (\_waking\_):

Why, this is strange! I dreamed I know not what,  
It seemed that certain apparitions were,  
Which sang uncanny words, significant  
And yet ambiguous-half-understood  
Portending evil; and an awful spook,  
Even as I stood with my accomplices,  
Counted me out, as children do in play.  
Is that you, Mike?

DE YOUNG \_(waking):\_

It was.

SWIFT \_(waking):\_

Am I all that?  
Then I'll reform my ways.  
\_(Reforms his ways.)\_  
Ah! had I known  
How sweet it is to be an honest man  
I never would have stooped to turn my coat  
For public favor, as chameleons take  
The hue (as near as they can judge) of that  
Supporting them. Henceforth I'll buy  
With money all the offices I need,  
And know the pleasure of an honest life,  
Or stay forever in this dismal place.  
Now that I'm good, it will no longer do  
To make a third with such, a wicked two.  
\_(Returns to his tomb.)\_

DE YOUNG:

Prophetic dream! by some good angel sent  
To make me with a quiet life content.  
The question shall no more my bosom irk,  
To go to Washington or go to work.  
From Fame's debasing struggle I'll withdraw,  
And taking up the pen lay down the law.  
I'll leave this rogue, lest my example make  
An honest man of him-his heart would break.  
\_(Exit De Young.)\_

ESTEE:

Out of my company these converts flee,  
But that advantage is denied to me:  
My curst identity's confining skin  
Nor lets me out nor tolerates me in.  
Well, since my hopes eternally have fled,  
And, dead before, I'm more than ever dead,  
To find a grander tomb be now my task,  
And pack my pork into a stolen cask.  
\_(Exit, searching. Loud calls for the Author, who appears, bowing and smiling\_.)

AUTHOR \_(singing):\_

Jack Satan's the greatest of gods,  
And Hell is the best of abodes.  
'Tis reached, through the Valley of Clods,  
By seventy different roads.  
Hurrah for the Seventy Roads!  
Hurrah for the clods that resound  
With a hollow, thundering sound!  
Hurrah for the Best of Abodes!

We'll serve him as long as we've breath  
Jack Satan the greatest of gods.  
To all of his enemies, death!  
A home in the Valley of Clods.  
Hurrah for the thunder of clods  
That smother the soul of his foe!  
Hurrah for the spirits that go  
To dwell with the Greatest of Gods;

\_(Curtain falls to faint odor of mortality. Exit the Gas\_.)

Ambrose Bierce

# Aspiration

Lo! the wild rabbit, happy in the pride  
Of qualities to meaner beasts denied,  
Surveys the ass with reverence and fear,  
Adoring his superior length of ear,  
And says: 'No living creature, lean or fat,  
But wishes in his heart to be like That!'

Ambrose Bierce

# At Anchor

The soft asphaltum in the sun;  
Betrays a tendency to run;  
Whereas the dog that takes his way  
Across its course concludes to stay.

Ambrose Bierce

# At The Close Of The Canvass

'Twas a Venerable Person, whom I met one Sunday morning,  
All appareled as a prophet of a melancholy sect;  
And in a jeremaid of objurgatory warning  
He lifted up his \_jodel\_ to the following effect:

O ye sanguinary statesmen, intermit your verbal tussles  
O ye editors and orators, consent to hear my lay!  
And a little while the digital and maxillary muscles  
And attend to what a Venerable Person has to say.

Cease your writing, cease your shouting, cease your wild unearthly lying;  
Cease to bandy such expressions as are never, never found  
In the letter of a lover; cease 'exposing' and 'replying'  
Let there be abated fury and a decrement of sound.

For to-morrow will be Monday and the fifth day of November  
Only day of opportunity before the final rush.  
\_Carpe diem!\_ go conciliate each person who's a member  
Of the other party-do it while you can without a blush.

'Lo! the time is close upon you when the madness of the season  
Having howled itself to silence, like a Minnesota 'clone,  
Will at last be superseded by the still, small voice of reason,  
When the whelpage of your folly you would willingly disown.

'Ah, 'tis mournful to consider what remorse will be thronging,  
With a consciousness of having been so ghastly indiscreet,  
When by accident untoward two ex-gentlemen belonging  
To the opposite political denominations meet!

'Yes, 'tis melancholy, truly, to forecast the fierce, unruly  
Supersurging of their blushes, like the flushes upon high  
When Aurora Borealis lights her circumpolar palace  
And in customary manner sets her banner in the sky.

'Each will think: 'This falsifier knows that I too am a liar.  
Curse him for a son of Satan, all unholily compound!  
Curse my leader for another! Curse that pelican, my mother!  
Would to God that I when little in my victual had been drowned!"

Then that Venerable Person went away without returning  
And, the madness of the season having also taken flight,  
All the people soon were blushing like the skies to crimson burning  
When Aurora Borealis fires her premises by night.

Ambrose Bierce



# At The Close Of The Canvass

'Twas a Venerable Person, whom I met one Sunday morning,  
All appareled as a prophet of a melancholy sect;  
And in a Jeremiad of objurgatory warning  
He lifted up his jodel to the following effect:

'O ye sanguinary statesmen, intermit your verbal tussles!  
O ye editors and orators, consent to hear my lay!  
Rest a little while the digital and maxillary muscles  
And attend to what a Venerable Person has to say.

'Cease your writing, cease your shouting, cease your wild unearthly lying;  
Cease to bandy such expressions as are never, never found  
In the letter of a lover; cease 'exposing' and 'replying'  
Let there be abated fury and a decrement of sound.

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Of the other party-do so while you can without a blush.

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With a consciousness of having been so ghastly indiscreet,  
When by accident untoward two ex-gentlemen belonging  
To the opposite political denominations meet!

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Supersurging of their blushes, like the flushes upon high  
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And in customary manner sets her banner in the sky.

'Each will think: 'This falsifier knows that I too am a liar.  
Curse him for a son of Satan, all unholily compound!  
Curse my leader for another! Curse that pelican, my mother!  
Would to God that I when little in my victual had been drowned!''

Then that venerable warner disappeared around a corner,  
And the season of unreason having also taken flight,  
All the cheeks of men were burning like the skies to crimson turning  
When Aurora Borealis fires her premises by night.

Ambrose Bierce

# At The Eleventh Hour

As through the blue expanse he skims  
On joyous wings, the late  
Frank Hutchings overtakes Miss Sims,  
Both bound for Heaven's high gate.

In life they loved and (God knows why  
A lover so should sue)  
He slew her, on the gallows high  
Died pious-and they flew.

Her pinions were bedraggled, soiled  
And torn as by a gale,  
While his were bright-all freshly oiled  
The feathers of his tail.

Her visage, too, was stained and worn  
And menacing and grim;  
His sweet and mild-you would have sworn  
That she had murdered him.

When they'd arrived before the gate  
He said to her: 'My dear,  
'Tis hard once more to separate,  
But you can't enter here.

'For you, unluckily, were sent  
So quickly to the grave  
You had no notice to repent,  
Nor time your soul to save.'

'Tis true,' said she, 'and I should wail  
In Hell even now, but I  
Have lingered round the county jail  
To see a Christian die.'

Ambrose Bierce

# At The 'National Encampment'

You 're grayer than one would have thought you:  
The climate you have over there  
In the East has apparently brought you  
Disorders affecting the hair,  
Which-pardon me-seems a thought spare.

You'll not take offence at my giving  
Expression to notions like these.  
You might have been stronger if living  
Out here in our sanative breeze.  
It's unhealthy here for disease.

No, I'm not as plump as a pullet.  
But that's the old wound, you see.  
Remember my paunching a bullet?  
And how that it didn't agree  
With-well, honest hardtack for me.

Just pass me the wine-I've a helly  
And horrible kind of drouth!  
When a fellow has that in his belly  
Which didn't go in at his mouth  
He's hotter than all Down South!

Great Scott! what a nasty day that was  
When every galoot in our crack  
Division who didn't lie flat was  
Dissuaded from further attack  
By the bullet's felicitous whack.

'Twas there that our major slept under  
Some cannon of ours on the crest,  
Till they woke him by stilling their thunder,  
And he cursed them for breaking his rest,  
And died in the midst of his jest.

That night-it was late in November  
The dead seemed uncommonly chill  
To the touch; and one chap I remember

Who took it exceedingly ill  
When I dragged myself over his bill.

Well, comrades, I'm off now-good morning.  
Your talk is as pleasant as pie,  
But, pardon me, one word of warning:  
Speak little of self, say I.  
That's my way. God bless you. Good-bye.

Ambrose Bierce

# Authority

'Authority, authority!' they shout  
Whose minds, not large enough to hold a doubt,  
Some chance opinion ever entertain,  
By dogma billeted upon their brain.  
'Ha!' they exclaim with choreatic glee,  
'Here's Dabster if you won't give in to me  
Dabster, sir, Dabster, to whom all men look  
With reverence!' The fellow wrote a book.  
It matters not that many another wight  
Has thought more deeply, could more wisely write  
On t' other side-that you yourself possess  
Knowledge where Dabster did but faintly guess.  
God help you if ambitious to persuade  
The fools who take opinion ready-made  
And 'recognize authorities.' Be sure  
No tittle of their folly they'll abjure  
For all that you can say. But write it down,  
Publish and die and get a great renown  
Faith! how they'll snap it up, misread, misquote,  
Swear that they had a hand in all you wrote,  
And ride your fame like monkeys on a goat!

Ambrose Bierce

# Azrael

The moon in the field of the keel-plowed main  
Was watching the growing tide:  
A luminous peasant was driving his wain,  
And he offered my soul a ride.

But I nourished a sorrow uncommonly tall,  
And I fixed him fast with mine eye.  
'O, peasant,' I sang with a dying fall,  
'Go leave me to sing and die.'

The water was weltering round my feet,  
As prone on the beach they lay.  
I chanted my death-song loud and sweet;  
'Kioodle, ioodle, iay!'

Then I heard the swish of erecting ears  
Which caught that enchanted strain.  
The ocean was swollen with storms of tears  
That fell from the shining swain.

'O, poet,' leapt he to the soaken sand,  
'That ravishing song would make  
The devil a saint.' He held out his hand  
And solemnly added: 'Shake.'

We shook. 'I crave a victim, you see,'  
He said-'you came hither to die.'  
The Angel of Death, 't was he! 't was he!  
And the victim he crove was I!

'T was I, Fred Emerson Brooks, the bard;  
And he knocked me on the head.  
O Lord! I thought it exceedingly hard,  
For I didn't want to be dead.

'You'll sing no worser for that,' said he,  
And he drove with my soul away,  
O, death-song singers, be warned by me,  
Kioodle, ioodle, iay!

Ambrose Bierce



# Bats In Sunshine

Well, Mr. Kemble, you are called, I think,  
A great divine, and I'm a great profane.  
You as a Congregationalist blink  
Some certain truths that I esteem a gain,  
And dropp them in the coffers of my brain,  
Pleased with the pretty music of their chink.  
Perhaps your spiritual wealth is such  
A golden truth or two don't count for much.

You say that you've no patience with such stuff  
As by Renan is writ, and when you read  
(Why do you read?) have hardly strength enough  
To hold your hand from flinging the vile screed  
Into the fire. That were a wasteful deed  
Which you'd repent in sackcloth extra rough;  
For books cost money, and I'm told you care  
To lay up treasures Here as well as There.

I fear, good, pious soul, that you mistake  
Your thrift for toleration. Never mind:  
Renan in any case would hardly break  
His great, strong, charitable heart to find  
The bats and owls of your myopic kind  
Pained by the light that his ideas make.  
'Tis Truth's best purpose to shine in at holes  
Where cower the Kembles, to confound their souls!

Ambrose Bierce

# Beecher

So, Beecher's dead. His was a great soul, too  
Great as a giant organ is, whose reeds  
Hold in them all the souls of all the creeds  
That man has ever taught and never knew.

When on this mighty instrument He laid  
His hand Who fashioned it, our common moan  
Was suppliant in its thundering. The tone  
Grew more vivacious when the Devil played.

No more those luring harmonies we hear,  
And lo! already men forget the sound.  
They turn, retracing all the dubious ground  
O'er which it led them, pigwise, by the ear.

Ambrose Bierce

# Bereavement

A Countess (so they tell the tale)  
Who dwelt of old in Arno's vale,  
Where ladies, even of high degree,  
Know more of love than of A.B.C,  
Came once with a prodigious bribe  
Unto the learned village scribe,  
That most discreet and honest man  
Who wrote for all the lover clan,  
Nor e'er a secret had betrayed  
Save when inadequately paid.  
'Write me,' she sobbed-'I pray thee do  
A book about the Prince di Giu  
A book of poetry in praise  
Of all his works and all his ways;  
The godlike grace of his address,  
His more than woman's tenderness,  
His courage stern and lack of guile,  
The loves that wantoned in his smile.  
So great he was, so rich and kind,  
I'll not within a fortnight find  
His equal as a lover. O,  
My God! I shall be drowned in woe!'

'What! Prince di Giu has died!' exclaimed  
The honest man for letters famed,  
The while he pocketed her gold;  
'Of what'?-if I may be so bold.'  
Fresh storms of tears the lady shed:  
'I stabbed him fifty times,' she said.

Ambrose Bierce

# Bimetalism

Ben Bulger was a silver man,  
Though not a mine had he:  
He thought it were a noble plan  
To make the coinage free.

'There hain't for years been sech a time,'  
Said Ben to his bull pup,  
'For biz-the country's broke and I'm  
The hardest kind of up.

'The paper says that that's because  
The silver coins is sea'ce,  
And that the chaps which makes the laws  
Puts gold ones in their place.

'They says them nations always be  
Most prosperatin' where  
The wolume of the currency  
Ain't so disgustin' rare.'

His dog, which hadn't breakfasted,  
Dissented from his view,  
And wished that he could swell, instead,  
The volume of cold stew.

'Nobody'd put me up,' said Ben,  
'With patriot galoots  
Which benefits their feller men  
By playin' warios roots;

'But havin' all the tools about,  
I'm goin' to commence  
A-turnin' silver dollars out  
Wuth eighty-seven cents.

'The feller takin' 'em can't whine:  
(No more, likewise, can I):  
They're better than the genooine,  
Which mostly satisfy.

'It's only makin' coinage free,  
And mebbly might augment  
The wolume of the currency  
A noomerous per cent.'

I don't quite see his error nor  
Malevolence prepense,  
But fifteen years they gave him for  
That technical offense.

Ambrose Bierce

## 'Black Bart, Po8'

Welcome, good friend; as you have served your term,  
And found the joy of crime to be a fiction,  
I hope you'll hold your present faith, stand firm  
And not again be open to conviction.

Your sins, though scarlet once, are now as wool:  
You've made atonement for all past offenses,  
And conjugated-'twas an awful pull!-  
The verb 'to pay' in all its moods and tenses.

You were a dreadful criminal-by Heaven,  
I think there never was a man so sinful!  
We've all a pinch or two of Satan's leaven,  
But you appeared to have an even skinful.

Earth shuddered with aversion at your name;  
Rivers fled backward, gravitation scorning;  
The sea and sky, from thinking on your shame,  
Grew lobster-red at eve and in the morning.

But still red-handed at your horrid trade  
You wrought, to reason deaf, and to compassion.  
But now with gods and men your peace is made  
I beg you to be good and in the fashion.

What's that?-you 'ne'er again will rob a stage'?  
What! did you do so? Faith, I didn't know it.  
Was that what threw poor Themis in a rage?  
I thought you were convicted as a poet!

I own it was a comfort to my soul,  
And soothed it better than the deepest curses,  
To think they'd got one poet in a hole  
Where, though he wrote, he could not print, his verses.

I thought that Welcker, Plunkett, Brooks, and all  
The ghastly crew who always are begriming  
With villain couplets every page and wall,  
Might be arrested and 'run in' for rhyming.

And then Parnassus would be left to me,  
And Pegasus should bear me up it gaily,  
Nor down a steep place run into the sea,  
As now he must be tempted to do daily.

Well, grab the lyre-strings, hearties, and begin:  
Bawl your harsh souls all out upon the gravel.  
I must endure you, for you'll never sin  
By robbing coaches, until dead men travel.

Ambrose Bierce

# Borrowed Brains

Writer folk across the bay  
Take the pains to see and say  
All their upward palms in air:  
'Joaquin Miller's cut his hair!'  
Hasten, hasten, writer folk  
In the gutters rake and poke,  
If by God's exceeding grace  
You may hit upon the place  
Where the barber threw at length  
Samson's literary strength.  
Find it, find it if you can;  
Happy the successful man!  
He has but to put one strand  
In his beaver's inner band  
And his intellect will soar  
As it never did before!  
While an inch of it remains  
He will noted be for brains,  
And at last ('twill so befall)  
Fit to cease to write at all.

Ambrose Bierce



# Business

Two villains of the highest rank  
Set out one night to rob a bank.  
They found the building, looked it o'er,  
Each window noted, tried each door,  
Scanned carefully the lidded hole  
For minstrels to cascade the coal  
In short, examined five-and-twenty  
Good paths from poverty to plenty.  
But all were sealed, they saw full soon,  
Against the minions of the moon.  
'Enough,' said one: 'I'm satisfied.'  
The other, smiling fair and wide,  
Said: 'I'm as highly pleased as you:  
No burglar ever can get through.  
Fate surely prospers our design  
The booty all is yours and mine.'  
So, full of hope, the following day  
To the exchange they took their way  
And bought, with manner free and frank,  
Some stock of that devoted bank;  
And they became, inside the year,  
One President and one Cashier.

Their crime I can no further trace  
The means of safety to embrace,  
I overdrew and left the place.

Ambrose Bierce

## By A Defeated Litigant

Liars for witnesses; for lawyers brutes  
Who lose their tempers to retrieve their suits;  
Cowards for jurors; and for judge a clown  
Who ne'er took up the law, yet lays it down;  
Justice denied, authority abused,  
And the one honest person the accused  
Thy courts, my country, all these awful years,  
Move fools to laughter and the wise to tears.

Ambrose Bierce

## By False Pretenses

John S. Hittell, whose sovereign genius wields  
The quill his tributary body yields;  
The author of an opera-that is,  
All but the music and libretto's his:  
A work renowned, whose formidable name,  
Linked with his own, repels the assault of fame  
From the high vantage of a dusty shelf,  
Secure from all the world except himself;  
Who told the tale of 'Culture' in a screed  
That all might understand if some would read;  
Master of poesy and lord of prose,  
Dowered, like a setter, with a double nose;  
That one for Erato, for Clio this;  
He flushes both-not his fault if we miss;  
Judge of the painter's art, who'll straight proclaim  
The hue of any color you can name,  
And knows a painting with a canvas back  
Distinguished from a duck by the duck's quack;  
This thinker and philosopher, whose work  
Is famous from Commercial street to Turk,  
Has got a fortune now, his talent's meed.  
A woman left it him who could not read,  
And so went down to death's eternal night  
Sweetly unconscious that the wretch could write.

Ambrose Bierce

# Cain

Lord, shed thy light upon his desert path,  
And gild his branded brow, that no man spill  
His forfeit life to balk thy holy will  
That spares him for the ripening of wrath.

Already, lo! the red sign is descried,  
To trembling jurors visibly revealed:  
The prison doors obediently yield,  
The baffled hangman flings the cord aside.

Powell, the brother's blood that marks your trail  
Hark, how it cries against you from the ground,  
Like the far baying of the tireless hound.  
Faith! to your ear it is no nightingale.

What signifies the date upon a stone?  
To-morrow you shall die if not to-day.  
What matter when the Avenger choose to slay  
Or soon or late the Devil gets his own.

Thenceforth through all eternity you'll hold  
No one advantage of the later death.  
Though you had granted Ralph another breath  
Would he to-day less silent lie and cold?

Earth cares not, curst assassin, when you die;  
You never will be readier than now.  
Wear, in God's name, that mark upon your brow,  
And keep the life you purchased with a lie!

Ambrose Bierce

# California

Why should he not have been allowed  
To thread with peaceful feet the crowd  
Which filled that Christian street?  
The Decalogue he had observed,  
From Faith in Jesus had not swerved,  
And scorning pious platitudes,  
He saw in the Beatitudes  
A lamp to guide his feet.

He knew that Jonah downed the whale  
And made no bones of it. The tale  
That Ananias told  
He swore was true. He had no doubt  
That Daniel laid the lions out.  
In short, he had all holiness,  
All meekness and all lowliness,  
And was with saints enrolled.

'Tis true, some slight excess of zeal  
Sincerely to promote the weal  
Of this most Christian state  
Had moved him rudely to divide  
The queue that was a pagan's pride,  
And in addition certify  
The Faith by making fur to fly  
From pelt as well as pate?

But, Heavenly Father, thou dost know  
That in this town these actions go  
For nothing worth a name.  
Nay, every editorial ass,  
To prove they never come to pass  
Will damn his soul eternally,  
Although in his own journal he  
May read the printed shame.

From bloody hands the reins of pow'r  
Fall slack; the high-decisive hour  
Strikes not for liars' ears.

Remove, O Father, the disgrace  
That stains our California's face,  
And consecrate to human good  
The strength of her young womanhood  
And all her golden years!

Ambrose Bierce

# Carmelite

As Death was a-riding out one day,  
Across Mount Carmel he took his way,  
Where he met a mendicant monk,  
Some three or four quarters drunk,  
With a holy leer and a pious grin,  
Ragged and fat and as saucy as sin,  
Who held out his hands and cried:  
'Give, give in Charity's name, I pray.  
Give in the name of the Church. O give,  
Give that her holy sons may live!'  
And Death replied,  
Smiling long and wide:  
'I'll give, holy father, I'll give thee-a ride.'

With a rattle and bang  
Of his bones, he sprang  
From his famous Pale Horse, with his spear;  
By the neck and the foot  
Seized the fellow, and put  
Him astride with his face to the rear.

The Monarch laughed loud with a sound that fell  
Like clods on the coffin's sounding shell:  
'Ho, ho! A beggar on horseback, they say,  
Will ride to the devil!' -and thump  
Fell the flat of his dart on the rump  
Of the charger, which galloped away.

Faster and faster and faster it flew,  
Till the rocks and the flocks and the trees that grew  
By the road were dim and blended and blue  
To the wild, wide eyes  
Of the rider- in size

Resembling a couple of blackberry pies.  
Death laughed again, as a tomb might laugh  
At a burial service spoiled,  
And the mourners' intentions foiled  
By the body erecting

Its head and objecting  
To further proceedings in its behalf.

Many a year and many a day  
Have passed since these events away.  
The monk has long been a dusty corse,  
And Death has never recovered his horse.  
For the friar got hold of its tail,  
And steered it within the pale  
Of the monastery gray,  
Where the beast was stabled and fed  
With barley oil and bread  
Till fatter it grew than the fattest friar,  
And so in due course was appointed Prior.

Ambrose Bierce



## Censor Literarum

So, Parson Stebbins, you've released your chin  
To say that here, and here, we press-folk ail.  
'Tis a great thing an editor to skin  
And hang his faulty pelt upon a nail  
(If over-eared, it has, at least, no tail)  
And, for an admonition against sin,  
Point out its maculations with a rod,  
And act, in short, the gentleman of God.

'Twere needless cruelty to spoil your sport  
By comment, critical or merely rude;  
But you, too, have, according to report,  
Despite your posing as a holy dude,  
Imperfect spiritual pulchritude  
For so severe a judge. May't please the court,  
We shall appeal and take our case at once  
Before that higher court, a taller dunce.

Sir, what were you without the press? What spreads  
The fame of your existence, once a week,  
From the Pacific Mail dock to the Heads,  
Warning the people you're about to wreak  
Upon the human ear your Sunday freak?  
Whereat the most betake them to their bed  
Though some prefer to slumber in the pews  
And nod assent to your hypnotic views.

Unhappy man! can you not still your tongue  
When (like a luckless brat afflict with worms,  
By cruel fleas intolerably stung,  
Or with a pang in its small lap) it squirms?  
Still must it vulgarize your feats of lung?  
No preaching better were, the sun beneath,  
If you had nothing there behind your teeth.

Ambrose Bierce

# Charles And Peter

Ere Gabriel's note to silence died  
All graves of men were gaping wide.

Then Charles A. Dana, of 'The Sun,'  
Rose slowly from the deepest one.

'The dead in Christ rise first, 't is writ,'  
Quoth he-'ick, bick, ban, doe,-I'm It!'

(His headstone, footstone, counted slow,  
Were 'ick' and 'bick,' he 'ban' and 'doe':

Of beating Nick the subtle art  
Was part of his immortal part.)

Then straight to Heaven he took his flight,  
Arriving at the Gates of Light.

There Warden Peter, in the throes  
Of sleep, lay roaring in the nose.

'Get up, you sluggard!' Dana cried  
'I've an engagement there inside.'

The Saint arose and scratched his head.  
'I recollect your face,' he said.

'(And, pardon me, 't is rather hard),  
But--' Dana handed him a card.

'Ah, yes, I now remember-bless  
My soul, how dull I am I-yes, yes,

'We've nothing better here than bliss.  
Walk in. But I must tell you this:

'We've rest and comfort, though, and peace.'  
'H'm-puddles,' Dana said, 'for geese.

'Have you in Heaven no Hell?' 'Why, no,'  
Said Peter, 'nor, in truth, below.

'T is not included in our scheme-  
'T is but a preacher's idle dream.'

The great man slowly moved away.  
'I'll call,' he said, 'another day.

'On earth I played it, o'er and o'er,  
And Heaven without it were a bore.'

'O, stuff!-come in. You'll make,' said Pete,  
'A hell where'er you set your feet.'

1885.

Ambrose Bierce

# Christian

I dreamed I stood upon a hill, and, lo!  
The godly multitudes walked to and fro  
Beneath, in Sabbath garments fitly clad,  
With pious mien, appropriately sad,  
While all the church bells made a solemn din --  
A fire-alarm to those who lived in sin.  
Then saw I gazing thoughtfully below,  
With tranquil face, upon that holy show  
A tall, spare figure in a robe of white,  
Whose eyes diffused a melancholy light.  
'God keep you, stranger,' I exclaimed. 'You are  
No doubt (your habit shows it) from afar;  
And yet I entertain the hope that you,  
Like these good people, are a Christian too.'  
He raised his eyes and with a look so stern  
It made me with a thousand blushes burn  
Replied -- his manner with disdain was spiced:  
'What! I a Christian? No, indeed! I'm Christ.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Codex Honoris

Jacob Jacobs, of Oakland, he swore:  
'Dat Solomon Martin-I'll haf his gore!'  
Solomon Martin, of Oakland, he said:  
'Of Shacob Shacobs der bleed I vill shed!'  
So they met, with seconds and surgeon at call,  
And fought with pistol and powder and-all  
Was done in good faith,-as before I said,  
They fought with pistol and powder and-shed  
Tears, O my friends, for each other they marred  
Fighting with pistol and powder and-lard!  
For the lead had been stolen away, every trace,  
And Christian hog-product supplied its place.  
Then the shade of Moses indignant arose:  
'Quvicker dan lighdnings go vosh yer glose!'  
Jacob Jacobs, of Oakland, they say,  
Applied for a pension the following day.  
Solomon Martin, of Oakland, I hear,  
Will call himself Colonel for many a year.

Ambrose Bierce

## Consolation

Little's the good to sit and grieve  
Because the serpent tempted Eve.  
Better to wipe your eyes and take  
A club and go out and kill a snake.

What do you gain by cursing Nick  
For playing her such a scurvy trick?  
Better go out and some villain find  
Who serves the devil, and beat him blind.

But if you prefer, as I suspect,  
To philosophize, why, then, reflect:  
If the cunning rascal upon the limb  
Hadn't tempted her she'd have tempted him.

Ambrose Bierce

# Constancy

Dull were the days and sober,  
The mountains were brown and bare,  
For the season was sad October  
And a dirge was in the air.

The mated starlings flew over  
To the isles of the southern sea.  
She wept for her warrior lover  
Wept and exclaimed: 'Ah, me!

'Long years have I mourned my darling  
In his battle-bed at rest;  
And it's O, to be a starling,  
With a mate to share my nest!'

The angels pitied her sorrow,  
Restoring her warrior's life;  
And he came to her arms on the morrow  
To claim her and take her to wife.

An aged lover-a portly,  
Bald lover, a trifle too stiff,  
With manners that would have been courtly,  
And would have been graceful, if

If the angels had only restored him  
Without the additional years  
That had passed since the enemy bored him  
To death with their long, sharp spears.

As it was, he bored her, and she rambled  
Away with her father's young groom,  
And the old lover smiled as he ambled  
Contentedly back to the tomb.

Ambrose Bierce

# Contemplation

I muse upon the distant town  
In many a dreamy mood.  
Above my head the sunbeams crown  
The graveyard's giant rood.  
The lupin blooms among the tombs.  
The quail recalls her brood.

Ah, good it is to sit and trace  
The shadow of the cross;  
It moves so still from place to place  
O'er marble, bronze and moss;  
With graves to mark upon its arc  
Our time's eternal loss.

And sweet it is to watch the bee  
That reve's in the rose,  
And sense the fragrance floating free  
On every breeze that blows  
O'er many a mound, where, safe and sound,  
Mine enemies repose.

Ambrose Bierce



# Contentment

Sleep fell upon my senses and I dreamed  
Long years had circled since my life had fled.  
The world was different, and all things seemed  
Remote and strange, like noises to the dead.  
And one great Voice there was; and something said:  
'Posterity is speaking-rightly deemed  
Infallible:' and so I gave attention,  
Hoping Posterity my name would mention.

'Illustrious Spirit,' said the Voice, 'appear!  
While we confirm eternally thy fame,  
Before our dread tribunal answer, here,  
Why do no statues celebrate thy name,  
No monuments thy services proclaim?  
Why did not thy contemporaries rear  
To thee some schoolhouse or memorial college?  
It looks almighty queer, you must acknowledge.'

Up spake I hotly: 'That is where you err!  
But some one thundered in my ear: 'You shan't  
Be interrupting these proceedings, sir;  
The question was addressed to General Grant.'  
Some other things were spoken which I can't  
Distinctly now recall, but I infer,  
By certain flushings of my cheeks and forehead,  
Posterity's environment is torrid.

Then heard I (this was in a dream, remark)  
Another Voice, clear, comfortable, strong,  
As Grant's great shade, replying from the dark,  
Said in a tone that rang the earth along,  
And thrilled the senses of the Judges' throng:  
'I'd rather you would question why, in park  
And street, my monuments were not erected  
Than why they were.' Then, waking, I reflected.

Ambrose Bierce

# Convalescent

What! 'Out of danger?' Can the slighted Dame  
Or canting Pharisee no more defame?  
Will Treachery caress my hand no more,  
Nor Hatred lie alurk about my door?-  
Ingratitude, with benefits dismissed,  
Not understanding what 'tis all about,  
Will Envy henceforth not retaliate  
For virtues it were vain to emulate?  
Will Ignorance my knowledge fail to scout,  
Not understanding what 'tis all about,  
Yet feeling in its light so mean and small  
That all his little soul is turned to gall?

What! 'Out of danger?' Jealousy disarmed?  
Greed from exaction magically charmed?  
Ambition stayed from trampling whom it meets.  
Like horses fugitive in crowded streets?  
The Bigot, with his candle, book and bell,  
Tongue-tied, unlunged and paralyzed as well?  
The Critic righteously to justice haled,  
His own ear to the post securely nailed-  
What most he dreads unable to inflict,  
And powerless to hawk the faults he's picked?  
The Liar choked upon his choicest lie,  
And impotent alike to vilify  
Or flatter for the gold of thrifty men  
Who hate his person but employ his pen-  
Who love and loathe, respectively, the dirt  
Belonging to his character and shirt?

What! 'Out of danger?'-Nature's minions all,  
Like hounds returning to the huntsman's call,  
Obedient to the unwelcome note  
That stays them from the quarry's bursting throat?-  
Famine and Pestilence and Earthquake dire,  
Torrent and Tempest, Lightning, Frost and Fire,  
The soulless Tiger and the mindless Snake,

The noxious Insect from the stagnant lake,-  
These from their immemorial prey restrained,  
Their fury baffled and their power chained?  
I'm safe? Is that what the physician said?  
What! 'Out of danger?' Then, by Heaven, I'm dead!

Ambrose Bierce

# Convalescent ['By Good Men's Prayers See Grant Restored!']

'By good men's prayers see Grant restored!  
Shouts Talmage, pious creature!  
Yes, God, by supplication bored  
From every droning preacher,  
Exclaimed: 'So be it, tiresome crew  
But I've a crow to pick with \_you\_.'

Ambrose Bierce

## Convalescent [what! 'Out Of Danger?' Can The Slighted Dame]

What! 'Out of danger?' Can the slighted Dame  
Or canting Pharisee no more defame?  
Will Treachery caress my hand no more,  
Nor Hatred He alurk about my door?  
Ingratitude, with benefits dismissed,  
Not close the loaded palm to make a fist?  
Will Envy henceforth not retaliate  
For virtues it were vain to emulate?  
Will Ignorance my knowledge fail to scout,  
Not understanding what 'tis all about,  
Yet feeling in its light so mean and small  
That all his little soul is turned to gall?

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Greed from exaction magically charmed?  
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The Bigot, with his candle, book and bell,  
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The Critic righteously to justice haled,  
His own ear to the post securely nailed  
What most he dreads unable to inflict,  
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And impotent alike to villify  
Or flatter for the gold of thrifty men  
Who hate his person but employ his pen  
Who love and loathe, respectively, the dirt  
Belonging to his character and shirt?

What! 'Out of danger?'-Nature's minions all,  
Like hounds returning to the huntsman's call,  
Obedient to the unwelcome note  
That stays them from the quarry's bursting throat?  
Famine and Pestilence and Earthquake dire,  
Torrent and Tempest, Lightning, Frost and Fire,  
The soulless Tiger and the mindless Snake,

The noxious Insect from the stagnant lake  
(Automaton malevolences wrought  
Out of the substance of Creative Thought  
These from their immemorial prey restrained,  
Their fury baffled and their power chained?

I'm safe? Is that what the physician said?  
What! 'Out of danger?' Then, by Heaven, I'm dead!

Ambrose Bierce

# Cooperation

No more the swindler singly seeks his prey;  
To hunt in couples is the modern way  
A rascal, from the public to purloin,  
An honest man to hide away the coin.

Ambrose Bierce

## Corrected News

'T was a maiden lady (the newspapers say)  
Pious and prim and a bit gone-gray.  
She slept like an angel, holy and white,  
Till ten o' the clock in the shank o' the night  
(When men and other wild animals prey)  
And then she cried in the viewless gloom:  
'There's a man in the room, a man in the room!'  
And this maiden lady (they make it appear)  
Leapt out of the window, five fathom sheer!

Alas, that lying is such a sin  
When newspaper men need bread and gin  
And none can be had for less than a lie!  
For the maiden lady a bit gone-gray  
Saw the man in the room from across the way,  
And leapt, not out of the window but in  
\_Ten\_ fathom sheer, as I hope to die!

Ambrose Bierce



# Couplets

I am for Cutting. I'm a blade  
Designed for use at dress parade.  
My gleaming length, when I display  
Peace rules the land with gentle sway;  
But when the war-dogs bare their teeth  
Go seek me in the modest sheath.  
I am for Cutting. Not for me  
The task of setting nations free.  
Let soulless blades take human life,  
My softer metal shuns the strife.  
The annual review is mine,  
When gorgeous shopmen sweat and shine,  
And Biddy, tip-toe on the pave,  
Adores the cobble-trotting brave.  
I am for Cutting. 'Tis not mine  
To hew amain the hostile line;  
Not mine all pitiless to spread  
The plain with tumuli of dead.  
My grander duty lies afar  
From haunts of the insane hussar,  
Where charging horse and struggling foot  
Are grimed alike with cannon-soot.  
When Loveliness and Valor meet  
Beneath the trees to dance, and eat,  
And sing, and much beside, behold  
My golden glories all unfold!  
There formidably are displayed  
The useful horrors of my blade  
In time of feast and dance and ballad,  
I am for cutting chicken salad.

Ambrose Bierce

# Creation

God dreamed-the suns sprang flaming into place,  
And sailing worlds with many a venturous race!  
He woke-His smile alone illumined space.

Ambrose Bierce

# Creation

GOD dreamed—the suns sprang flaming into place,  
And sailing worlds with many a venturous race.  
He woke—His smile alone illumined space.

Ambrose Bierce

## De Young-A Prophecy

Running for Senator with clumsy pace,  
He stooped so low, to win at least a place,  
That Fortune, tempted by a mark so droll,  
Sprang in an kicked him to the winning pole.

Ambrose Bierce

# Decalogue

Thou shalt no God but me adore:  
'Twere too expensive to have more.

No images nor idols make  
For Roger Ingersoll to break.

Take not God's name in vain: select  
A time when it will have effect.

Work not on Sabbath days at all,  
But go to see the teams play ball.

Honor thy parents. That creates  
For life insurance lower rates.

Kill not, abet not those who kill;  
Thou shalt not pay thy butcher's bill.

Kiss not thy neighbor's wife, unless  
Thine own thy neighbor doth caress.

Don't steal; thou'lt never thus compete  
Successfully in business. Cheat.

Bear not false witness--that is low--  
But 'hear 'tis rumored so and so.'

Covet thou naught that thou hast got  
By hook or crook, or somehow, got.

Ambrose Bierce

# Democracy

Let slaves and subjects with unvaried psalms  
Before their sovereign execute salaams;  
The freeman scorns one idol to adore  
Tom, Dick and Harry and himself are four.

Ambrose Bierce

# Dennis Kearney

Your influence, my friend, has gathered head  
To east and west its tides encroaching spread.  
There'll be, on all God's foot-stool, when they meet,  
No clean spot left for God to set His feet.

Ambrose Bierce

# Detected

In Congress once great Mowther shone,  
Debating weighty matters;  
Now into an asylum thrown,  
He vacuously chatters.

If in that legislative hall  
His wisdom still he 'd vented,  
It never had been known at all  
That Mowther was demented.

Ambrose Bierce



# Diagnosis

Cried Allen Forman: 'Doctor, pray  
Compose my spirits' strife:  
O what may be my chances, say,  
Of living all my life?

'For lately I have dreamed of high  
And hempen dissolution!  
O doctor, doctor, how can I  
Amend my constitution?'

The learned leech replied: 'You're young  
And beautiful and strong  
Permit me to inspect your tongue:  
H'm, ah, ahem!-'tis long.'

Ambrose Bierce

## 'Died Of A Rose'

A reporter he was, and he wrote, wrote he:  
'The grave was covered as thick as could be  
With floral tributes'-which reading,  
The editor man he said, he did so:  
'For 'floral tributes' he's got for to go,  
For I hold the same misleading.'  
Then he called him in and he pointed sweet  
To a blooming garden across the street,  
Inquiring: 'What's them a-growing?'  
The reporter chap said: 'Why, where's your eyes?  
Them's floral tributes!' 'Arise, arise,'  
The editor said, 'and be going.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Dies Irae

Dies irae! dies ilia!  
Solvat saeculum in favilla  
Teste David cum Sibylla.

Quantus tremor est futurus,  
Quando Judex est venturus.  
Cuncta stricte discussurus.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum  
Per sepulchra regionem,  
Coget omnes ante thronum.

Mors stupebit, et Natura,  
Quum resurget creatura  
Judicanti responsura.

Liber scriptus proferetur,  
In quo totum continetur,  
Unde mundus judicetur.

Judex ergo quum sedebit,  
Quicquid latet apparebit,  
Nil inultum remanebit.

Quid sum miser tunc dicturus,  
Quem patronem rogaturus,  
Quum vix justus sit securus?

Rex tremendae majestatis,  
Qui salvandos salvas gratis;  
Salva me, Fons pietatis

Recordare, Jesu pie  
Quod sum causa tuae viae;  
Ne me perdas illa die.

Quarens me sedisti lassus  
Redimisti crucem passus,  
Tantus labor non sit cassus.

Juste Judex ultionis,  
Donum fac remissionis  
Ante diem rationis.

Ingemisco tanquam reus,  
Culpa rubet vultus meus;  
Supplicanti parce, Deus.

Qui Mariam absolvisti  
Et latronem exaudisti,  
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.

Preces meae non sunt dignae,  
Sed tu bonus fac benigne  
Ne perenni cremer igne.

Inter oves locum praesta.  
Et ab haedis me sequestra,  
Statuens in parte dextra.

Confutatis maledictis,  
Flammis acribus addictis,  
Voca me cum benedictis.

Oro supplex et acclinis,  
Cor contritum quasi cinis;  
Gere curam mei finis.

Lacrymosa dies illa  
Qua resurgent et favilla,  
Judicandus homo reus  
Huic ergo parce, Deus!

Ambrose Bierce

# Disappointment

The Senate woke; the Chairman's snore  
Was stilled, its echoes balking;  
The startled members dreamed no more,  
For Steele, who long had held the floor,  
Had suddenly ceased talking.

As, like Elijah, in his pride,  
He to his seat was passing,  
'Go up thou baldhead!' Reddy cried.  
Then six fierce bears ensued and tried  
To sunder him for 'sassing.'

Two seized his legs, and one his head,  
The fourth his trunk, to munch on;  
The fifth preferred an arm instead;  
The last, with rueful visage, said:  
'Pray what have I for luncheon?'

Then to that disappointed bear  
Said Steele, serene and chipper,  
'My friend, you shall not lack your share:  
Look in the Treasury, and there  
You'll find his other flipper.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Discretion

SHE:

I'm told that men have sometimes got  
Too confidential, and  
Have said to one another what  
They-well, you understand.  
I hope I don't offend you, sweet,  
But are you sure that you're discreet?

HE:

'Tis true, sometimes my friends in wine  
Their conquests do recall,  
But none can truly say that mine  
Are known to him at all.  
I never, never talk you o'er  
In truth, I never get the floor.

Ambrose Bierce

# Down Among The Dead Men

Within my dark and narrow bed  
I rested well, new-laid:  
I heard above my fleshless head  
The grinding of a spade.

A gruffer note ensued and grew  
To harsh and harsher strains:  
The poet Welcker then I knew  
Was 'snatching' my remains.

'O Welcker, let your hand be stayed  
And leave me here in peace.  
Of your revenge you should have made  
An end with my decease.'

'Hush, Mouldyshanks, and hear my moan:  
I once, as you're aware,  
Was eminent in letters-known  
And honored everywhere.

'My splendor made all Berkeley bright  
And Sacramento blind.  
Men swore no writer e'er could write  
Like me-if I'd a mind.

'With honors all insatiate,  
With curst ambition smit,  
Too far, alas! I tempted fate  
I \_published\_ what I'd writ!

'Good Heaven! with what a hunger wild  
Oblivion swallows fame!  
Men who have known me from a child  
Forget my very name!

'Even creditors with searching looks  
My face cannot recall;  
My heaviest one-he prints my books  
Oblivious most of all.

'O I should feel a sweet content  
If one poor dun his claim  
Would bring to me for settlement,  
And bully me by name.

'My dog is at my gate forlorn;  
It howls through all the night,  
And when I greet it in the morn  
It answers with a bite!'

'O Poet, what in Satan's name  
To me's all this ado?  
Will snatching me restore the fame  
That printing snatched from you?'

'Peace, dread Remains; I'm not about  
To do a deed of sin.  
I come not here to hale you out  
I'm trying to get in.'

Ambrose Bierce



# Egotist

Megaceph, chosen to serve the State  
In the halls of legislative debate,  
One day with his credentials came  
To the capitol's door and announced his name.  
The doorkeeper looked, with a comical twist  
Of the face, at the eminent egotist,  
And said: 'Go away, for we settle here  
All manner of questions, knotty and queer,  
And we cannot have, when the speaker demands  
To know how every member stands,  
A man who to all things under the sky  
Assents by eternally voting 'I.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Election Day

Despots effete upon tottering thrones  
Unsteadily poised upon dead men's bones,  
Walk up! walk up! the circus is free,  
And this wonderful spectacle you shall see:  
Millions of voters who mostly are fools  
Demagogues' dupes and candidates' tools,  
Armies of uniformed mountebanks,  
And braying disciples of brainless cranks.  
Many a week they've bellowed like beeves,  
Bitterly blackguarding, lying like thieves,  
Libeling freely the quick and the dead  
And painting the New Jerusalem red.  
Tyrants monarchical-emperors, kings,  
Princes and nobles and all such things  
Noblemen, gentlemen, step this way:  
There's nothing, the Devil excepted, to pay,  
And the freaks and curios here to be seen  
Are very uncommonly grand and serene.

No more with vivacity they debate,  
Nor cheerfully crack the illogical pate;  
No longer, the dull understanding to aid,  
The stomach accepts the instructive blade,  
Nor the stubborn heart learns what is what  
From a revelation of rabbit-shot;  
And vilification's flames-behold!  
Burn with a bickering faint and cold.

Magnificent spectacle!-every tongue  
Suddenly civil that yesterday rung  
(Like a clapper beating a brazen bell)  
Each fair reputation's eternal knell;  
Hands no longer delivering blows,  
And noses, for counting, arrayed in rows.

Walk up, gentlemen-nothing to pay  
The Devil goes back to Hell to-day.



# Elegy

The cur foretells the knell of parting day;  
The loafing herd winds slowly o'er the lea;  
The wise man homewards plods; I only stay  
To fiddle-faddle in a minor key.

Ambrose Bierce

# Elixer Vitæ

Of life's elixir I had writ, when sleep  
(Pray Heaven it spared him who the writing read!)  
Settled upon my senses with so deep  
A stupefaction that men thought me dead.  
The centuries stole by with noiseless tread,  
Like spectres in the twilight of my dream;  
I saw mankind in dim procession sweep  
Through life, oblivion at each extreme.  
Meanwhile my beard, like Barbarossa's growing,  
Loaded my lap and o'er my knees was flowing.

The generations came with dance and song,  
And each observed me curiously there.  
Some asked: 'Who was he?' Others in the throng  
Replied: 'A wicked monk who slept at prayer.'  
Some said I was a saint, and some a bear-  
These all were women. So the young and gay,  
Visibly wrinkling as they fared along,  
Doddered at last on failing limbs away;  
Though some, their footing in my beard entangled,  
Fell into its abysses and were strangled.

At last a generation came that walked  
More slowly forward to the common tomb,  
Then altogether stopped. The women talked  
Excitedly; the men, with eyes agloom  
Looked darkly on them with a look of doom;  
And one cried out: 'We are immortal now-  
How need we these?' And a dread figure stalked,  
Silent, with gleaming axe and shrouded brow,  
And all men cried: 'Decapitate the women,  
Or soon there'll be no room to stand or swim in!'

So (in my dream) each lovely head was chopped  
From its fair shoulders, and but men alone  
Were left in all the world. Birth being stopped,

Enough of room remained in every zone,  
And Peace ascended Woman's vacant throne.  
Thus, life's elixir being found (the quacks  
Their bread-and-butter in it gladly sopped)  
'Twas made worth having by the headsman's axe.  
Seeing which, I gave myself a hearty shaking,  
And crumbled all to powder in the waking.

Ambrose Bierce

# Emancipation

Behold! the days of miracle at last  
Return-if ever they were truly past:  
From sinful creditors' unholy greed  
The church called Calvary at last is freed  
So called for there the Savior's crucified,  
Roberts and Carmany on either side.

The circling contribution-box no more  
Provokes the nod and simulated snore;  
No more the Lottery, no more the Fair,  
Lure the reluctant dollar from its lair,  
Nor Ladies' Lunches at a bit a bite  
Destroy the health yet spare the appetite,  
While thrifty sisters o'er the cauldron stoop  
To serve their God with zeal, their friends with soup,  
And all the brethren mendicate the earth  
With viewless placards: 'We've been \_so\_ from birth!'

Sure of his wage, the pastor now can lend  
His whole attention to his latter end,  
Remarking with a martyr's prescient thrill  
The Hemp maturing on the cheerless Hill.  
The holy brethren, lifting pious palms,  
Pour out their gratitude in prayer and psalms,  
Chant \_De Profundis\_, meaning 'out of debt,'  
And dance like mad-or would if they were let.

Deeply disguised (a deacon newly dead  
Supplied the means) Jack Satan holds his head  
As high as any and as loudly sings  
His \_jubilate\_ till each rafter rings.  
'Rejoice, ye ever faithful,' bellows he,  
'The debt is lifted and the temple free!'  
Then says, aside, with gentle cachination:  
'I've got a mortgage on the congregation.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Exoneration

When men at candidacy don't connive,  
From that suspicion if their friends would free 'em,  
The teeth and nails with which they did not strive  
Should be exhibited in a museum.

Ambrose Bierce



# Expositor Veritatis

I Slept, and, waking in the years to be,  
Heard voices, and approaching whence they came,  
Listened indifferently where a key  
Had lately been removed. An ancient dame  
Said to her daughter: 'Go to yonder caddy  
And get some emery to scour your daddy.'

And then I knew-some intuition said  
That tombs were not and men had cleared their shelves  
Of urns; and the electro-plated dead  
Stood pedestaled as statues of themselves.  
With famous dead men all the public places  
Were thronged, and some in piles awaited bases.

One mighty structure's high facade alone  
Contained a single monumental niche,  
Where, central in that steep expanse of stone,  
Gleamed the familiar form of Thomas Fitch.  
A man cried: 'Lo! Truth's temple and its founder!'  
Then gravely added: 'I'm her chief expounder.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Fallen

O, hadst thou died when thou wert great,  
When at thy feet a nation knelt  
To sob the gratitude it felt  
And thank the Saviour of the State,  
Gods might have envied thee thy fate!

Then was the laurel round thy brow,  
And friend and foe spoke praise of thee,  
While all our hearts sang victory.  
Alas! thou art too base to bow  
To hide the shame that brands it now.

Ambrose Bierce

## Fame [he Held A Book In His Knotty Paws]

He held a book in his knotty paws,  
And its title grand read he:  
'The Chronicles of the Kings' it was,  
By the History Companee.  
'I'm a monarch,' he said  
(But a tear he shed)  
'And my picter here you see.

'Great and lasting is my renown,  
However the wits may flout  
As wide almost as this blessed town'  
(But he winced as if with gout).  
'I paid 'em like sin  
For to put me in,  
But it's O, and O, to be out!'

Ambrose Bierce

# Fame [one Thousand Years I Slept Beneath The Sod]

One thousand years I slept beneath the sod,  
My sleep in 1901 beginning,  
Then, by the action of some scurvy god  
Who happened then to recollect my sinning,  
I was revived and given another inning.  
On breaking from my grave I saw a crowd  
A formless multitude of men and women,  
Gathered about a ruin. Clamors loud  
I heard, and curses deep enough to swim in;  
And, pointing at me, one said: 'Let's put \_him\_ in.'  
Then each turned on me with an evil look,  
As in my ragged shroud I stood and shook.

'Nay, good Posterity,' I cried, 'forbear!  
If that's a jail I fain would be remaining  
Outside, for truly I should little care  
To catch my death of cold. I'm just regaining  
The life lost long ago by my disdain  
To take precautions against draughts like those  
That, haply, penetrate that cracked and splitting  
Old structure.' Then an aged wight arose  
From a chair of state in which he had been sitting,  
And with preliminary coughing, spitting  
And wheezing, said: 'T is not a jail, we're sure,  
Whate'er it may have been when it was newer.

'T was found two centuries ago, o'ergrown  
With brush and ivy, all undoored, ungated;  
And in restoring it we found a stone  
Set here and there in the dilapidated  
And crumbling frieze, inscribed, in antiquated  
Big characters, with certain uncouth names,  
Which we conclude were borne of old by awful  
Rapscallions guilty of all sinful games  
Vagrants engaged in purposes unlawful,  
And orators less sensible than jawful.  
So each ten years we add to the long row  
A name, the most unworthy that we know.'

'But why,' I asked, 'put \_me\_ in?' He replied:  
'You look it'-and the judgment pained me greatly;  
Right gladly would I then and there have died,  
But that I'd risen from the grave so lately.  
But on examining that solemn, stately  
Old ruin I remarked: 'My friend, you err  
The truth of this is just what I expected.  
This building in its time made quite a stir.  
I lived (was famous, too) when 't was erected.  
The names here first inscribed were much respected.  
This is the Hall of Fame, or I'm a stork,  
And this goat pasture once was called New York.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Famine's Realm

To him in whom the love of Nature has  
Imperfectly supplanted the desire  
And dread necessity of food, your shore,  
Fair Oakland, is a terror. Over all  
Your sunny level, from Tamaletown  
To where the Pestuary's fragrant slime,  
With dead dogs studded, bears its ailing fleet,  
Broods the still menace of starvation. Bones  
Of men and women bleach along the ways  
And pampered vultures sleep upon the trees.  
It is a land of death, and Famine there  
Holds sovereignty; though some there be her sway  
Who challenge, and intrenched in larders live,  
Drawing their sustentation from abroad.  
But woe to him, the stranger! He shall die  
As die the early righteous in the bud  
And promise of their prime. He, venturesome  
To penetrate the wilds rectangular  
Of grass-grown ways luxuriant of blooms,  
Frequented of the bee and of the blithe,  
Bold squirrel, strays with heedless feet afar  
From human habitation and is lost  
In mid-Broadway. There hunger seizes him,  
And (careless man! deeming God's providence  
Extends so far) he has not wherewithal  
To bate its urgency. Then, lo! appears  
A mealery-a restaurant-a place  
Where poison battles famine, and the two,  
Like fish-hawks warring in the upper sky  
For that which one has taken from the deep,  
Manage between them to dispatch the prey.  
He enters and leaves hope behind. There ends  
His history. Anon his bones, clean-picked  
By buzzards (with the bones himself had picked,  
Incautious) line the highway. O, my friends,  
Of all felonious and deadlywise  
Devices of the Enemy of Souls,  
Planted along the ways of life to snare  
Man's mortal and immortal part alike,

The Oakland restaurant is chief. It lives  
That man may die. It flourishes that life  
May wither. Its foundation stones repose  
On human hearts and hopes. I've seen in it  
Crabs stewed in milk and salad offered up  
With dressing so unholily compound  
That it included flour and sugar! Yea,  
I've eaten dog there!-dog, as I'm a man,  
Dog seethed in sewage of the town! No more  
Thy hand, Dyspepsia, assumes the pen  
And scrawls a tortured 'Finis' on the page.

Ambrose Bierce

# Fate

Alas, alas, for the tourist's guide!  
He turned from the beaten trail aside,  
Wandered bewildered, lay down and died.

O grim is the Irony of Fate:  
It switches the man of low estate  
And loosens the dogs upon the great.

It lights the fireman to roast the cook;  
The fisherman squirms upon the hook,  
And the flirt is slain with a tender look.

The undertaker it overtakes;  
It saddles the cavalier, and makes  
The haughtiest butcher into steaks.

Assist me, gods, to balk the decree!  
Nothing I'll do and nothing I'll be,  
In order that nothing be done to me.

Ambrose Bierce



# Finis Aeternitatis

Strolling at sunset in my native land,  
With fruits and flowers thick on either hand,  
I crossed a Shadow flung athwart my way,  
Emerging on a waste of rock and sand.

'The apples all are gone from here,' I said,  
'The roses perished and their spirits fled.  
I will go back.' A voice cried out: 'The man  
Is risen who eternally was dead!'

I turned and saw an angel standing there,  
Newly descended from the heights of air.  
Sweet-eyed compassion filled his face, his hands  
A naked sword and golden trumpet bare.

'Nay, 'twas not death, the shadow that I crossed,'  
I said. 'Its chill was but a touch of frost.  
It made me gasp, but quickly I came through,  
With breath recovered ere it scarce was lost.'

'Twas the same land! Remembered mountains thrust  
Grayed heads asky, and every dragging gust,  
In ashen valleys where my sons had reaped,  
Stirred in familiar river-beds the dust.

Some heights, where once the traveler was shown  
The youngest and the proudest city known,  
Lifted smooth ridges in the steely light  
Bleak, desolate acclivities of stone.

Where I had worshiped at my father's tomb,  
Within a massive temple's awful gloom,  
A jackal slunk along the naked rock,  
Affrighted by some prescience of doom.

Man's vestiges were nowhere to be found,  
Save one brass mausoleum on a mound  
(I knew it well) spared by the artist Time  
To emphasize the desolation round.

Into the stagnant sea the sullen sun  
Sank behind bars of crimson, one by one.  
'Eternity's at hand!' I cried aloud.  
'Eternity,' the angel said, 'is done.

For man is ages dead in every zone;  
The angels all are dead but I alone;  
The devils, too, are cold enough at last,  
And God lies dead before the great white throne!

'Tis foreordained that I bestride the shore  
When all are gone (as Gabriel did before,  
When I had throttled the last man alive)  
And swear Eternity shall be no more.'

'O Azrael-O Prince of Death, declare  
Why conquered I the grave?' I cried. 'What rare,  
Conspicuous virtues won this boon for me?'  
'You've been revived,' he said, 'to hear me swear.'

'Then let me creep again beneath the grass,  
And knock thou at yon pompous tomb of brass.  
If ears are what you want, Charles Crocker's there  
Betwixt the greatest ears, the greatest ass.'

He rapped, and while the hollow echoes rang,  
Out at the door a curst hyena sprang  
And fled! Said Azrael: 'His soul's escaped,'  
And closed the brazen portal with a bang.

Ambrose Bierce

# Fleet Strother

What! you were born, you animated doll,  
Within the shadow of the Capitol?  
'Twas always thought (and Bancroft so assures  
His trusting readers) it was reared in yours.

Ambrose Bierce

## For A Certain Critic

Let lowly themes engage my humble pen  
Stupidities of critics, not of men.  
Be it mine once more the maanderings to trace  
Of the expounders' self-directed race  
Their wire-drawn fancies, finically fine,  
Of diligent vacuity the sign.  
Let them in jargon of their trade rehearse  
The moral meaning of the random verse  
That runs spontaneous from the poet's pen  
To be half-blotted by ambitious men  
Who hope with his their meaner names to link  
By writing o'er it in another ink  
The thoughts unreal which they think they think,  
Until the mental eye in vain inspects  
The hateful palimpsest to find the text.

The lark ascending heavenward, loud and long  
Sings to the dawning day his wanton song.  
The moaning dove, attentive to the sound,  
Its hidden meaning hastens to expound:  
Explains its principles, design-in brief,  
Pronounces it a parable of grief!

The bee, just pausing ere he daubs his thigh  
With pollen from a hollyhock near by,  
Declares he never heard in terms so just  
The labor problem thoughtfully discussed!  
The browsing ass looks up and clears his whistle  
To say: 'A monologue upon the thistle!'  
Meanwhile the lark, descending, folds his wing  
And innocently asks: 'What!-did I sing?'

O literary parasites! who thrive  
Upon the fame of better men, derive  
Your sustenance by suction, like a leech,  
And, for you preach of them, think masters preach,  
Who find it half is profit, half delight,  
To write about what you could never write,  
Consider, pray, how sharp had been the throes

Of famine and discomfiture in those  
You write of if they had been critics, too,  
And doomed to write of nothing but of you!

Lo! where the gaping crowd throngs yonder tent,  
To see the lion resolutely bent!  
The prosing showman who the beast displays  
Grows rich and richer daily in its praise.  
But how if, to attract the curious yeoman,  
The lion owned the show and showed the showman?

Ambrose Bierce

## For Mayor

O Abner Doble-whose 'catarrhal name'  
Budd of that ilk might envy-'tis a rough  
Rude thing to say, but it is plain enough  
Your name is to be sneezed at: its acclaim  
Will 'fill the speaking trump of future fame'  
With an impeded utterance-a puff  
Suggesting that a pinch or two of snuff  
Would clear the tube and somewhat disinflate.  
Nay, Abner Doble, you'll not get from me  
My voice and influence: I'll cheer instead,  
Some other man; for when my voice ascends a  
Tall pinnacle of praise, and at high C  
Sustains a chosen name, it shan't be said  
My influence is naught but influenza.

Ambrose Bierce

# For Merit

To Parmentier Parisians raise  
A statue fine and large:  
He cooked potatoes fifty ways,  
Nor ever led a charge.

'\_Palma qui meruit'\_-the rest  
You knew as well as I;  
And best of all to him that best  
Of sayings will apply.

Let meaner men the poet's bays  
Or warrior's medal wear;  
Who cooks potatoes fifty ways  
Shall bear the palm-de terre.

Ambrose Bierce

## For President, Leland Stanford

Mahomet Stanford, with covetous stare,  
Gazed on a vision surpassingly fair:  
Far on the desert's remote extreme  
A mountain of gold with a mellow gleam  
Reared its high pinnacles into the sky,  
The work of \_mirage\_ to delude the eye.  
Pixley Pasha, at the Prophet's feet  
Piously licking them, swearing them sweet,  
Ventured, observing his master's glance,  
To beg that he order the mountain's advance.  
Mahomet Stanford exerted his will,  
Commanding: 'In Allah's name, hither, hill!'  
Never an inch the mountain came.  
Mahomet Stanford, with face aflame,  
Lifted his foot and kicked, alack!  
Pixley Pasha on the end of the back.  
Mollified thus and smiling free,  
He said: 'Since the mountain won't come to me,  
I'll go to the mountain.' With infinite pains,  
Camels in caravans, negroes in trains,  
Warriors, workmen, women, and fools,  
Food and water and mining tools  
He gathered about him, a mighty array,  
And the journey began at the close of day.  
All night they traveled-at early dawn  
Many a wearisome league had gone.  
Morning broke fair with a golden sheen,  
Mountain, alas, was nowhere seen!  
Mahomet Stanford pounded his breast,  
Pixley Pasha he thus addressed:  
'Dog of mendacity, cheat and slave,  
May jackasses sing o'er your grandfather's grave!'

Ambrose Bierce



## For Tat

O, heavenly powers! will wonders never cease?  
Hair upon dogs and feathers upon geese!  
The boys in mischief and the pigs in mire!  
The drinking water wet! the coal on fire!  
In meadows, rivulets surpassing fair,  
Forever running, yet forever there!  
A tail appended to the gray baboon!  
A person coming out of a saloon!  
Last, and of all most marvelous to see,  
A female Yahoo flinging filth at me!  
If 'twould but stick I'd bear upon my coat  
May Little's proof that she is fit to vote.

Ambrose Bierce

# For Wounds

O bear me, gods, to some enchanted isle  
Where woman's tears can antidote her smile.

Ambrose Bierce

# Foresight

An 'actors' cemetery! Sure  
The devil never tires  
Of planning places to procure  
The sticks to feed his fires.

Ambrose Bierce

# Foundations Of The State

Observe, dear Lord, what lively pranks  
Are played by sentimental cranks!  
First this one mounts his hinder hoofs  
And brays the chimneys off the roofs;  
Then that one, with exalted voice,  
Expounds the thesis of his choice,  
Our understandings to bombard,  
Till all the window panes are starred!  
A third augments the vocal shock  
Till steeples to their bases rock,  
Confessing, as they humbly nod,  
They hear and mark the will of God.  
A fourth in oral thunder vents  
His awful penury of sense  
Till dogs with sympathetic howls,  
And lowing cows, and cackling fowls,  
Hens, geese, and all domestic birds,  
Attest the wisdom of his words.  
Cranks thus their intellects deflate  
Of theories about the State.  
This one avers 'tis built on Truth,  
And that on Temperance. This youth  
Declares that Science bears the pile;  
That graybeard, with a holy smile,  
Says Faith is the supporting stone;  
While women swear that Love alone  
Could so unflinchingly endure  
The heavy load. And some are sure  
The solemn vow of Christian Wedlock  
Is the indubitable bedrock.

Physicians once about the bed  
Of one whose life was nearly sped  
Blew up a disputatious breeze  
About the cause of his disease:  
This, that and t' other thing they blamed.  
'Tut, tut!' the dying man exclaimed,  
'What made me ill I do not care;  
You've not an ounce of it, I'll swear.

And if you had the skill to make it  
I'd see you hanged before I'd take it!

Ambrose Bierce

## Four Candidates For Senator

To flatter your way to the goad of your hope,  
O plausible Mr. Perkins,  
You'll need ten tons of the softest soap  
And butter a thousand firkins.  
The soap you could put to a better use  
In washing your hands of ambition  
Ere the butter's used for cooking your goose  
To a beautiful brown condition.

'The Railroad can't run Stanford.' That is so  
The tail can't curl the pig; but then, you know,  
Inside the vegetable-garden's pale  
The pig will eat more cabbage than the tail.

When Sargent struts by all the lawmakers say:  
'Right-left!' It is fair to infer  
The right will get left, nor polar the day  
When he makes that thing to occur.

Not so, not so, 'tis a joke, that cry  
Foolish and dull and small:  
He so bores them for votes that they mean to imply  
He's a drill-Sargent, that is all.

Gods! what a sight! Astride McClure's broad back  
Estee jogs round the Senatorial track,  
The crowd all undecided, as they pass,  
Whether to cheer the man or cheer the ass.  
They stop: the man to lower his feet is seen  
And the tired beast, withdrawing from between,  
Mounts, as they start again, the biped's neck,  
And scarce the crowd can say which one's on deck.



# Four Of A Kind

ROBERT F. MORROW

Dear man! although a stranger and a foe  
To soft affection's humanizing glow;  
Although untaught how manly hearts may throb  
With more desires than the desire to rob;  
Although as void of tenderness as wit,  
And owning nothing soft but Maurice Schmitt;  
Although polluted, shunned and in disgrace,  
You fill me with a passion to embrace!  
Attentive to your look, your smile, your beck,  
I watch and wait to fall upon your neck.  
Lord of my love, and idol of my hope,  
You are my Valentine, and I'm  
A ROPE.

ALFRED CLARKE JR.

Illustrious son of an illustrious sire  
Entrusted with the duty to cry 'Fire!'  
And call the engines out, exert your power  
With care. When, looking from your lofty tower,  
You see a ruddy light on every wall,  
Pause for a moment ere you sound the call:  
It may be from a fire, it may be, too,  
From good men's blushes when they think of you.

JUDGE RUTLEDGE

Sultan of Stupids! with enough of brains  
To go indoors in all uncommon rains,  
But not enough to stay there when the storm  
Is past. When all the world is dry and warm,  
In irking comfort, lamentably gay,  
Keeping the evil tenor of your way,  
You walk abroad, sweet, beautiful and smug,  
And Justice hears you with her wonted shrug,



Lifts her broad bandage half-an-inch and keeps  
One eye upon you while the other weeps.

W.H.L. BARNES

Happy the man who sin's proverbial wage  
Receives on the instalment plan-in age.  
For him the bulldog pistol's honest bark  
Has naught of terror in its blunt remark.  
He looks with calmness on the gleaming steel  
If e'er it touched his heart he did not feel:  
Superior hardness turned its point away,  
Though urged by fond affinity to stay;  
His bloodless veins ignored the futile stroke,  
And moral mildew kept the cut in cloak.  
Happy the man, I say, to whom the wage  
Of sin has been commuted into age.  
Yet not \_quite\_ happy-hark, that horrid cry!  
His cruel mirror wounds him in the eye!

Ambrose Bierce

# France

Unhappy State! with horrors still to strive:  
Thy Hugo dead, thy Boulanger alive;  
A Prince who'd govern where he dares not dwell,  
And who for power would his birthright sell  
Who, anxious o'er his enemies to reign,  
Grabs at the scepter and conceals the chain;  
While pugnant factions mutually strive  
By cutting throats to keep the land alive.  
Perverse in passion, as in pride perverse  
To all a mistress, to thyself a curse;  
Sweetheart of Europe! every sun's embrace  
Matures the charm and poison of thy grace.  
Yet time to thee nor peace nor wisdom brings:  
In blood of citizens and blood of kings  
The stones of thy stability are set,  
And the fair fabric trembles at a threat.

Ambrose Bierce

# Francine

Did I believe the angels soon would call  
You, my beloved, to the other shore,  
And I should never see you any more,  
I love you so I know that I should fall  
Into dejection utterly, and all  
Love's pretty pageantry, wherein we bore  
Twin banners bravely in the tumult's fore,  
Would seem as shadows idling on a wall.  
So daintily I love you that my love  
Endures no rumor of the winter's breath,  
And only blossoms for it thinks the sky  
Forever gracious, and the stars above  
Forever friendly. Even the fear of death  
Were frost wherein its roses all would die.

Ambrose Bierce

# Freedom

Freedom, as every schoolboy knows,  
Once shrieked as Kosciusko fell;  
On every wind, indeed, that blows  
I hear her yell.

She screams whenever monarchs meet,  
And parliaments as well,  
To bind the chains about her feet  
And toll her knell.

And when the sovereign people cast  
The votes they cannot spell,  
Upon the pestilential blast  
Her clamors swell.

For all to whom the power's given  
To sway or to compel,  
Among themselves apportion Heaven  
And give her Hell.

Blary O'Gary.

Ambrose Bierce

## From The Minutes

When, with the force of a ram that discharges its ponderous body  
Straight at the rear elevation of the luckless culler of simples,  
The foot of Herculean Kilgore-statesman of surname suggestive  
Or carnage unspeakable!-lit like a missile prodigious  
Upon the Congressional door with a monstrous and mighty momentum,  
Causing that vain ineffective bar to political freedom  
To fly from its hinges, effacing the nasal excrescence of Dingley,  
That luckless one, decently veiling the ruin with ready bandanna,  
Lamented the loss of his eminence, sadly with sobs as follows:  
'Ah, why was I ever elected to the halls of legislation,  
So soon to be shown the door with pitiless emphasis? Truly,  
I've leaned on a broken Reed, and the same has gone back on me meanly.  
Where now is my prominence, erstwhile in council conspicuous, patent?  
Alas, I did never before understand what I now see clearly,  
To wit, that Democracy tends to level all human distinctions!'  
His fate so untoward and sad the Pine-tree statesman, bewailing,  
Stood in the corridor there while Democrats freed from confinement  
Came trooping forth from the chamber, dissembling all, as they passed him,  
Hilarious sentiments painful indeed to observe, and remarking:  
'O friend and colleague of the Speaker, what ails the unjoyous proboscis?'

Ambrose Bierce

# From Top To Bottom

O Buddha, had you but foreknown  
The vices of your priesthood  
It would have made you twist and moan  
As any wounded beast would.  
You would have damned the entire lot  
And turned a Christian, would you not?

There were no Christians, I'll allow,  
In your day; that would only  
Have brought distinction. Even now  
A Christian might feel lonely.  
All take the name, but facts are things  
As stubborn as the will of kings.

The priests were ignorant and low  
When ridiculed by Lucian;  
The records, could we read, might show  
The same of times Confucian.  
And yet the fact I can't disguise  
That Deacon Rankin's good and wise.

'Tis true he is not quite a priest,  
Nor more than half a preacher;  
But he exhorts as loud at least  
As any living creature.  
And when the plate is passed about  
He never takes a penny out.

From Buddha down to Rankin! There,  
I never did intend to.  
This pen's a buzzard's quill, I swear,  
Such subjects to descend to.  
When from the humming-bird I've wrung  
A plume I'll write of Mike de Young.

Ambrose Bierce

## From Virginia To Paris

The polecat, sovereign of its native wood,  
Dashes damnation upon bad and good;  
The health of all the upas trees impairs  
By exhalations deadlier than theirs;  
Poisons the rattlesnake and warts the toad  
The creeks go rotten and the rocks corrode!  
She shakes o'er breathless hill and shrinking dale  
The horrid aspergillus of her tail!  
From every saturated hair, till dry,  
The spargent fragrances divergent fly,  
Deafen the earth and scream along the sky!

Removed to alien scenes, amid the strife  
Of urban odors to ungladden life  
Where gas and sewers and dead dogs conspire  
The flesh to torture and the soul to fire  
Where all the 'well defined and several stinks'  
Known to mankind hold revel and high jinks  
Humbled in spirit, smitten with a sense  
Of lost distinction, leveled eminence,  
She suddenly resigns her baleful trust,  
Nor ever lays again our mortal dust.  
Her powers atrophied, her vigor sunk,  
She lives deodorized, a sweeter skunk.

Ambrose Bierce

## General B.F. Butler

Thy flesh to earth, thy soul to God,  
We gave, O gallant brother;  
And o'er thy grave the awkward squad  
Fired into one another!

Ambrose Bierce



# Genesis [god Said, 'Let There Be Crime,' And The Command]

God said, 'Let there be Crime,' and the command  
Brought Satan, leading Stoneman by the hand.  
'Why, that's Stupidity, not Crime,' said God  
'Bring what I ordered.' Satan with a nod  
Replied, 'This is one element-when I  
The other-Opportunity-supply  
In just equivalent, the two'll affine  
And in a chemical embrace combine  
And Crime result-for Crime can only be  
Stupiditate of Opportunity.'  
So leaving Stoneman (not as yet endowed  
With soul) in special session on a cloud,  
Nick to his sooty laboratory went,  
Returning soon with t'other element.  
'Here's Opportunity,' he said, and put  
Pen, ink, and paper down at Stoneman's foot.  
He seized them-Heaven was filled with fires and thunders,  
And Crime was added to Creation's wonders!

Ambrose Bierce

# Genesis [god Said: 'Let There Be Man,' And From The Clay]

God said: 'Let there be Man,' and from the clay  
Adam came forth and, thoughtful, walked away.  
The matrix whence his body was obtained,  
An empty, man-shaped cavity, remained  
All unregarded from that early time  
Till in a recent storm it filled with slime.  
Now Satan, envying the Master's power  
To make the meat himself could but devour,  
Strolled to the place and, standing by the pool,  
Exerted all his will to make a fool.  
A miracle!-from out that ancient hole  
Rose Morehouse, lacking nothing but a soul.  
'To give him that I've not the power divine,'  
Said Satan, sadly, 'but I'll lend him mine.'  
He breathed it into him, a vapor black,  
And to this day has never got it back.

Ambrose Bierce

## George A. Knight

Attorney Knight, it happens so sometimes  
That lawyers, justifying cut-throats' crimes  
For hire-calumniating, too, for gold,  
The dead, dumb victims cruelly unsouled  
Speak, through the press, to a tribunal far  
More honorable than their Honors are,  
A court that sits not with assenting smile  
While living rogues dead gentleman revile,  
A court where scoundrel ethics of your trade  
Confuse no judgment and no cheating aid,  
The Court of Honest Souls, where you in vain  
May plead your right to falsify for gain,  
Sternly reminded if a man engage  
To serve assassins for the liar's wage,  
His mouth with vilifying falsehoods crammed,  
He's twice detestable and doubly damned!

Attorney Knight, defending Powell, you,  
To earn your fee, so energetic grew  
(So like a hound, the pride of all the pack,  
Clapping your nose upon the dead man's track  
To run his faults to earth-at least proclaim  
At vacant holes the overtaken game)  
That men who marked you nourishing the tongue,  
And saw your arms so vigorously swung,  
All marveled how so light a breeze could stir  
So great a windmill to so great a whirr!  
Little they knew, or surely they had grinned,  
The mill was laboring to raise the wind.

Ralph Smith a 'shoulder-striker'! God, O hear  
This hardy man's description of thy dear  
Dead child, the gentlest soul, save only One,  
E'er born in any land beneath the sun.  
All silent benefactions still he wrought:  
High deed and gracious speech and noble thought,  
Kept all thy law, and, seeking still the right,  
Upon his blameless breast received the light.

'Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints,' he cried  
Whose wrath was deep as his comparison wide  
Milton, thy servant. Nay, thy will be done:  
To smite or spare-to me it all is one.  
Can vengeance bring my sorrow to an end,  
Or justice give me back my buried friend?  
But if some Milton vainly now implore,  
And Powell prosper as he did before,  
Yet 'twere too much that, making no ado,  
Thy saints be slaughtered and be slandered too.  
So, Lord, make Knight his weapon keep in sheath,  
Or do Thou wrest it from between his teeth!

Ambrose Bierce

# Geotheos

As sweet as the look of a lover  
Saluting the eyes of a maid  
That blossom to blue as the maid  
Is ablush to the glances above her,  
The sunshine is gilding the glade  
And lifting the lark out of shade.

Sing therefore high praises, and therefore  
Sing songs that are ancient as gold,  
Of earth in her garments of gold;  
Nor ask of their meaning, nor wherefore  
They charm as of yore, for behold!  
The Earth is as fair as of old.

Sing songs of the pride of the mountains,  
And songs of the strength of the seas,  
And the fountains that fall to the seas  
From the hands of the hills, and the fountains  
That shine in the temples of trees,  
In valleys of roses and bees.

Sing songs that are dreamy and tender,  
Of slender Arabian palms,  
And shadows that circle the palms,  
Where caravans out of the splendor,  
Are kneeling in blossoms and balms,  
In islands of infinite calms.

Barbaric, O Man, was thy runing  
When mountains were stained as with wine  
By the dawning of Time, and as wine  
Were the seas, yet its echoes are crooning,  
Achant in the gusty pine  
And the pulse of the poet's line.



## Haec Fabula Docet

A rat who'd gorged a box of bane  
And suffered an internal pain,  
Came from his hole to die (the label  
Required it if the rat were able)  
And found outside his habitat  
A limpid stream. Of bane and rat  
'T was all unconscious; in the sun  
It ran and prattled just for fun.  
Keen to allay his inward throes,  
The beast immersed his filthy nose  
And drank-then, bloated by the stream,  
And filled with superheated steam,  
Exploded with a rascal smell,  
Remarking, as his fragments fell  
Astonished in the brook: 'I'm thinking  
This water's damned unwholesome drinking!'

Ambrose Bierce

# Hell

The friends who stood about my bed  
Looked down upon my face and said:  
'God's will be done-the fellow's dead.'

When from my body I was free  
I straightway felt myself, ah me!  
Sink downward to the life to be.

Full twenty centuries I fell,  
And then alighted. 'Here you dwell  
For aye,' a Voice cried-'this is Hell!'

A landscape lay about my feet,  
Where trees were green and flowers sweet.  
The climate was devoid of heat.

The sun looked down with gentle beam  
Upon the bosom of the stream,  
Nor saw I any sign of steam.

The waters by the sky were tinged,  
The hills with light and color fringed.  
Birds warbled on the wing unsinged.

'Ah, no, this is not Hell,' I cried;  
'The preachers ne'er so greatly lied.  
This is Earth's spirit glorified!

'Good souls do not in Hades dwell,  
And, look, there's John P. Irish!' 'Well,'  
The Voice said, 'that's what makes it Hell.'

Ambrose Bierce



# History

What wrecked the Roman power? One says vice,  
Another indolence, another dice.  
Emascle says polygamy. 'Not so,'  
Says Impycu-"twas luxury and show.'  
The parson, lifting up a brow of brass,  
Swears superstition gave the \_coup de grace\_,  
Great Allison, the statesman-chap affirms  
'Twas lack of coins (croaks Medico: "T was worms')  
And John P. Jones the swift suggestion collars,  
Averring the no coins were silver dollars.  
Thus, through the ages, each presuming quack  
Turns the poor corpse upon its rotten back,  
Holds a new 'autopsy' and finds that death  
Resulted partly from the want of breath,  
But chiefly from some visitation sad  
That points his argument or serves his fad.  
They're all in error-never human mind  
The cause of the disaster has divined.  
What slew the Roman power? Well, provided  
You'll keep the secret, I will tell you. I did.

Ambrose Bierce

# Homo Podunkensis

As the poor ass that from his paddock strays  
Might sound abroad his field-companions' praise,  
Recounting volubly their well-bred leer,  
Their port impressive and their wealth of ear,  
Mistaking for the world's assent the clang  
Of echoes mocking his accurst harangue;  
So the dull clown, untraveled though at large,  
Visits the city on the ocean's marge,  
Expands his eyes and marvels to remark  
Each coastwise schooner and each alien bark;  
Prates of 'all nations,' wonders as he stares  
That native merchants sell imported wares,  
Nor comprehends how in his very view  
A foreign vessel has a foreign crew;  
Yet, faithful to the hamlet of his birth,  
Swears it superior to aught on earth,  
Sighs for the temples locally renowned  
The village school-house and the village pound  
And chinks upon the palaces of Rome  
The peasant sentiments of 'Home, Sweet Home!'

Ambrose Bierce

# Hospitality

Why ask me, Gastrogogue, to dine  
(Unless to praise your rascal wine)  
Yet never ask some luckless sinner  
Who needs, as I do not, a dinner?

Ambrose Bierce

# Humility

Great poets fire the world with fagots big  
That make a crackling racket,  
But I'm content with but a whispering twig  
To warm some single jacket.

Ambrose Bierce

# Ignis Fatuus

Weep, weep, each loyal partisan,  
For Buckley, king of hearts;  
A most accomplished man; a man  
Of parts-of foreign parts.

Long years he ruled with gentle sway,  
Nor grew his glory dim;  
And he would be with us to-day  
If we were but with him.

Men wondered at his going off  
In such a sudden way;  
'Twas thought, as he had come to scoff  
He would remain to prey.

Since he is gone we're all agreed  
That he is what men call  
A crook: his very steps, indeed,  
Are bent-to Montreal.

So let our tears unhindered flow,  
Our sighs and groans have way:  
It matters not how much we Oh!  
The devil is to pay.

Ambrose Bierce

# In Contumaciam

Och! Father McGlynn,  
Ye appear to be in  
Fer a bit of a bout wid the Pope;  
An' there's divil a doubt  
But he's knockin' ye out  
While ye're hangin' onto the rope.

An' soon ye'll lave home  
To thtravel to Rome,  
For its bound to Canossa ye are.  
Persistin' to shtay  
When ye're ordered away  
Bedad! that is goin' too far!

Ambrose Bierce

## In Defense

You may say, if you please, Johnny Bull, that our girls  
Are crazy to marry your dukes and your earls;  
But I've heard that the maids of your own little isle  
Greet bachelor lords with a favoring smile.

Nay, titles, 'tis said in defense of our fair,  
Are popular here because popular there;  
And for them our ladies persistently go  
Because 'tis exceedingly English, you know.

Whatever the motive, you'll have to confess  
The effort's attended with easy success;  
And-pardon the freedom-'tis thought, over here,  
'Tis mortification you mask with a sneer.

It's all very well, sir, your scorn to parade  
Of the high nasal twang of the Yankee maid,  
But, ah, to my lord when he dares to propose  
No sound is so sweet as that 'Yes' from the nose.

Our ladies, we grant, walk alone in the street  
(Observe, by-the-by, on what delicate feet!)  
'Tis a habit they got here at home, where they say  
The men from politeness go seldom astray.

Ah, well, if the dukes and the earls and that lot  
Can stand it (God succor them if they cannot!)  
Your commoners ought to assent, I am sure,  
And what they 're not called on to suffer, endure.

"'Tis nothing but money?' 'Your nobles are bought?'  
As to that, I submit, it is commonly thought  
That England's a country not specially free  
Of Croesi and (if you'll allow it) Croesae.

You've many a widow and many a girl  
With money to purchase a duke or an earl.  
'Tis a very remarkable thing, you'll agree,  
When goods import buyers from over the sea.

Alas for the woman of Albion's isle!  
She may simper; as well as she can she may smile;  
She may wear pantalettes and an air of repose  
But my lord of the future will talk through his nose.

Ambrose Bierce



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Ambrose Bierce

## In High Life

Sir Impycu Lackland, from over the sea,  
Has led to the altar Miss Bloatie Bondee.  
The wedding took place at the Church of St. Blare;  
The fashion, the rank and the wealth were all there  
No person was absent of all whom one meets.  
Lord Mammon himself bowed them into their seats,  
While good Sir John Satan attended the door  
And Sexton Beelzebub managed the floor,  
Respectfully keeping each dog to its rug,  
Preserving the peace between poodle and pug.  
Twelve bridesmaids escorted the bride up the aisle  
To blush in her blush and to smile in her smile;  
Twelve groomsmen supported the eminent groom  
To scowl in his scowl and to gloom in his gloom.  
The rites were performed by the hand and the lip  
Of his Grace the Diocesan, Billingham Pip,  
Assisted by three able-bodied divines.  
He prayed and they grunted, he read, they made signs.  
Such fashion, such beauty, such dressing, such grace  
Were ne'er before seen in that heavenly place!  
That night, full of gin, and all blazing inside,  
Sir Impycu blackened the eyes of his bride.

Ambrose Bierce

## In His Hand

De Young (in Chicago the story is told)  
'Took his life in his hand,' like a warrior bold,  
And stood before Buckley-who thought him behind,  
For Buckley, the man-eating monster is blind.  
'Count fairly the ballots!' so rang the demand  
Of the gallant De Young, with his life in his hand.  
'Tis done, and the struggle is ended. No more  
He havocs the battle-field, gilt with the gore  
Of slain reputations. No more he defies  
His 'lying opponents' with deadlier lies.  
His trumpet is hushed and his belt is unbound  
His enemies' characters cumber the ground.  
They bloat on the war-plain with ink all asoak,  
The fortunate candidates perching to croak.  
No more he will charge, with a daring divine,  
His foes with corruption, his friends by the line.  
The thunders are stilled of the horrid campaign,  
De Young is triumphant, and never again  
Will he need, with his life in his hand, to roar:  
'Count fair or, by G--, I will die on your floor!'  
His life has been spared, for his sins to atone,  
And the hand that he took it in washed with cologne.

Ambrose Bierce

## In Memoriam

Beauty (they called her) wasn't a maid  
Of many things in the world afraid.  
She wasn't a maid who turned and fled  
At sight of a mouse, alive or dead.  
She wasn't a maid a man could 'shoo'  
By shouting, however abruptly, 'Boo!'  
She wasn't a maid who'd run and hide  
If her face and figure you idly eyed.  
She wasn't a maid who'd blush and shake  
When asked what part of the fowl she'd take.  
(I blush myself to confess she preferred,  
And commonly got, the most of the bird.)  
She wasn't a maid to simper because  
She was asked to sing-if she ever was.

In short, if the truth must be displayed  
\_In puris\_-Beauty wasn't a maid.  
Beauty, furry and fine and fat,  
Yawny and clawy, sleek and all that,  
Was a pampered and spoiled Angora cat!

I loved her well, and I'm proud that she  
Wasn't indifferent, quite, to me;  
In fact I have sometimes gone so far  
(You know, mesdames, how silly men are)  
As to think she preferred-excuse the conceit  
\_My\_ legs upon which to sharpen her feet.  
Perhaps it shouldn't have gone for much,  
But I started and thrilled beneath her touch!

Ah, well, that's ancient history now:  
The fingers of Time have touched my brow,  
And I hear with never a start to-day  
That Beauty has passed from the earth away.  
Gone!-her death-song (it killed her) sung.  
Gone!-her fiddlestrings all unstrung.  
Gone to the bliss of a new \_regime  
Of turkey smothered in seas of cream;  
Of roasted mice (a superior breed,

To science unknown and the coarser need  
Of the living cat) cooked by the flame  
Of the dainty soul of an erring dame  
Who gave to purity all her care,  
Neglecting the duty of daily prayer,  
Crisp, delicate mice, just touched with spice  
By the ghost of a breeze from Paradise;  
A very digestible sort of mice.

Let scoffers sneer, I propose to hold  
That Beauty has mounted the Stair of Gold,  
To eat and eat, forever and aye,  
On a velvet rug from a golden tray.  
But the human spirit-that is my creed  
Rots in the ground like a barren seed.  
That is my creed, abhorred by Man  
But approved by Cat since time began.  
Till Death shall kick at me, thundering 'Scat!'  
I shall hold to that, I shall hold to that.

Ambrose Bierce

## In The Binnacle

The Church's compass, if you please,  
Has two or three (or more) degrees  
Of variation;  
And many a soul has gone to grief  
On this or that or t'other reef  
Through faith unreckoning or brief  
Miscalculation.  
Misguidance is of perils chief  
To navigation.

The obsequious thing makes, too, you'll mark,  
Obeisance through a little arc  
Of declination;  
For Satan, fearing witches, drew  
From Death's pale horse, one day, a shoe,  
And nailed it to his door to undo  
Their machination.  
Since then the needle dips to woo  
His habitation.

Ambrose Bierce

# In Upper San Francisco

I heard that Heaven was bright and fair,  
And politicians dwelt not there.

'Twas said by knowing ones that they  
Were in the Elsewhere-so to say.

So, waking from my last long sleep,  
I took my place among the sheep.

I passed the gate-Saint Peter eyed  
Me sharply as I stepped inside.

He thought, as afterward I learned,  
That I was Chris, the Unreturned.

The new Jerusalem-ah me,  
It was a sorry sight to see!

The mansions of the blest were there,  
And mostly they were fine and fair;

But O, such streets!-so deep and wide,  
And all unpaved, from side to side!

And in a public square there grew  
A blighted tree, most sad to view.

From off its trunk the bark was ripped  
Its very branches all were stripped!

An angel perched upon the fence  
With all the grace of indolence.

'Celestial bird,' I cried, in pain,  
'What vandal wrought this wreck? Explain.'

He raised his eyelids as if tired:  
'What is a Vandal?' he inquired.



'This is the Tree of Life. 'Twas stripped  
By Durst and Siebe, who have shipped

'The bark across the Jordan-see?  
And sold it to a tannery.'

'Alas,' I sighed, 'their old-time tricks!  
That pavement, too, of golden bricks

'They've gobbled that?' But with a scowl,  
'You greatly wrong them,' said the fowl:

'Twas Gilleran did that, I fear-  
Head of the Street Department here.'

'What! what!' cried I-'you let such chaps  
Come here? You've Satan, too, perhaps.'

'We had him, yes, but off he went,  
Yet showed some purpose to repent;

'But since your priests and parsons filled  
The place with those their preaching killed'

(Here Siebe passed along with Durst,  
Psalming as if their lungs would burst)

'He swears his foot no more shall press  
('Tis cloven, anyhow, I guess)

'Our soil. In short, he's out on strike  
But devils are not all alike.'

Lo! Gilleran came down the street,  
Pressing the soil with broad, flat feet!

Ambrose Bierce

# Incurable

From pride, joy, hate, greed, melancholy  
From any kind of vice, or folly,  
Bias, propensity or passion  
That is in prevalence and fashion,  
Save one, the sufferer or lover  
May, by the grace of God, recover:  
Alone that spiritual tetter,  
The zeal to make creation better,  
Glow still immedicably warmer.  
Who knows of a reformed reformer?

Ambrose Bierce

# Indicted

Dear Bruner, once we had a little talk  
(That is to say, 'twas I did all the talking)  
About the manner of your moral walk:  
How devious the trail you made in stalking,  
On level ground, your law-protected game  
'Another's Dollar' is, I think, its name.

Your crooked course more recently is not  
So blamable; for, truly, you have stumbled  
On evil days; and 'tis your luckless lot  
To traverse spaces (with a spirit humbled,  
Contrite, dejected and divinely sad)  
Where, 'tis confessed, the walking's rather bad.

Jordan, the song says, is a road (I thought  
It was a river) that is hard to travel;  
And Dublin, if you'd find it, must be sought  
Along a highway with more rocks than gravel.  
In difficulty neither can compete  
With that wherein you navigate your feet.

As once George Gorham said of Pixley, so  
I say of you: 'The prison yawns before you,  
The turnkey stalks behind!' Now will you go?  
Or lag, and let that functionary floor you?  
To change the metaphor-you seem to be  
Between Judge Wallace and the deep, deep sea!

Ambrose Bierce

# Industrial Discontent

As time rolled on the whole world came to be  
A desolation and a darksome curse;  
And some one said: 'The changes that you see  
In the fair frame of things, from bad to worse,  
Are wrought by strikes. The sun withdrew his glimmer  
Because the moon assisted with her shimmer.

'Then, when poor Luna, straining very hard,  
Doubled her light to serve a darkling world,  
He called her 'scab,' and meanly would retard  
Her rising: and at last the villain hurled  
A heavy beam which knocked her o'er the Lion  
Into the nebula of great O'Ryan.

'The planets all had struck some time before,  
Demanding what they said were equal rights:  
Some pointing out that others had far more  
That a fair dividend of satellites.  
So all went out-though those the best provided,  
If they had dared, would rather have abided.

'The stars struck too-I think it was because  
The comets had more liberty than they,  
And were not bound by any hampering laws,  
While they were fixed; and there are those who say  
The comets' tresses nettled poor Altair,  
An aged orb that hasn't any hair.

'The earth's the only one that isn't in  
The movement-I suppose because she's watched  
With horror and disgust how her fair skin  
Her pranking parasites have fouled and blotched  
With blood and grease in every labor riot,  
When seeing any purse or throat to fly at.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Inspiration

O hoary sculptor, stay thy hand:  
I fain would view the lettered stone.  
What carvest thou?-perchance some grand  
And solemn fancy all thine own.  
For oft to know the fitting word  
Some humble worker God permits.  
'Jain Ann Meginnis,  
Agid 3rd.  
He givith His beluved fits.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Invocation

Goddess of Liberty! O thou  
Whose tearless eyes behold the chain,  
And look unmoved upon the slain,  
Eternal peace upon thy brow,-

Before thy shrine the races press,  
Thy perfect favor to implore-  
The proudest tyrant asks no more,  
The ironed anarchist no less.

Thine altar-coals that touch the lips  
Of prophets kindle, too, the brand  
By Discord flung with wanton hand  
Among the houses and the ships.

Upon thy tranquil front the star  
Burns bleak and passionless and white,  
Its cold inclemency of light  
More dreadful than the shadows are.

Thy name we do not here invoke  
Our civic rites to sanctify:  
Enthroned in thy remoter sky,  
Thou heedest not our broken yoke.

Thou carest not for such as we:  
Our millions die to serve the still  
And secret purpose of thy will.  
They perish-what is that to thee?

The light that fills the patriot's tomb  
Is not of thee. The shining crown  
Compassionately offered down

To those who falter in the gloom,

And fall, and call upon thy name,  
And die desiring-'tis the sign  
Of a diviner love than thine,  
Rewarding with a richer fame.

To him alone let freemen cry  
Who hears alike the victor's shout,  
The song of faith, the moan of doubt,  
And bends him from his nearer sky.

God of my country and my race!  
So greater than the gods of old-  
So fairer than the prophets told  
Who dimly saw and feared thy face,-

Who didst but half reveal thy will  
And gracious ends to their desire,  
Behind the dawn's advancing fire  
Thy tender day-beam veiling still,-

To whom the unceasing suns belong,  
And cause is one with consequence,-  
To whose divine, inclusive sense  
The moan is blended with the song,-

Whose laws, imperfect and unjust,  
Thy just and perfect purpose serve:  
The needle, howsoe'er it swerve,  
Still warranting the sailor's trust,-

God, lift thy hand and make us free  
To crown the work thou hast designed.  
O, strike away the chains that bind

Our souls to one idolatry!

The liberty thy love hath given  
We thank thee for. We thank thee for  
Our great dead fathers' holy war  
Wherein our manacles were riven.

We thank thee for the stronger stroke  
Ourselves delivered and incurred  
When-thine incitement half unheard-  
The chains we riveted we broke.

We thank thee that beyond the sea  
Thy people, growing ever wise,  
Turn to the west their serious eyes  
And dumbly strive to be as we.

As when the sun's returning flame  
Upon the Nileside statue shone,  
And struck from the enchanted stone  
The music of a mighty fame,

Let Man salute the rising day  
Of Liberty, but not adore.  
'Tis Opportunity-no more-  
A useful, not a sacred, ray.

It bringeth good, it bringeth ill,  
As he possessing shall elect.  
He maketh it of none effect  
Who walketh not within thy will.

Give thou more or less, as we  
Shall serve the right or serve the wrong.  
Confirm our freedom but so long



As we are worthy to be free.

But when (O, distant be the time!)  
Majorities in passion draw  
Insurgent swords to murder Law,  
And all the land is red with crime;

Or-nearer menace!-when the band  
Of feeble spirits cringe and plead  
To the gigantic strength of Greed,  
And fawn upon his iron hand;-

Nay, when the steps to state are worn  
In hollows by the feet of thieves,  
And Mammon sits among the sheaves  
And chuckles while the reapers mourn:

Then stay thy miracle!-replace  
The broken throne, repair the chain,  
Restore the interrupted reign  
And veil again thy patient face.

Lo! here upon the world's extreme  
We stand with lifted arms and dare  
By thine eternal name to swear  
Our country, which so fair we deem-

Upon whose hills, a bannered throng,  
The spirits of the sun display  
Their flashing lances day by day  
And hear the sea's pacific song-

Shall be so ruled in right and grace  
That men shall say: 'O, drive afield  
The lawless eagle from the shield,

And call an angel to the place!

Ambrose Bierce

## J.F.B.

How well this man unfolded to our view  
The world's beliefs of Death and Heaven and Hell  
This man whose own convictions none could tell,  
Nor if his maze of reason had a clew.  
Dogmas he wrote for daily bread, but knew  
The fair philosophies of doubt so well  
That while we listened to his words there fell  
Some that were strangely comforting, though true.  
Marking how wise we grew upon his doubt,  
We said: 'If so, by groping in the night,  
He can proclaim some certain paths of trust,  
How great our profit if he saw about  
His feet the highways leading to the light.'  
Now he sees all. Ah, Christ! his mouth is dust!

Ambrose Bierce

## James L. Flood

As oft it happens in the youth of day  
That mists obscure the sun's imperfect ray,  
Who, as he's mounting to the dome's extreme,  
Smites and dispels them with a steeper beam,  
So you the vapors that begirt your birth  
Consumed, and manifested all your worth.  
But still one early vice obstructs the light  
And sullies all the visible and bright  
Display of mind and character. You write.

Ambrose Bierce

# Johndonkey

Thus the poor ass whose appetite has ne'er  
Known than the thistle any sweeter fare  
Thinks all the world eats thistles. Thus the clown,  
The wit and Mentor of the country town,  
Grins through the collar of a horse and thinks  
Others for pleasure do as he for drinks,  
Though secretly, because unwilling still  
In public to attest their lack of skill.  
Each dunce whose life and mind all follies mar  
Believes as he is all men living are  
His vices theirs, their understandings his;  
Naught that he knows not, all he fancies, \_is\_.  
How odd that any mind such stuff should boast!  
How natural to write it in the \_Post\_!

Ambrose Bierce

# Judex Judicatus

Judge Armstrong, when the poor have sought your aid,  
To be released from vows that they have made  
In haste, and leisurely repented, you,  
As stern as Rhadamanthus (Minos too,  
And AEacus) have drawn your fierce brows down  
And petrified them with a moral frown!  
With iron-faced rigor you have made them run  
The gauntlet of publicity-each Hun  
Or Vandal of the public press allowed  
To throw their households open to the crowd  
And bawl their secret bickerings aloud.  
When Wealth before you suppliant appears,  
Bang! go the doors and open fly your ears!  
The blinds are drawn, the lights diminished burn,  
Lest eyes too curious should look and learn  
That gold refines not, sweetens not a life  
Of conjugal brutality and strife-  
That vice is vulgar, though it gilded shine  
Upon the curve of a judicial spine.  
The veiled complainant's whispered evidence,  
The plain collusion and the no defense,  
The sealed exhibits and the secret plea,  
The unrecorded and unseen decree,  
The midnight signature and- \_chink! chink! chink!  
Nay, pardon, upright Judge, I did but think  
I heard that sound abhorred of honest men;  
No doubt it was the scratching of your pen.

O California! long-enduring land,  
Where Judges fawn upon the Golden Hand,  
Proud of such service to that rascal thing  
As slaves would blush to render to a king  
Judges, of judgment destitute and heart,  
Of conscience conscious only by the smart  
From the recoil (so insight is enlarged)  
Of duty accidentally discharged;  
Invoking still a 'song o' sixpence' from  
The Scottish fiddle of each lusty palm,  
Thy Judges, California, skilled to play

This silent music, through the livelong-day  
Perform obsequious before the rich,  
And still the more they scratch the more they itch!

Ambrose Bierce

# Judgment

I drew aside the Future's veil  
And saw upon his bier  
The poet Whitman. Loud the wail  
And damp the falling tear.

'He's dead-he is no more!' one cried,  
With sobs of sorrow crammed;  
'No more? He's this much more,' replied  
Another: 'he is damned!'

Ambrose Bierce



# Justice

Jack Doe met Dick Roe, whose wife he loved,  
And said: 'I will get the best of him.'  
So pulling a knife from his boot, he shoved  
It up to the hilt in the breast of him.

Then he moved that weapon forth and back,  
Enlarging the hole he had made with it,  
Till the smoking liver fell out, and Jack  
Merrily, merrily played with it.

Then he reached within and he seized the slack  
Of the lesser bowel, and, traveling  
Hither and thither, looked idly back  
On that small intestine, raveling.

The wretched Richard, with many a grin  
Laid on with exceeding suavity,  
Curled up and died, and they ran John in  
And charged him with sins of gravity.

The case was tried and a verdict found:  
The jury, with great humanity,  
Acquitted the prisoner on the ground  
Of extemporany insanity.

Ambrose Bierce

# L'Audace

Daughter of God! Audacity divine  
Of clowns the terror and of brains the sign  
Not thou the inspirer of the rushing fool,  
Not thine of idiots the vocal drool:  
Thy bastard sister of the brow of brass,  
Presumption, actuates the charging ass.  
Sky-born Audacity! of thee who sings  
Should strike with freer hand than mine the strings;  
The notes should mount on pinions true and strong,  
For thou, the subject shouldst sustain the song,  
Till angels lean from Heaven, a breathless throng!  
Alas! with reeling heads and wavering tails,  
They (notes, not angels) dropp and the hymn fails;  
The minstrel's tender fingers and his thumbs  
Are torn to rags upon the lyre he strums.  
Have done! the lofty thesis makes demand  
For stronger voices and a harder hand:  
Night-howling apes to make the notes aspire,  
And Poet Riley's fist to slug the rebel wire!

Ambrose Bierce

## Laus Lucis

Each to his taste: some men prefer to play  
At mystery, as others at piquet.  
Some sit in mystic meditation; some  
Parade the street with tambourine and drum.  
One studies to decipher ancient lore  
Which, proving stuff, he studies all the more;  
Another swears that learning is but good  
To darken things already understood,  
Then writes upon Simplicity so well  
That none agree on what he wants to tell,  
And future ages will declare his pen  
Inspired by gods with messages to men.  
To found an ancient order those devote  
Their time-with ritual, regalia, goat,  
Blankets for tossing, chairs of little ease  
And all the modern inconveniences;  
These, saner, frown upon unmeaning rites  
And go to church for rational delights.  
So all are suited, shallow and profound,  
The prophets prosper and the world goes round.  
For me-unread in the occult, I'm fain  
To damn all mysteries alike as vain,  
Spurn the obscure and base my faith upon  
The Revelations of the good St. John.

Ambrose Bierce

# Liberty

"Let there be Liberty!" God said, and, lo!  
The red skies all were luminous. The glow  
Struck first Columbia's kindling mountain peaks  
One hundred and eleven years ago!

So sang a patriot whom once I saw  
Descending Bunker's holy hill. With awe  
I noted that he shone with sacred light,  
Like Moses with the tables of the Law.

One hundred and eleven years? O small  
And paltry period compared with all  
The tide of centuries that flowed and ebbed  
To etch Yosemite's divided wall!

Ah, Liberty, they sing you always young  
Whose harps are in your adoration strung  
(Each swears you are his countrywoman, too,  
And speak no language but his mother tongue).

And truly, lass, although with shout and horn  
Man has all-hailed you from creation's morn,  
I cannot think you old-I think, indeed,  
You are by twenty centuries unborn.

Ambrose Bierce

# Llewellen Powell

Villain, when the word is spoken,  
And your chains at last are broken  
When the gibbet's chilling shade  
Ceases darkly to enfold you,  
And the angel who enrolled you  
As a master of the trade  
Of assassination sadly  
Blots the record he has made,  
And your name and title paints  
In the calendar of saints;  
When the devils, dancing madly  
In the midmost Hell, are very  
Multitudinously merry  
Then beware, beware, beware!  
Nemesis is everywhere!  
You shall hear her at your back,  
And, your hunted visage turning,  
Fancy that her eyes are burning  
Like a tiger's on your track!  
You shall hear her in the breeze  
Whispering to summer trees.  
You shall hear her calling, calling  
To your spirit through the storm  
When the giant billows form  
And the splintered lightning, falling  
Down the heights of Heaven, appalling,  
Splendors all the tossing seas!  
On your bed at night reclining,  
Stars into your chamber shining  
As they roll around the Pole,  
None their purposes divining,  
Shall appear to search your soul,  
And to gild the mark of Cain  
That burns into your tortured brain!  
And the dead man's eyes shall ever  
Meet your own wherever you,  
Desperate, shall turn you to,  
And you shall escape them never!

By your heritage of guilt;  
By the blood that you have spilt;  
By the Law that you have broken;  
By the terrible red token  
That you bear upon your brow;  
By the awful sentence spoken  
And irrevocable vow  
Which consigns you to a living  
Death and to the unforgiving  
Furies who avenge your crime  
Through the periods of time;  
By that dread eternal doom  
Hinted in your future's gloom,  
As the flames infernal tell  
Of their power and perfection  
In their wavering reflection  
On the battlements of Hell;  
By the mercy you denied,  
I condemn your guilty soul  
In your body to abide,  
Like a serpent in a hole!

Ambrose Bierce

# Lucifer Of The Torch

O Reverend Ravlin, once with sounding lung  
You shook the bloody banner of your tongue,  
Urged all the fiery boycotters afield  
And swore you'd rather follow them than yield,  
Alas, how brief the time, how great the change!  
Your dogs of war are ailing all of mangle;  
The loose leash dangles from your finger-tips,  
But the loud 'havoc' dies upon your lips.  
No spirit animates your feeble clay  
You'd rather yield than even run away.  
In vain McGlashan labors to inspire  
Your pallid nostril with his breath of fire:  
The light of battle's faded from your face  
You keep the peace, John Chinaman his place.  
O Ravlin, what cold water, thrown by whom  
Upon the kindling Boycott's ruddy bloom,  
Has slaked your parching blood-thirst and allayed  
The flash and shimmer of your lingual blade?  
Your salary-your salary's unpaid!

In the old days, when Christ with scourges drave  
The Ravlins headlong from the Temple's nave,  
Each bore upon his pelt the mark divine  
The Boycott's red authenticating sign.  
Birth-marked forever in surviving hurts,  
Glowing and smarting underneath their shirts,  
Successive Ravlins have revenged their shame  
By blowing every coal and flinging flame.  
And you, the latest (may you be the last!)  
Endorsed with that hereditary, vast  
And monstrous rubric, would the feud prolong,  
Save that cupidity forbids the wrong.  
In strife you preferably pass your days  
But brawl no moment longer than it pays.  
By shouting when no more you can incite  
The dogs to put the timid sheep to flight  
To load, for you, the brambles with their fleece,  
You cackle concord to congenial geese,  
Put pinches of goodwill upon their tails

And pluck them with a touch that never fails.

Ambrose Bierce



# Lusus Politicus

Come in, old gentleman. How do you do?  
Delighted, I'm sure, that you've called.  
I'm a sociable sort of a chap and you  
Are a pleasant-appearing person, too,  
With a head agreeably bald.  
That's right-sit down in the scuttle of coal  
And put up your feet in a chair.  
It is better to have them there:  
And I've always said that a hat of lead,  
Such as I see you wear,  
Was a better hat than a hat of glass.  
And your boots of brass  
Are a natural kind of boots, I swear.  
'May you blow your nose on a paper of pins?'  
Why, certainly, man, why not?  
I rather expected you'd do it before,  
When I saw you poking it in at the door.  
It's dev'lish hot  
The weather, I mean. 'You are twins'?  
Why, that was evident at the start,  
From the way that you paint your head  
In stripes of purple and red,  
With dots of yellow.  
That proves you a fellow  
With a love of legitimate art.  
'You've bitten a snake and are feeling bad'?  
That's very sad,  
But Longfellow's words I beg to recall:  
Your lot is the common lot of all.  
'Horses are trees and the moon is a sneeze'?  
That, I fancy, is just as you please.  
Some think that way and others hold  
The opposite view;  
I never quite knew,  
For the matter o' that,  
When everything's been said  
May I offer this mat  
If you will stand on your head?  
I suppose I look to be upside down

From your present point of view.  
It's a giddy old world, from king to clown,  
And a topsy-turvy, too.  
But, worthy and now uninverted old man,  
\_You're\_ built, at least, on a normal plan  
If ever a truth I spoke.  
Smoke?  
Your air and conversation  
Are a liberal education,  
And your clothes, including the metal hat  
And the brazen boots-what's that?  
  
'You never could stomach a Democrat  
Since General Jackson ran?  
You're another sort, but you predict  
That your party'll get consummately licked?'  
Good God! what a queer old man!

Ambrose Bierce

# Mad

O ye who push and fight  
To hear a wanton sing  
Who utter the delight  
That has the bogus ring,

O men mature in years,  
In understanding young,  
The membranes of whose ears  
She tickles with her tongue,-

O wives and daughters sweet,  
Who call it love of art  
To kiss a woman's feet  
That crush a woman's heart,

O prudent dams and sires,  
Your docile young who bring  
To see how man admires  
A sinner if she sing,

O husbands who impart  
To each assenting spouse  
The lesson that shall start  
The buds upon your brows,

All whose applauding hands  
Assist to rear the fame  
That throws o'er all the lands  
The shadow of its shame,

Go drag her car!-the mud  
Through which its axle rolls  
Is partly human blood  
And partly human souls.

Mad, mad!-your senses whirl  
Like devils dancing free,  
Because a strolling girl  
Can hold the note high C.

For this the avenging rod  
Of Heaven ye dare defy,  
And tear the law that God  
Thundered from Sinai!

Ambrose Bierce

# Magnanimity

'To the will of the people we loyally bow!'  
That's the minority shibboleth now.  
O noble antagonists, answer me flat  
What would you do if you didn't do that?

Ambrose Bierce

# Master Of Three Arts

Your various talents, Goldenson, command  
Respect: you are a poet and can draw.  
It is a pity that your gifted hand  
Should ever have been raised against the law.  
If you had drawn no pistol, but a picture,  
You would have saved your throttle from a stricture.

About your poetry I'm not so sure:  
'Tis certain we have much that's quite as bad,  
Whose hardy writers have not to endure  
The hangman's fondling. It is said they're mad:  
Though lately Mr. Brooks (I mean the poet)  
Looked well, and if demented didn't show it.

Well, Goldenson, I am a poet, too  
Taught by the muses how to smite the harp  
And lift the tuneful voice, although, like you  
And Brooks, I sometimes flat and sometimes sharp.  
But let me say, with no desire to taunt you,  
I never murder even the girls I want to.

I hold it one of the poetic laws  
To sing of life, not take. I've ever shown  
A high regard for human life because  
I have such trouble to support my own.  
And you-well, you'll find trouble soon in blowing  
Your private coal to keep it red and glowing.

I fancy now I see you at the Gate  
Approach St. Peter, crawling on your belly,  
You cry: 'Good sir, take pity on my state  
Forgive the murderer of Mamie Kelly!'  
And Peter says: 'O, that's all right-but, mister,  
You scribbled rhymes. In Hell I'll make you blister!'

Ambrose Bierce

# Matter For Gratitude

Be pleased, O Lord, to take a people's thanks  
That Thine avenging sword has spared our ranks-  
That Thou hast parted from our lips the cup  
And forced our neighbors' lips to drink it up.  
Father of Mercies, with a heart contrite  
We thank Thee that Thou goest south to smite,  
And sparest San Francisco's loins, to crack  
Thy lash on Hermosillo's bleeding back-  
That o'er our homes Thine awful angel spread  
His wings in vain, and Guaymas weeps instead.

We praise Thee, God, that Yellow Fever here  
His horrid banner has not dared to rear,  
Consumption's jurisdiction to contest,  
Her dagger deep in every second breast!  
Catarrh and Asthma and Congestive Chill  
Attest Thy bounty and perform Thy will.  
These native messengers obey Thy call-  
They summon singly, but they summon all.  
Not, as in Mexico's impested clime,  
Can Yellow Jack commit recurring crime.  
We thank Thee that Thou killest all the time.

Thy tender mercies, Father, never end:  
Upon all heads Thy blessings still descend,  
Though their forms vary. Here the sown seeds yield  
Abundant grain that whitens all the field-  
There the smit corn stands barren on the plain,  
Thrift reaps the straw and Famine gleans in vain.  
Here the fat priest to the contented king  
Points out the contrast and the people sing-  
There mothers eat their offspring. Well, at least  
Thou hast provided offspring for the feast.  
An earthquake here rolls harmless through the land,  
And Thou art good because the chimneys stand-  
There templ'd cities sink into the sea,  
And damp survivors, howling as they flee,  
Skip to the hills and hold a celebration  
In honor of Thy wise discrimination.

O God, forgive them all, from Stoneman down,  
Thy smile who construe and expound Thy frown,  
And fall with saintly grace upon their knees  
To render thanks when Thou dost only sneeze.

Ambrose Bierce



# Mendax

High Lord of Liars, Pickering, to thee  
Let meaner mortals bend the subject knee!  
Thine is mendacity's imperial crown,  
Alike by genius, action and renown.  
No man, since words could set a cheek aflame  
E'er lied so greatly with so little shame!  
O bad old man, must thy remaining years  
Be passed in leading idiots by their ears  
Thine own (which Justice, if she ruled the roast  
Would fasten to the penitential post)  
Still wagging sympathetically-hung  
the same rocking-bar that bears thy tongue?

Thou dog of darkness, dost thou hope to stay  
Time's dread advance till thou hast had thy day?  
Dost think the Strangler will release his hold  
Because, forsooth, some fibs remain untold?  
No, no-beneath thy multiplying load  
Of years thou canst not tarry on the road  
To dabble in the blood thy leaden feet  
Have pressed from bosoms that have ceased to beat  
Of reputations margining thy way,  
Nor wander from the path new truth to slay.  
Tell to thyself whatever lies thou wilt,  
Catch as thou canst at pennies got by guilt  
Straight down to death this blessed year thou'lt sink,  
Thy life washed out as with a wave of ink.  
But if this prophecy be not fulfilled,  
And thou who killest patience be not killed;  
If age assail in vain and vice attack  
Only by folly to be beaten back;  
Yet Nature can this consolation give:  
The rogues who die not are condemned to live!

Ambrose Bierce

# Metempsychosis

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ST. JOHN \_a Presidential Candidate\_  
MCDONALD \_a Defeated Aspirant\_  
MRS. HAYES \_an Ex-President\_  
PITTS-STEVENSON \_a Water Nymph\_

\_Scene\_ -A Small Lake in the Alleghany Mountains.

ST. JOHN:

Hours I've immersed my muzzle in this tarn  
And, quaffing copious potations, tried  
To suck it dry; but ever as I pumped  
Its waters into my distended skin  
The labor of my zeal extruded them  
In perspiration from my pores; and so,  
Rilling the marginal declivity,  
They fell again into their source. Ah, me!  
Could I but find within these ancient hills  
Some long extinct volcano, by the rains  
Of countless ages in its crater brimmed  
Like a full goblet, I would lay me down  
Prone on the outer slope, and o'er its edge  
Arching my neck, I'd siphon out its store  
And flood the valleys with my sweat for aye.  
So should I be accounted as a god,  
Even as Father Nilus is. What's that?  
Methought I heard some sawyer draw his file  
With jarring, stridulous cacophany  
Across his notchy blade, to set its teeth  
And mine on edge. Ha! there it goes again!

\_Song, within\_.

Cold water's the milk of the mountains,  
And Nature's our wet-nurse. O then,  
Glue thou thy blue lips to her fountains  
Forever and ever, amen!

ST. JOHN:

Why surely there's congenial company  
Aloof-the spirit, I suppose, that guards  
This sacred spot; perchance some water-nymph  
Who laving in the crystal flood her limbs  
Has taken cold, and so, with raucous voice  
Afflicts the sensitive membrane of mine ear  
The while she sings my sentiments.

\_(Enter Pitts-Stevens.)\_

Hello!

What fiend is this?

PITTS-STEVENSON:

'Tis I, be not afraid.

ST. JOHN:

And who, thou antiquated crone, art thou?  
I ne'er forget a face, but names I can't  
So well remember. I have seen thee oft.  
When in the middle season of the night,  
Curved with a cucumber, or knotted hard  
With an eclectic pie, I've striven to keep  
My head and heels asunder, thou has come,  
With sociable familiarity,  
Into my dream, but not, alas, to bless.

PITTS-STEVENSON:

My name's Pitts-Stevens, age just seventeen years;  
Talking teetotaler, professional  
Beauty.

ST. JOHN:

What dost them here?

PITTS-STEVENSON:

I'm come, fair sir,  
With paint and brush to blazon on these rocks  
The merits of my master's nostrum-so:  
\_(Paints rapidly.)\_  
'McDonald's Vinegar Bitters!'

ST. JOHN:

What are they?

PITTS-STEVENSON:

A woman suffering from widowhood  
Took a full bottle and was cured. A man  
There was-a murderer; the doctors all  
Had given him up-he'd but an hour to live.  
He swallowed half a glassful. He is dead,  
But not of Vinegar Bitters. A wee babe  
Lay sick and cried for it. The mother gave  
That innocent a spoonful and it smoothed  
Its pathway to the tomb. 'Tis warranted  
To cause a boy to strike his father, make  
A pig squeal, start the hair upon a stone,  
Or play the fiddle for a country dance.  
\_(Enter McDonald, reading a Sunday-school book.)\_  
Good morrow, sir; I trust you're well.

MCDONALD:

H'lo, Pitts!  
Observe, good friends, I have a volume here  
Myself am author of-a noble book  
To train the infant mind (delightful task!)  
It tells how one Samantha Brown, age, six,  
A gutter-bunking slave to rum, was saved  
By Vinegar Bitters, went to church and now  
Has an account at the Pacific Bank.  
I'll read the whole work to you.

ST JOHN:

Heaven forbid!  
I've elsewhere an engagement.

PITTS-STEVENS:

I am deaf.

MCDONALD \_(reading regardless):\_

'Once on a time there lived'--

\_(Enter Mrs. Hayes.)\_

Behold our queen!

ALL:

Her eyes upon the ground  
Before her feet she low'rs,  
Walking, in thought profound,  
As 'twere, upon all fours.  
Her visage is austere,  
Her gait a high parade;  
At every step you hear  
The sloshing lemonade!

MRS. HAYES \_(to herself):\_

Once, sitting in the White House, hard at work  
Signing State papers (Rutherford was there,  
Knitting some hose) a sudden glory fell  
Upon my paper. I looked up and saw  
An angel, holding in his hand a rod  
Wherewith he struck me. Smarting with the blow  
I rose and (cuffing Rutherford) inquired:  
'Wherefore this chastisement?' The angel said:  
'Four years you have been President, and still  
There's rum!'-then flew to Heaven. Contrite, I swore  
Such oath as lady Methodist might take,  
My second term should medicine my first.  
The people would not have it that way; so  
I seek some candidate who'll take my soul-  
My spirit of reform, fresh from my breast,  
And give me his instead; and thus equipped  
With my imperious and fiery essence,  
Drive the Drink-Demon from the land and fill

The people up with water till their teeth  
Are all afloat.

(\_St. John discovers himself\_.)  
What, \_you\_?

ST. JOHN:

Aye, Madam, I'll  
Swap souls with you and lead the cold sea-green  
Amphibians of Prohibition on,  
Pallid of nose and webbed of foot, swim-bladdered,  
Gifted with gills, invincible!

MRS. HAYES:

Enough,  
Stand forth and consummate the interchange.

(\_While McDonald and Pitts-Stevens modestly turn their  
backs, the latter blushing a delicate shrimp-pink, St. John and  
Mrs. Hayes effect an exchange of immortal parts. When the  
transfer is complete McDonald turns and advances, uncorking  
a bottle of Vinegar Bitters\_.)

MCDONALD (\_chanting\_):

Nectar compounded of simples  
Cocted in Stygian shades-  
Acids of wrinkles and pimples  
From faces of ancient maids-  
Acrid precipitates sunken  
From tempers of scolding wives  
Whose husbands, uncommonly drunken,  
Are commonly found in dives,-  
With this I baptize and appoint thee  
(\_to St. John\_.)  
To marshal the vinophobe ranks.  
In the name of Dambosh I anoint thee  
(\_pours the liquid down St. John's back\_.)  
As King of aquatical cranks!

(The liquid blisters the royal back, and His Majesty starts on a dead run, energetically exclaiming. Exit St. John.)

MRS. HAYES:

My soul! My soul! I'll never get it back  
Unless I follow nimbly on his track.

(Exit Mrs. Hayes.)

PITTS-STEVENSON:

O my! he's such a beautiful young man!  
I'll follow, too, and catch him if I can.

(Exit Pitts-Stevens.)

MCDONALD:

He scarce is visible, his dust so great!  
Methinks for so obscure a candidate  
He runs quite well. But as for Prohibition-  
I mean myself to hold the first position.

(Produces a pocket flask, topes a cruel quantity of double-distilled thunder-and-lightning out of it, smiles so grimly as to darken all the stage and sings):

Though fortunes vary let all be merry,  
And then if e'er a disaster befall,  
At Styx's ferry is Charon's wherry  
In easy call.

Upon a ripple of golden tipple  
That tipsy ship'll convey you best.  
To king and cripple, the bottle's the nipple  
Of Nature's breast!

Ambrose Bierce

## Metempsychosis [once With Christ He Entered Salem]

Once with Christ he entered Salem,  
Once in Moab bullied Balaam,  
Once by Apuleius staged  
He the pious much enraged.  
And, again, his head, as beaver,  
Topped the neck of Nick the Weaver.  
Omar saw him (minus tether  
Free and wanton as the weather:  
Knowing naught of bit or spur)  
Stamping over Bahram-Gur.  
Now, as Altgeld, see him joy  
As Governor of Illinois!

Ambrose Bierce



# Montague Levenson

As some enormous violet that towers  
Colossal o'er the heads of lowlier flowers  
Its giant petals royally displayed,  
And casting half the landscape into shade;  
Delivering its odors, like the blows  
Of some strong slugger, at the public nose;  
Pride of two Nations-for a single State  
Would scarce suffice to sprout a plant so great;  
So Levenson's humility, outgrown  
The meaner virtues that he deigns to own,  
To the high skies its great corolla rears,  
O'ertopping all he has except his ears.

Ambrose Bierce

# Montefiore

I SAW—'t was in a dream, the other night—  
A man whose hair with age was thin and white;  
One hundred years had bettered by his birth,  
And still his step was firm, his eye was bright.

Before him and about him pressed a crowd.  
Each head in reverence was bared and bowed,  
And Jews and Gentiles in a hundred tongues  
Extolled his deeds and spake his fame aloud.

I joined the throng and, pushing forward, cried,  
"Montefiore!" with the rest, and vied  
In efforts to caress the hand that ne'er  
To want and worth had charity denied.

So closely round him swarmed our shouting clan  
He scarce could breathe, and, taking from a pan  
A gleaming coin, he tossed it o'er our heads,  
And in a moment was a lonely man!

Ambrose Bierce

## Mr. Fink's Debating Donkey

Of a person known as Peters I will humbly crave your leave  
An unusual adventure into narrative to weave  
Mr. William Perry Peters, of the town of Muscatel,  
A public educator and an orator as well.  
Mr. Peters had a weakness which, 'tis painful to relate,  
Was a strong predisposition to the pleasures of debate.  
He would foster disputation wheresoever he might be;  
In polygonal contention none so happy was as he.  
'Twas observable, however, that the exercises ran  
Into monologue by Peters, that rhetorical young man.  
And the Muscatelian rustics who assisted at the show,  
By involuntary silence testified their overthrow-  
Mr. Peters, all unheedful of their silence and their grief,  
Still effacing every vestige of erroneous belief.  
O, he was a sore affliction to all heretics so bold  
As to entertain opinions that he didn't care to hold.

One day-'t was in pursuance of a pedagogic plan  
For the mental elevation of Uncultivated Man  
Mr. Peters, to his pupils, in dismissing them, explained  
That the Friday evening following (unless, indeed, it rained)  
Would be signalized by holding in the schoolhouse a debate  
Free to all who their opinions might desire to ventilate  
On the question, 'Which is better, as a serviceable gift,  
Speech or hearing, from barbarity the human mind to lift?'  
The pupils told their fathers, who, forehanded always, met  
At the barroom to discuss it every evening, dry or wet,  
They argued it and argued it and spat upon the stove,  
And the non-committal 'barkeep' on their differences throve.  
And I state it as a maxim in a loosish kind of way:  
You'll have the more to back your word the less you have to say.  
Public interest was lively, but one Ebenezer Fink  
Of the Rancho del Jackrabbit, only seemed to sit and think.

On the memorable evening all the men of Muscatel  
Came to listen to the logic and the eloquence as well  
All but William Perry Peters, whose attendance there, I fear.  
Was to wreak his ready rhetoric upon the public ear,  
And prove (whichever side he took) that hearing wouldn't lift

The human mind as ably as the other, greater gift.  
The judges being chosen and the disputants enrolled,  
The question he proceeded *\_in extenso\_* to unfold:  
'*\_Resolved\_*-The sense of hearing lifts the mind up out of reach  
Of the fogs of error better than the faculty of speech.'  
This simple proposition he expounded, word by word,  
Until they best understood it who least perfectly had heard.  
Even the judges comprehended as he ventured to explain  
The impact of a spit-ball admonishing in vain.  
Beginning at a period before Creation's morn,  
He had reached the bounds of tolerance and Adam yet unborn.  
As down the early centuries of pre-historic time  
He tracked important principles and quoted striking rhyme,  
And Whisky Bill, prosaic soul! proclaiming him a jay,  
Had risen and like an earthquake, 'reeled unheededly away,'  
And a late lamented cat, when opportunity should serve,  
Was preparing to embark upon her parabolic curve,  
A noise arose outside-the door was opened with a bang  
And old Ebenezer Fink was heard ejaculating 'G'lang!'  
Straight into that assembly gravely marched without a wink  
An ancient ass-the property it was of Mr. Fink.  
Its ears depressed and beating time to its infestive tread,  
Silent through silence moved amain that stately quadruped!  
It stopped before the orator, and in the lamplight thrown  
Upon its tail they saw that member weighted with a stone.  
Then spake old Ebenezer: 'Gents, I heern o' this debate  
On w'ether v'ice or y'ears is best the mind to elevate.  
Now 'yer's a bird ken throw some light uponto that tough theme:  
He has 'em both, I'm free to say, oncommonly extreme.  
He wa'n't invited for to speak, but he will not refuse  
(If t'other gentleman ken wait) to exposay his views.'

Ere merriment or anger o'er amazement could prevail;  
He cut the string that held the stone on that canary's tail.  
Freed from the weight, that member made a gesture of delight,  
Then rose until its rigid length was horizontal quite.  
With lifted head and level ears along his withers laid,  
Jack sighed, refilled his lungs and then-to put it mildly-brayed!  
He brayed until the stones were stirred in circumjacent hills,  
And sleeping women rose and fled, in divers kinds of frills.  
'T is said that awful bugle-blast-to make the story brief-  
Wafted William Perry Peters through the window, like a leaf!

Such is the tale. If anything additional occurred  
'Tis not set down, though, truly, I remember to have heard  
That a gentleman named Peters, now residing at Soquel,  
A considerable distance from the town of Muscatel,  
Is opposed to education, and to rhetoric, as well.

Ambrose Bierce

## Mr. Sheets

The Devil stood before the gate  
Of Heaven. He had a single mate:  
Behind him, in his shadow, slunk  
Clay Sheets in a perspiring funk.  
'Saint Peter, see this season ticket,'  
Said Satan; 'pray undo the wicket.'  
The sleepy Saint threw slight regard  
Upon the proffered bit of card,  
Signed by some clerical dead-beats:  
'Admit the bearer and Clay Sheets.'  
Peter expanded all his eyes:  
"Clay Sheets?'-well, I'll be damned!' he cries.  
'Our couches are of golden cloud;  
Nothing of earth is here allowed.  
I'll let you in,' he added, shedding  
On Nick a smile-'but not your bedding.'

Ambrose Bierce

## My Lord Poet

'Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat;'  
Who sings for nobles, he should noble be.  
There's no *\_non sequitur\_*, I think, in that,  
And this is logic plain as a, b, c.  
Now, Hector Stuart, you're a Scottish prince,  
If right you fathom your descent-that fall  
From grace; and since you have no peers, and since  
You have no kind of nobleness at all,  
'Twere better to sing little, lest you wince  
When made by heartless critics to sing small.  
And yet, my liege, I bid you not despair  
Ambition conquers but a realm at once:  
For European bays arrange your hair  
Two continents, in time, shall crown you Dunce!

Ambrose Bierce

# My Monument

It is pleasant to think, as I'm watching my ink  
A-drying along my paper,  
That a monument fine will surely be mine  
When death has extinguished my taper.

From each rhyming scribe of the journalist tribe  
Purged clean of all sentiments narrow,  
A pebble will mark his respect for the stark  
Stiff body that's under the barrow.

By fellow-bards thrown, thus stone upon stone  
Will make my celebrity deathless.  
O, I wish I could think, as I gaze at my ink,  
They'd wait till my carcass is breathless.

Ambrose Bierce



# Nanine

We heard a song-bird trilling  
'T was but a night ago.  
Such rapture he was rilling  
As only we could know.

This morning he is flinging  
His music from the tree,  
But something in the singing  
Is not the same to me.

His inspiration fails him,  
Or he has lost his skill.  
Nanine, Nanine, what ails him  
That he should sing so ill?

Nanine is not replying  
She hears no earthly song.  
The sun and bird are lying  
And the night is, O, so long!

Ambrose Bierce

# Nimrod

There were brave men, some one has truly said,  
Before Atrides (those were mostly dead  
Behind him) and ere you could e'er occur  
Actaeon lived, Nimrod and Bahram-Gur.  
In strength and speed and daring they excelled:  
The stag they overtook, the lion felled.  
Ah, yes, great hunters flourished before you,  
And-for Munchausen lived-great talkers too.  
There'll be no more; there's much to kill, but-well,  
\_You\_ have left nothing in the world to tell!

Ambrose Bierce

## Not Guilty

'I saw your charms in another's arms,'  
Said a Grecian swain with his blood a-boil;  
'And he kissed you fair as he held you there,  
A willing bird in a serpent's coil!'

The maid looked up from the cinctured cup  
Wherein she was crushing the berries red,  
Pain and surprise in her honest eyes  
'It was only one o' those gods,' she said.

Ambrose Bierce

# Novum Organum

In Bacon see the culminating prime  
Of Anglo-Saxon intellect and crime.  
He dies and Nature, settling his affairs,  
Parts his endowments among us, his heirs:  
To every one a pinch of brain for seed,  
And, to develop it, a pinch of greed.  
Each thrifty heir, to make the gift suffice,  
Buries the talent to manure the vice.

Ambrose Bierce

# Omnes Vanitas

Alas for ambition's possessor!  
Alas for the famous and proud!  
The Isle of Manhattan's best dresser  
Is wearing a hand-me-down shroud.

The world has forgotten his glory;  
The wagoner sings on his wain,  
And Chauncey Depew tells a story,  
And jackasses laugh in the lane.

Ambrose Bierce

# On A Proposed Crematory

When a fair bridge is builded o'er the gulf  
Between two cities, some ambitious fool,  
Hot for distinction, pleads for earliest leave  
To push his clumsy feet upon the span,  
That men in after years may single him,  
Saying: 'Behold the fool who first went o'er!'  
So be it when, as now the promise is,  
Next summer sees the edifice complete  
Which some do name a crematorium,  
Within the vantage of whose greater maw's  
Quicker digestion we shall cheat the worm  
And circumvent the handed mole who loves,  
With tunnel, adit, drift and roomy stope,  
To mine our mortal parts in all their dips  
And spurs and angles. Let the fool stand forth  
To link his name with this fair enterprise,  
As first decarcassed by the flame. And if  
With rival greedings for the fiery fame  
They push in clamoring multitudes, or if  
With unaccustomed modesty they all  
Hold off, being something loth to qualify,  
Let me select the fittest for the rite.  
By heaven! I'll make so warrantable, wise  
And excellent censure of their true deserts,  
And such a searching canvass of their claims,  
That none shall bait the ballot. I'll spread my choice  
Upon the main and general of those  
Who, moved of holy impulse, pulpit-born,  
Protested 'twere a sacrilege to burn  
God's gracious images, designed to rot,  
And bellowed for the right of way for each  
Distempered carrion through the water pipes.  
With such a sturdy, boisterous exclaim  
They did discharge themselves from their own throats  
Against the splintered gates of audience  
'Twere wholesomer to take them in at mouth  
Than ear. These shall burn first: their ignible  
And seasoned substances-trunks, legs and arms,  
Blent indistinguishable in a mass,

Like winter-woven serpents in a pit  
None vantaged of his fellow-fools in point  
Of precedence, and all alive-shall serve  
As fueling to fervor the retort  
For after cineration of true men.

Ambrose Bierce

# On Stone

As in a dream, strange epitaphs I see,  
Inscribed on yet unquarried stone,  
Where wither flowers yet unstrawn  
The Campo Santo of the time to be.

Ambrose Bierce



# On The Platform

When Dr. Bill Bartlett stepped out of the hum  
Of Mammon's distracting and wearisome strife  
To stand and deliver a lecture on 'Some  
Conditions of Intellectual Life,'  
I cursed the offender who gave him the hall  
To lecture on any conditions at all!

But he rose with a fire divine in his eye,  
Haranguing with endless abundance of breath,  
Till I slept; and I dreamed of a gibbet reared high,  
And Dr. Bill Bartlett was dressing for death.  
And I thought in my dream: 'These conditions, no doubt,  
Are bad for the life he was talking about.'

So I cried (pray remember this all was a dream):  
'Get off of the platform!-it isn't the kind!'  
But he fell through the trap, with a jerk at the beam,  
And wiggled his toes to unburden his mind.  
And, O, so bewitching the thoughts he advanced,  
That I clung to his ankles, attentive, entranced!

Ambrose Bierce

# On The Wedding Of The Aeronaut

Aeronaut, you're fairly caught,  
Despite your bubble's leaven:  
Out of the skies a lady's eyes  
Have brought you down to Heaven!

No more, no more you'll freely soar  
Above the grass and gravel:  
Henceforth you'll walk-and she will chalk  
The line that you're to travel!

Ambrose Bierce

# One And One Are Two

The trumpet sounded and the dead  
Came forth from earth and ocean,  
And Pickering arose and sped  
Aloft with wobbling motion.

'What makes him fly lop-sided?' cried  
A soul of the elected.  
'One ear was wax,' a rogue replied,  
'And isn't resurrected.'

Below him on the pitted plain,  
By his abandoned hollow,  
His hair and teeth tried all in vain  
The rest of him to follow.

Saint Peter, seeing him ascend,  
Came forward to the wicket,  
And said: 'My mutilated friend,  
I'll thank you for your ticket.'

'The \_Call\_,' said Pickering, his hand  
To reach the latch extended.  
Said Peter, affable and bland:  
'The free-list is suspended

'What claim have you that's valid here?'  
That ancient vilifier  
Reflected; then, with look austere,  
Replied: 'I am a liar.'

Said Peter: 'That is simple, neat  
And candid Anglo-Saxon,  
But-well, come in, and take a seat  
Up there by Colonel Jackson.'

Ambrose Bierce

# One Judge

Wallace, created on a noble plan  
To show us that a Judge can be a Man;  
Through moral mire exhaling mortal stench  
God-guided sweet and foot-clean to the Bench;  
In salutation here and sign I lift  
A hand as free as yours from lawless thrift,  
A heart-ah, would I truly could proclaim  
My bosom lighted with so pure a flame!  
Alas, not love of justice moves my pen  
To praise, or to condemn, my fellow men.  
Good will and ill its busy point incite:  
I do but gratify them when I write.  
In palliation, though, I'd humbly state,  
I love the righteous and the wicked hate.  
So, sir, although we differ we agree,  
Our work alike from persecution free,  
And Heaven, approving you, consents to me.  
Take, therefore, from this not all useless hand  
The crown of honor-not in all the land  
One honest man dissenting from the choice,  
Nor in approval one Fred. Crocker's voice!

Ambrose Bierce

# One Mood's Expression

See, Lord, fanatics all arrayed  
For revolution!  
To foil their villainous crusade  
Unsheathe again the sacred blade  
Of persecution.

What though through long disuse 't is grown  
A trifle rusty?  
'Gainst modern heresy, whose bone  
Is rotten, and the flesh fly-blown,  
It still is trusty.

Of sterner stuff thine ancient foes,  
Unapprehensive,  
Sprang forth to meet thy biting blows;  
Our zealots chiefly to the nose  
Assume the offensive.

Then wield the blade their necks to hack,  
Nor ever spare one.  
Thy crowns of martyrdom unpack,  
But see that every martyr lack  
The head to wear one.

Ambrose Bierce

# One Morning

Because that I am weak, my love, and ill,  
I cannot follow the impatient feet  
Of my desire, but sit and watch the beat  
Of the unpitying pendulum fulfill  
The hour appointed for the air to thrill  
And brighten at your coming. O my sweet,  
The tale of moments is at last complete  
The tryst is broken on the gusty hill!  
O lady, faithful-footed, loyal-eyed,  
The long leagues silence me; yet doubt me not;  
Think rather that the clock and sun have lied  
And all too early, you have sought the spot.  
For lo! despair has darkened all the light,  
And till I see your face it still is night.

Ambrose Bierce

# One Of The Redeemed

Saint Peter, standing at the Gate, beheld  
A soul whose body Death had lately felled.

A pleasant soul as ever was, he seemed:  
His step was joyous and his visage beamed.

'Good morning, Peter.' There was just a touch  
Of foreign accent, but not overmuch.

The Saint bent gravely, like a stately tree,  
And said: 'You have the advantage, sir, of me.'

'Renan of Paris,' said the immortal part  
'A master of the literary art.

'I'm somewhat famous, too, I grieve to tell,  
As controversialist and infidel.'

'That's of no consequence,' the Saint replied,  
'Why, I myself my Master once denied.

'No one up here cares anything for that.  
But is there nothing you were always at?

'It seems to me you were accused one day  
Of something - what it was I can't just say.'

'Quite likely,' said the other; 'but I swear  
My life was irreproachable and fair.'

Just then a soul appeared upon the wall,  
Singing a hymn as loud as he could bawl.

About his head a golden halo gleamed,  
As well befitted one of the redeemed.

A harp he bore and vigorously thumbed,  
Strumming he sang, and, singing, ever strummed.

His countenance, suffused with holy pride,  
Glowed like a pumpkin with a light inside.

'Ah! that's the chap,' said Peter, 'who declares:  
'Renan's a rake and drunkard-smokes and swears.'

'Yes, that's the fellow-he's a preacher-came  
From San Francisco. Mansfield was his name.'

'Do you believe him?' said Renan. 'Great Scott!  
Believe? Believe the blackguard? Of course \_not!

'Just walk right in and make yourself at home.  
And if he pecks at you I'll cut his comb.

'He's only here because the Devil swore  
He wouldn't have him, for the smile he wore.'

Resting his eyes one moment on that proof  
Of saving grace, the Frenchman turned aloof,

And stepping down from cloud to cloud, said he:  
'Thank you, monsieur,-I'll see if he'll have \_me\_.'

Ambrose Bierce



# One Of The Saints

Big Smith is an Oakland School Board man,  
And he looks as good as ever he can;  
And he's such a cold and a chaste Big Smith  
That snowflakes all are his kin and kith.  
Wherever his eye he chances to throw  
The crystals of ice begin to grow;  
And the fruits and flowers he sees are lost  
By the singeing touch of a sudden frost.  
The women all shiver whenever he's near,  
And look upon \_us\_ with a look austere-  
Effect of the Smithian atmosphere.  
Such, in a word, is the moral plan  
Of the Big, Big Smith, the School Board man.  
When told that Madame Ferrier had taught  
\_Hernani\_ in school, his fist he brought  
Like a trip-hammer down on his bulbous knee,  
And he roared: 'Her Nanny? By gum, we'll see  
If the public's time she dares devote  
To the educatin' of any dam goat!'  
'You do not entirely comprehend-  
\_Hernani's\_ a play,' said his learned friend,  
'By Victor Hugo-immoral and bad.  
What's worse, it's French!' 'Well, well, my lad,'  
Said Smith, 'if he cuts a swath so wide  
I'll have him took re'glar up and tried!'  
And he smiled so sweetly the other chap  
Thought that himself was a Finn or Lapp  
Caught in a storm of his native snows,  
With a purple ear and an azure nose.  
The Smith continued: 'I never pursue  
Immoral readin'.' And that is true:  
He's a saint of remarkably high degree,  
With a mind as chaste as a mind can be;  
But read!-the devil a word can he!

Ambrose Bierce

# One Of The Unfair Sex

She stood at the ticket-seller's  
Serenely removing her glove,  
While hundreds of strugglers and yellers,  
And some that were good at a shove,  
Were clustered behind her like bats in  
a cave and unwilling to speak their love.

At night she still stood at that window  
Endeavoring her money to reach;  
The crowds right and left, how they sinned-O,  
How dreadfully sinned in their speech!  
Ten miles either way they extended  
their lines, the historians teach.

She stands there to-day-legislation  
Has failed to remove her. The trains  
No longer pull up at that station;  
And over the ghastly remains  
Of the army that waited and died of  
old age fall the snows and the rains.

Ambrose Bierce

# One President

'What are those, father?' 'Statesmen, my child  
Lacrymose, unparliamentary, wild.'

'What are they that way for, father?' 'Last fall,  
'Our candidate's better,' they said, 'than all!'

'What did they say he was, father?' 'A man  
Built on a straight incorruptible plan-  
Believing that none for an office would do  
Unless he were honest and capable too.'

'Poor gentlemen- so disappointed!' 'Yes, lad,  
That is the feeling that's driving them mad;  
They're weeping and wailing and gnashing because  
They find that he's all that they said that he was.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Oneiromancy

I fell asleep and dreamed that I  
Was flung, like Vulcan, from the sky;  
Like him was lamed-another part:  
His leg was crippled and my heart.  
I woke in time to see my love  
Conceal a letter in her glove

Ambrose Bierce

# Ornithanthropos

'Let John P. Irish rise!' the edict rang  
As when Creation into being sprang!  
Nature, not clearly understanding, tried  
To make a bird that on the air could ride.  
But naught could baffle the creative plan  
Despite her efforts 'twas almost a man.  
Yet he had risen-to the bird a twin  
Had she but fixed a wing upon his chin.

Ambrose Bierce

# Over The Border

O, justice, you have fled, to dwell  
In Mexico, unstrangled,  
Lest you should hang as high as-well,  
As Haman dangled.

(I know not if his cord he twanged,  
Or the King proved forgiving.  
'Tis hard to think of Haman hanged,  
And Haymond living.)

Yes, as I said: in mortal fear  
To Mexico you journeyed;  
For you were on your trial here,  
And ill attorneyed.

The Law had long regarded you  
As an extreme offender.  
Religion looked upon you, too,  
With thoughts untender.

The Press to you was cold as snow,  
For sin you'd always call so.  
In Politics you were *\_de trop\_*,  
In Morals also.

All this is accurately true  
And, faith! there might be more said;  
But-well, to save your thrapple you  
Fled, as aforesaid.

You're down in Mexico-that's plain  
As that the sun is risen;  
For Daniel Burns, down there, his chain  
Drags round in prison.

Ambrose Bierce

# Peace

When lion and lamb have together lain down  
Spectators cry out, all in chorus;  
'The lamb doesn't shrink nor the lion frown  
A miracle's working before us!'

But 't is patent why Hot-head his wrath holds in,  
And Faint-heart her terror and loathing;  
For the one's but an ass in a lion's skin,  
The other a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Ambrose Bierce

# 'Peaceable Expulsion'

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

MOUNTWAVE \_a Politician\_

HARDHAND \_a Workingman\_

TOK BAK \_a Chinaman\_

SATAN \_a Friend to Mountwave\_

CHORUS OF FOREIGN VOTERS.

MOUNTWAVE:

My friend, I beg that you will lend your ears  
(I know 'tis asking a good deal of you)  
While I for your instruction nominate  
Some certain wrongs you suffer. Men like you  
Imperfectly are sensible of all  
The miseries they actually feel.  
Hence, Providence has prudently raised up  
Clear-sighted men like me to diagnose  
Their cases and inform them where they're hurt.  
The wounds of honest workingmen I've made  
A specialty, and probing them's my trade.

HARDHAND:

Well, Mister, s'pose you let yer bossest eye  
Camp on my mortal part awhile; then you  
Jes' toot my sufferin's an' tell me what's  
The fashionable caper now in writhes-  
The very swellest wiggle.

MOUNTWAVE:

Well, my lad,  
'Tis plain as is the long, conspicuous nose  
Borne, ponderous and pendulous, between  
The elephant's remarkable eye-teeth  
(\_Enter Tok Bak.\_)



That Chinese competition's what ails \_you\_.

BOTH (\_Singing\_):

O pig-tail Celestial,  
O barbarous bestial,  
Abominable Chinee!  
Simian fellow man,  
Primitive yellow man,  
Joshian devotee!  
Shoe-and-cigar machine,  
Oleomargarine  
You are, and butter are we-  
Fat of the land are we,  
Salt of the earth;  
In God's image planned to be-  
Noble in birth!  
You, on the contrary,  
Modeled upon very  
Different lines indeed,  
Show in conspicuous,  
Base and ridiculous  
Ways your inferior breed.  
Wretched apology,  
Shame of ethnology,  
Monster unspeakably low!  
Fit to be buckshotted-  
Be you 'steboycotted.  
Vanish-vamoose-mosy-Go!

TOK BAK:

You listen me! You beatee the big dlum  
An' tell me go to Flowly Kingdom Come.  
You all too muchee fool. You chinnee heap.  
Such talkee like my washee-belly cheap!  
( \_Enter Satan.\_ )  
You dlive me outee clunty towns all way;  
Why you no tackle me Safflisco, hay?

SATAN:

Methought I heard a murmuring of tongues  
Sound through the ceiling of the hollow earth,  
As if the anti-coolie ques--ha! friends,  
Well met. You see I keep my ancient word:  
Where two or three are gathered in my name,  
There am I in their midst.

MOUNTWAVE:

O monstrous thief!  
To quote the words of Shakespeare as your own.  
I know his work.

HARDHAND:

Who's Shakespeare?-what's his trade?  
I've heard about the work o' that galoot  
Till I'm jest sick!

TOK BAK:

Go Sunny school-you'll know  
Mo' Bible. Bime by pleach-hell-talkee. Tell  
'Bout Abel-mebby so he live too cheap.  
He mebbly all time dig on lanch-no dlink,  
No splee-no go plocession fo' make vote-  
No sendee money out of clunty fo'  
To helpee Ilishmen. Cain killum. Josh  
He catchee at it, an' he belly mad-  
Say: 'Allee Melicans boycottee Cain.'  
Not muchee-you no pleachee that:  
You all same lie.

MOUNTWAVE:

This cuss must be expelled.  
( \_Draws pistol\_.)

MOUNTWAVE, HARDHAND, SATAN ( \_singing\_ ):

For Chinese expulsion, hurrah!  
To mobbing and murder, all hail!

Away with your justice and law-  
We'll make every pagan turn tail.

CHORUS OF FOREIGN VOTERS:

Bedad! oof dot tief o'ze world-  
Zat Ivan Tchanay vos got hurled  
In Hella, da debil he say:  
'Wor be yer return pairmit, hey?'  
Und gry as 'e shaka da boot:  
'Zis haythen haf nevaire been oot!'

HARDHAND:

Too many cooks are working at this broth-  
I think, by thunder, t'will be mostly froth!  
I'm cussed ef I can sarvy, up to date,  
What good this dern fandango does the State.

MOUNTWAVE:

The State's advantage, sir, you may not see,  
But think how good it is for me.

SATAN:

And me.

(\_Curtain\_.)

Ambrose Bierce

## 'Phil' Crimmins

Still as he climbed into the public view  
His charms of person more apparent grew,  
Till the pleased world that watched his airy grace  
Saw nothing of him but his nether face  
Forgot his follies with his head's retreat,  
And blessed his virtues as it viewed their seat.

Ambrose Bierce

# Philosopher Bimm

Republicans think Jonas Bimm  
A Democrat gone mad,  
And Democrats consider him  
Republican and bad.

The Tough reviles him as a Dude  
And gives it him right hot;  
The Dude condemns his crassitude  
And calls him \_sans culottes.

Derided as an Anglophile  
By Anglophobes, forsooth,  
As Anglophobe he feels, the while,  
The Anglophilic tooth.

The Churchman calls him Atheist;  
The Atheists, rough-shod,  
Have ridden o'er him long and hissed  
'The wretch believes in God!'

The Saints whom clergymen we call  
Would kill him if they could;  
The Sinners (scientists and all)  
Complain that he is good.

All men deplore the difference  
Between themselves and him,  
And all devise expedients  
For paining Jonas Bimm.

I too, with wild demoniac glee,  
Would put out both his eyes;  
For Mr. Bimm appears to me  
Insufferably wise!

Ambrose Bierce

# Piety

The pig is taught by sermons and epistles  
To think the God of Swine has snout and bristles.

Judibras.

Ambrose Bierce

# Poesy

Successive bards pursue Ambition's fire  
That shines, Oblivion, above thy mire.  
The latest mounts his predecessor's trunk,  
And sinks his brother ere himself is sunk.  
So die ingloriously Fame's \_elite\_,  
But dams of dunces keep the line complete.

Ambrose Bierce

# Political Economy

'I beg you to note,' said a Man to a Goose,  
As he plucked from her bosom the plumage all loose,  
'That pillows and cushions of feathers and beds  
As warm as maids' hearts and as soft as their heads,  
Increase of life's comforts the general sum  
Which raises the standard of living.' 'Come, come,'  
The Goose said, impatiently, 'tell me or cease,  
How that is of any advantage to geese.'  
'What, what!' said the man-'you are very obtuse!  
Consumption no profit to those who produce?  
No good to accrue to Supply from a grand  
Progressive expansion, all round, of Demand?  
Luxurious habits no benefit bring  
To those who purvey the luxurious thing?  
Consider, I pray you, my friend, how the growth  
Of luxury promises-' 'Promises,' quoth  
The sufferer, 'what?-to what course is it pledged  
To pay me for being so often defledged?'  
'Accustomed'-this notion the plucker expressed  
As he ripped out a handful of down from her breast  
'To one kind of luxury, people soon yearn  
For others and ever for others in turn;  
And the man who to-night on your feathers will rest,  
His mutton or bacon or beef to digest,  
His hunger to-morrow will wish to assuage  
By dining on goose with a dressing of sage.'

Ambrose Bierce



## Politics

That land full surely hastens to its end  
Where public sycophants in homage bend  
The populace to flatter, and repeat  
The doubled echoes of its loud conceit.  
Lowly their attitude but high their aim,  
They creep to eminence through paths of shame,  
Till, fixed securely in the seats of pow'r,  
The dupes they flattered they at last devour.

Ambrose Bierce

# Polyphemus

Tw'as a sick young man with a face ungay  
And an eye that was all alone;  
And he shook his head in a hopeless way  
As he sat on a roadside stone.

'O, ailing youth, what untoward fate  
Has made the sun to set  
On your mirth and eye?' 'I'm constrained to state  
I'm an ex-West Point cadet.

"Tw'as at cannon-practice I got my hurt  
And my present frame of mind;  
For the gun went off with a double spurt-  
Before it, and also behind!"

'How sad, how sad, that a fine young chap,  
When studying how to kill,  
Should meet with so terrible a mishap  
Precluding eventual skill.

'Ah, woful to think that a weapon made  
For mowing down the foe  
Should commit so dreadful an escapade  
As to turn about to mow!"

No more he heeded while I condoled:  
He was wandering in his mind;  
His lonely eye unconsidered rolled,  
And his views he thus defined:

"Tw'as O for a breach of the peace-'twas O  
For an international brawl!  
But a piece of the breech-ah no, ah no,

I didn't want that at all.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Posterity's Award

I'd long been dead, but I returned to earth.  
Some small affairs posterity was making  
A mess of, and I came to see that worth  
Received its dues. I'd hardly finished waking,  
The grave-mould still upon me, when my eye  
Perceived a statue standing straight and high.

'Twas a colossal figure-bronze and gold  
Nobly designed, in attitude commanding.  
A toga from its shoulders, fold on fold,  
Fell to the pedestal on which 'twas standing.  
Nobility it had and splendid grace,  
And all it should have had-except a face!

It showed no features: not a trace nor sign  
Of any eyes or nose could be detected  
On the smooth oval of its front no line  
Where sites for mouths are commonly selected.  
All blank and blind its faulty head it reared.  
Let this be said: 'twas generously eared.

Seeing these things, I straight began to guess  
For whom this mighty image was intended.  
'The head,' I cried, 'is Upton's, and the dress  
Is Parson Bartlett's own.' True, his cloak ended  
Flush with his lowest vertebra, but no  
Sane sculptor ever made a toga so.

Then on the pedestal these words I read:  
'\_Erected Eighteen Hundred Ninety-seven\_'  
(Saint Christofer! how fast the time had sped!  
Of course it naturally does in Heaven)  
'\_To\_ --' (here a blank space for the name began)  
'\_The Nineteenth Century's Great Foremost Man\_!'

'\_Completed\_' the inscription ended, '\_in  
The Year Three Thousand\_'-which was just arriving.  
By Jove! thought I, 'twould make the founders grin  
To learn whose fame so long has been surviving

To read the name posterity will place  
In that blank void, and view the finished face.

Even as I gazed, the year Three Thousand came,  
And then by acclamation all the people  
Decreed whose was our century's best fame;  
Then scaffolded the statue like a steeple,  
To make the likeness; and the name was sunk  
Deep in the pedestal's metallic trunk.

Whose was it? Gentle reader, pray excuse  
The seeming rudeness, but I can't consent to  
Be so forehanded with important news.  
'Twas neither yours nor mine-let that content you.  
If not, the name I must surrender, which,  
Upon a dead man's word, was George K. Fitch!

Ambrose Bierce

## Prayer [fear Not In Any Tongue To Call]

Fear not in any tongue to call  
Upon the Lord-He's skilled in all.  
But if He answereth my plea  
He speaketh one unknown to me.

Ambrose Bierce

# Presentiment

WITH saintly grace and reverent tread  
She walked among the graves with me;  
Her every footfall seemed to be  
A benediction on the dead.

The guardian spirit of the place  
She seemed, and I some ghost forlorn,  
Surprised by the untimely morn  
She made with her resplendent face.

Moved by some waywardness of will,  
Three paces from the path apart  
She stepped and stood—my prescient heart  
Was stricken with a passing chill.

My child-lore of the years agone  
Remembering, I smiled and thought,  
“Who shudders suddenly at naught,  
His grave is being trod upon.”

But now I know that it was more  
Than idle fancy. O, my sweet,  
I did not know such little feet  
Could make a buried heart so sore!

Ambrose Bierce

# Psychographs

Says Gerald Massey: 'When I write, a band  
Of souls of the departed guides my hand.'  
How strange that poems cumbering our shelves,  
Penned by immortal parts, have none themselves

Ambrose Bierce



# Rebuke

When Admonition's hand essays  
Our greed to curse,  
Its lifted finger oft displays  
Our missing purse.

Ambrose Bierce

## Re-Edified

Lord of the tempest, pray refrain  
From leveling this church again.  
Now in its doom, as so you've willed it,  
We acquiesce. But you'll rebuild it.

Ambrose Bierce

# Rejected

When Dr. Charles O'Donnell died  
They sank a box with him inside.

The plate with his initials three  
Was simply graven-'C.O.D.'

That night two demons of the Pit  
A down the coal-hole shunted it.

Ten million million leagues it fell,  
Alighting at the gate of Hell.

Nick looked upon it with surprise,  
A night-storm darkening his eyes.

'They've sent this rubbish, C.O.D.  
I'll never pay a cent!' said he.

Ambrose Bierce

# Religion

Hassan Bedreddin, clad in rags, ill-shod,  
Sought the great temple of the living God.  
The worshippers arose and drove him forth,  
And one in power beat him with a rod.

'Allah,' he cried, 'thou seest what I got;  
Thy servants bar me from the sacred spot.'  
'Be comforted,' the Holy One replied;  
'It is the only place where I am not.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Religious Progress

Professor dear, I think it queer  
That all these good religions  
('Twixt you and me, some two or three  
Are schemes for plucking pigeons)

I mean 'tis strange that every change  
Our poor minds to unfetter  
Entails a new religion-true  
As t' other one, and better.

From each in turn the truth we learn,  
That wood or flesh or spirit  
May justly boast it rules the roast  
Until we cease to fear it.

Nay, once upon a time long gone  
Man worshipped Cat and Lizard:  
His God he'd find in any kind  
Of beast, from a to izzard.

When risen above his early love  
Of dirt and blood and slumber,  
He pulled down these vain deities,  
And made one out of lumber.

'Far better that than even a cat,'  
The Howisons all shouted;  
'When God is wood religion's good!'  
But one poor cynic doubted.

'A timber God-that's very odd!'  
Said Progress, and invented  
The simple plan to worship Man,  
Who, kindly soul! consented.

But soon our eye we lift asky,  
Our vows all unregarded,  
And find (at least so says the priest)  
The Truth-and Man's discarded.

Along our line of march recline  
Dead gods devoid of feeling;  
And thick about each sun-cracked lout  
Dried Howisons are kneeling.

Ambrose Bierce

# Reminded

Beneath my window twilight made  
Familiar mysteries of shade.  
Faint voices from the darkening down  
Were calling vaguely to the town.  
Intent upon a low, far gleam  
That burned upon the world's extreme,  
I sat, with short reprieve from grief,  
And turned the volume, leaf by leaf,  
Wherein a hand, long dead, had wrought  
A million miracles of thought.  
My fingers carelessly unclung  
The lettered pages, and among  
Them wandered witless, nor divined  
The wealth in which, poor fools, they mined.  
The soul that should have led their quest  
Was dreaming in the level west,  
Where a tall tower, stark and still,  
Uplifted on a distant hill,  
Stood lone and passionless to claim  
Its guardian star's returning flame.

I know not how my dream was broke,  
But suddenly my spirit woke  
Filled with a foolish fear to look  
Upon the hand that clove the book,  
Significantly pointing; next  
I bent attentive to the text,  
And read-and as I read grew old-  
The mindless words: 'Poor Tom's a-cold!'

Ah me! to what a subtle touch  
The brimming cup resigns its clutch  
Upon the wine. Dear God, is 't writ  
That hearts their overburden bear  
Of bitterness though thou permit  
The pranks of Chance, alurk in nooks,  
And striking coward blows from books,  
And dead hands reaching everywhere?





# Revenge

A spitcat sate on a garden gate  
And a snapdog fared beneath;  
Careless and free was his mien, and he  
Held a fiddle-string in his teeth.

She marked his march, she wrought an arch  
Of her back and blew up her tail;  
And her eyes were green as ever were seen,  
And she uttered a woful wail.

The spitcat's plaint was as follows: 'It ain't  
That I am to music a foe;  
For fiddle-strings bide in my own inside,  
And I twang them soft and low.

'But that dog has trifled with art and rifled  
A kitten of mine, ah me!  
That catgut slim was marauded from him:  
'Tis the string that men call E.'

Then she sounded high, in the key of Y,  
A note that cracked the tombs;  
And the missiles through the firmament flew  
From adjacent sleeping-rooms.

As her gruesome yell from the gate-post fell  
She followed it down to earth;  
And that snapdog wears a placard that bears  
The inscription: 'Blind from birth.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Rimer

The rimer quenches his unheeded fires,  
The sound surceases and the sense expires.  
Then the domestic dog, to east and west,  
Expounds the passions burning in his breast.  
The rising moon o'er that enchanted land  
Pauses to hear and yearns to understand.

Ambrose Bierce

# Safety-Clutch

Once I seen a human ruin  
In a elevator-well.  
And his members was bestrewin'  
All the place where he had fell.

And I says, apostrophisin'  
That uncommon woful wreck:  
'Your position's so surprisin'  
That I tremble for your neck!'

Then that ruin, smilin' sadly  
And impressive, up and spoke:  
'Well, I wouldn't tremble badly,  
For it's been a fortnight broke.'

Then, for further comprehension  
Of his attitude, he begs  
I will focus my attention  
On his various arms and legs--

How they all are contumacious;  
Where they each, respective, lie;  
How one trotter proves ungracious,  
T' other one an alibi.

These particulars is mentioned  
For to show his dismal state,  
Which I wasn't first intentioned  
To specifical relate.

None is worser to be dreaded  
That I ever have heard tell  
Than the gent's who there was spreaded  
In that elevator-well.

Now this tale is allegoric--  
It is figurative all,  
For the well is metaphoric  
And the feller didn't fall.

I opine it isn't moral  
For a writer-man to cheat,  
And despise to wear a laurel  
As was gotten by deceit.

For 'tis Politics intended  
By the elevator, mind,  
It will boost a person splendid  
If his talent is the kind.

Col. Bryan had the talent  
(For the busted man is him)  
And it shot him up right gallant  
Till his head began to swim.

Then the rope it broke above him  
And he painful came to earth  
Where there's nobody to love him  
For his detrimented worth.

Though he's living' none would know him,  
Or at leastwise not as such.  
Moral of this woful poem:  
Frequent oil your safety-clutch.

Ambrose Bierce

# Salvini In America

Come, gentlemen-your gold.  
Thanks: welcome to the show.  
To hear a story told  
In words you do not know.

Now, great Salvini, rise  
And thunder through your tears,  
Aha! friends, let your eyes  
Interpret to your ears.

Gods! 't is a goodly game.  
Observe his stride-how grand!  
When legs like his declaim  
Who can misunderstand?

See how that arm goes round.  
It says, as plain as day:  
'I love,' 'The lost is found,'  
'Well met, sir,' or, 'Away!'

And mark the drawing down  
Of brows. How accurate  
The language of that frown:  
Pain, gentlemen-or hate.

Those of the critic trade  
Swear it is all as clear  
As if his tongue were made  
To fit an English ear.

Hear that Italian phrase!  
Greek to your sense, 't is true;  
But shrug, expression, gaze  
Well, they are Grecian too.

But it is Art! God wot  
Its tongue to all is known.  
Faith! he to whom 't were not  
Would better hold his own.

Shakespeare says act and word  
Must match together true.  
From what you've seen and heard,  
How can you doubt they do?

Enchanting drama! Mark  
The crowd 'from pit to dome',  
One box alone is dark  
The prompter stays at home.

Stupendous artist! You  
Are lord of joy and woe:  
We thrill if you say 'Boo,'  
And thrill if you say 'Bo.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Samuel Shortridge

Like a worn mother he attempts in vain  
To still the unruly Crier of his brain:  
The more he rocks the cradle of his chin  
The more uproarious grows the brat within.

Ambrose Bierce

# Sires And Sons

Wild wanton Luxury lays waste the land  
With difficulty tilled by Thrift's hard hand!  
Then dies the State!-and, in its carcass found,  
The millionaires, all maggot-like, abound.  
Alas! was it for this that Warren died,  
And Arnold sold himself to t' other side,  
Stark piled at Bennington his British dead,  
And Gates at Camden, Lee at Monmouth, fled?  
For this that Perry did the foeman fleece,  
And Hull surrender to preserve the peace?  
Degenerate countrymen, renounce, I pray,  
The slothful ease, the luxury, the gay  
And gallant trappings of this idle life,  
And be more fit for one another's wife.

Ambrose Bierce



# Slander

FITCH:

'All vices you've exhausted, friend;  
So all the papers say.'

PICKERING:

'Ah, what vile calumnies are penned!-  
'Tis just the other way.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Slickens

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

HAYSEED \_a Granger\_

NOZZLE \_a Miner\_

RINGDIVVY \_a Statesman\_

FEEGOBBLE \_a Lawyer\_

JUNKET \_a Committee\_

\_Scene\_-Yuba Dam.

\_Feegobble, Ringdivvy, Nozzle\_.

NOZZLE:

My friends, since '51 I have pursued  
The evil tenor of my watery way,  
Removing hills as by an act of faith

RINGDIVVY:

Just so; the steadfast faith of those who hold,  
In foreign lands beyond the Eastern sea,  
The shares in your concern-a simple, blind,  
Unreasoning belief in dividends,  
Still stimulated by assessments which,  
When the skies fall, ensnaring all the larks,  
Will bring, no doubt, a very great return.

ALL (\_singing\_):

O the beautiful assessment,  
The exquisite assessment,  
The regular assessment,  
That makes the water flow.

RINGDIVVY:

The rascally-assessment!

FEEGOBBLE:

The murderous assessment!

NOZZLE:

The glorious assessment  
That makes my mare to go!

FEEGOBBLE:

But, Nozzle, you, I think, were on the point  
Of making a remark about some rights-  
Some certain vested rights you have acquired  
By long immunity; for still the law  
Holds that if one do evil undisturbed  
His right to do so ripens with the years;  
And one may be a villain long enough  
To make himself an honest gentleman.

ALL (\_singing\_):

Hail, holy law,  
The soul with awe  
Bows to thy dispensation.

NOZZLE:

It breaks my jaw!

RINGDIVVY:

It qualms my maw!

FEEGOBBLE:

It feeds my jaw,  
It crams my maw,  
It is my soul's salvation!

NOZZLE:

Why, yes, I've floated mountains to the sea  
For lo! these many years; though some, they say,  
Do strand themselves along the bottom lands  
And cover up a village here and there,  
And here and there a ranch. 'Tis said, indeed,  
The granger with his female and his young  
Do not infrequently go to the dickens  
By premature burial in slickens.

ALL (\_singing\_):

Could slickens forever  
Choke up the river,  
And slime's endeavor  
Be tried on grain,  
How small the measure  
Of granger's treasure,  
How keen his pain!

RINGDIVVY:

'A consummation devoutly to be wished!  
These rascal grangers would long since have been  
Submerged in slimes, to the last man of them,  
But for the fact that all their wicked tribes  
Affect our legislation with their bribes.

ALL (\_singing\_):

O bribery's great-  
'Tis a pillar of State,  
And the people they are free.

FEEGOBBLE:

It smashes my slate!

NOZZLE:

It is thievery straight!

RINGDIVVY:

But it's been the making of me!

NOZZLE:

I judge by certain shrewd sensations here  
In these callosities I call my thumbs  
thrilling sense as of ten thousand pins,  
Red-hot and penetrant, transpiercing all  
The cuticle and tickling through the nerves  
That some malign and awful thing draws near.

( \_Enter Hayseed.\_ )

Good Lord! here are the ghosts and spooks of all  
The grangers I have decently interred,  
Rolled into one!

FEEGOBBLE:

Plead, phantom.

RINGDIVVY:

You've the floor.

HAYSEED:

From the margin of the river  
(Bitter Creek, they sometimes call it)  
Where I cherished once the pumpkin,  
And the summer squash promoted,  
Harvested the sweet potato,  
Dallied with the fatal melon  
And subdued the fierce cucumber,  
I've been driven by the slickens,  
Driven by the slimes and tailings!  
All my family-my Polly  
Ann and all my sons and daughters,  
Dog and baby both included  
All were swamped in seas of slickens,

Buried fifty fathoms under,  
Where they lie, prepared to play their  
Gentle prank on geologic  
Gents that shall exhume them later,  
In the dim and distant future,  
Taking them for melancholy  
Relics antedating Adam.  
I alone got up and dusted.

NOZZLE:

Avaunt! you horrid and infernal cuss!  
What dire distress have you prepared for us?

RINGDIVVY:

Were I a buzzard stooping from the sky  
My craw with filth to fill,  
Into your honorable body I  
Would introduce a bill.

FEEGOBBLE:

Defendant, hence, or, by the gods, I'll brain thee!-  
Unless you saved some turneps to retain me.

HAYSEED:

As I was saying, I got up and dusted,  
My ranch a graveyard and my business busted!  
But hearing that a fellow from the City,  
Who calls himself a Citizens' Committee,  
Was coming up to play the very dickens,  
With those who cover up our farms with slickens,  
And make himself-unless I am in error  
To all such miscreants a holy terror,  
I thought if I would join the dialogue  
I maybe might get payment for my dog.

ALL (\_Singing\_):

O the dog is the head of Creation,

Prime work of the Master's hand;  
He hasn't a known occupation,  
Yet lives on the fat of the land.  
Adipose, indolent, sleek and orbicular,  
Sun-soaken, door matted, cross and particular,  
Men, women, children, all coddle and wait on him,  
Then, accidentally shutting the gate on him,  
Miss from their calves, ever after, the rifted out  
Mouthful of tendons that doggy has lifted out!  
(\_Enter Junket\_.)

JUNKET:

Well met, my hearties! I must trouble you  
Jointly and severally to provide  
A comfortable carriage, with relays  
Of hardy horses. This Committee means  
To move in state about the country here.  
I shall expect at every place I stop  
Good beds, of course, and everything that's nice,  
With bountiful repast of meat and wine.  
For this Committee comes to sea and mark  
And inwardly digest.

HAYSEED:

Digest my dog!

NOZZLE:

First square my claim for damages: the gold  
Escaping with the slickens keeps me poor!

RINGDIVVY:

I merely would remark that if you'd grease  
My itching palm it would more glibly glide  
Into the public pocket.

FEEGOBBLE:

Sir, the wheels

Of justice move but slowly till they're oiled.  
I have some certain writs and warrants here,  
Prepared against your advent. You recall  
The tale of Zaccheus, who did climb a tree,  
And Jesus said: 'Come down'?

JUNKET:

Why, bless your souls!  
I've got no money; I but came to see  
What all this noisy babble is about,  
Make a report and file the same away.

NOZZLE, RINGDIVVY, FEEGOBBLE, HAYSEED:

How'll that help us? Reports are not our style  
Of provender!

JUNKET:

Well, you can gnaw the file.

Ambrose Bierce



# Something In The Papers

'What's in the paper?' Oh, it's dev'lish dull:  
There's nothing happening at all-a lull  
After the war-storm. Mr. Someone's wife  
Killed by her lover with, I think, a knife.  
A fire on Blank Street and some babies-one,  
Two, three or four, I don't remember, done  
To quite a delicate and lovely brown.  
A husband shot by woman of the town  
The same old story. Shipwreck somewhere south.  
The crew, all saved-or lost. Uncommon drouth  
Makes hundreds homeless up the River Mud  
Though, come to think, I guess it was a flood.  
'T is feared some bank will burst-or else it won't  
They always burst, I fancy-or they don't;  
Who cares a cent?-the banker pays his coin  
And takes his chances: bullet in the groin  
But that's another item-suicide  
Fool lost his money (serve him right) and died.  
Heigh-ho! there's noth-Jerusalem! what's this:  
Tom Jones has failed! My God, what an abyss  
Of ruin!-owes me seven hundred clear!  
Was ever such a damned disastrous year!

Ambrose Bierce

# Stephen Dorsey

Fly, heedless stranger, from this spot accurst,  
Where rests in Satan an offender first  
In point of greatness, as in point of time,  
Of new-school rascals who proclaim their crime.  
Skilled with a frank loquacity to blab  
The dark arcana of each mighty grab,  
And famed for lying from his early youth,  
He sinned secure behind a veil of truth.  
Some lock their lips upon their deeds; some write  
A damning record and conceal from sight;  
Some, with a lust of speaking, die to quell it.  
His way to keep a secret was to tell it.

Ambrose Bierce

# Stephen J. Field

Here sleeps one of the greatest students  
Of jurisprudence.  
Nature endowed him with the gift  
Of the juristhrift.  
All points of law alike he threw  
The dice to settle.  
Those honest cubes were loaded true  
With railway metal.

Ambrose Bierce

# Stoneman In Heaven

The Seraphs came to Christ, and said: 'Behold!  
The man, presumptuous and overbold,  
Who boasted that his mercy could excel  
Thine own, is dead and on his way to Hell.'

Gravely the Saviour asked: 'What did he do  
To make his impious assertion true?'

'He was a Governor, releasing all  
The vilest felons ever held in thrall.  
No other mortal, since the dawn of time,  
Has ever pardoned such a mass of crime!'

Christ smiled benignly on the Seraphim:  
'Yet I am victor, for I pardon \_him\_.'

Ambrose Bierce

# Strained Relations

Says England to Germany: 'Africa's ours.'

Says Germany: 'Ours, I opine.'

Says Africa: 'Tell me, delectable Pow'rs,

What is it that ought to be mine?'

Ambrose Bierce

# Substance Versus Shadow

So, gentle critics, you would have me tilt,  
Not at the guilty, only just at Guilt!  
Spare the offender and condemn Offense,  
And make life miserable to Pretense!  
'Whip Vice and Folly-that is satire's use  
But be not personal, for \_that's\_ abuse;  
Nor e'er forget what, 'like a razor keen,  
Wounds with a touch that's neither felt nor seen."  
Well, friends, I venture, destitute of awe,  
To think that razor but an old, old saw,  
A trifle rusty; and a wound, I'm sure,  
That's felt not, seen not, one can well endure.  
Go to! go to!-you're as unfitted quite  
To give advice to writers as to write.  
I find in Folly and in Vice a lack  
Of head to hit, and for the lash no back;  
Whilst Pixley has a pow that's easy struck,  
And though good Deacon Fitch (a Fitch for luck!)  
Has none, yet, lest he go entirely free,  
God gave to him a corn, a heel to me.  
He, also, sets his face (so like a flint  
The wonder grows that Pickering doesn't skin't)  
With cold austerity, against these wars  
On scamps-'tis Scampery that \_he\_ abhors!  
Behold advance in dignity and state  
Grave, smug, serene, indubitably great  
Stanford, philanthropist! One hand bestows  
In alms what t'other one as justice owes.  
Rascality attends him like a shade,  
But closes, woundless, o'er my baffled blade,  
Its limbs unsevered, spirit undismayed.  
Faith! I'm for something can be made to feel,  
If, like Pelides, only in the heel.  
The fellow's self invites assault; his crimes  
Will each bear killing twenty thousand times!  
Anon Creed Haymond-but the list is long  
Of names to point the moral of my song.  
Rogues, fools, impostors, sycophants, they rise,  
They foul the earth and horrify the skies

With Mr. Huntington (sole honest man  
In all the reek of that rascalion clan)  
Denouncing Theft as hard as e'er he can!

Ambrose Bierce

# Subterranean Phantasies

I died. As meekly in the earth I lay,  
With shriveled fingers reverently folded,  
The worm-uncivil engineer!-my clay  
Tunneled industriously, and the mole did.  
My body could not dodge them, but my soul did;  
For that had flown from this terrestrial ball  
And I was rid of it for good and all.

So there I lay, debating what to do  
What measures might most usefully be taken  
To circumvent the subterranean crew  
Of anthropophagi and save my bacon.  
My fortitude was all this while unshaken,  
But any gentleman, of course, protests  
Against receiving uninvited guests.

However proud he might be of his meats,  
Not even Apicius, nor, I think, Lucullus,  
Wasted on tramps his culinary sweets;  
'\_Aut Caesar\_', say judicious hosts, '\_aut nullus\_.'  
And though when Marcius came unbidden Tullus  
Aufidius feasted him because he starved,  
Marcius by Tullus afterward was carved.

We feed the hungry, as the book commands  
(For men might question else our orthodoxy)  
But do not care to see the outstretched hands,  
And so we minister to them by proxy.  
When Want, in his improper person, knocks he  
Finds we're engaged. The graveworm's very fresh  
To think we like his presence in the flesh.

So, as I said, I lay in doubt; in all  
That underworld no judges could determine  
My rights. When Death approaches them they fall,  
And falling, naturally soil their ermine.  
And still below ground, as above, the vermin  
That work by dark and silent methods win  
The case-the burial case that one is in.



Cases at law so slowly get ahead,  
Even when the right is visibly unclouded,  
That if all men are classed as quick and dead,  
The judges all are dead, though some unshrouded.  
Pray Jove that when they're actually crowded  
On Styx's brink, and Charon rows in sight,  
His bark prove worse than Cerberus's bite.

Ah! Cerberus, if you had but begot  
A race of three-mouthed dogs for man to nourish  
And woman to caress, the muse had not  
Lamented the decay of virtues currish,  
And triple-hydrophobia now would flourish,  
For barking, biting, kissing to employ  
Canine repeaters were indeed a joy.

Lord! how we cling to this vile world! Here I,  
Whose dust was laid ere I began this carping,  
By moles and worms and such familiar fry  
Run through and through, am singing still and harping  
Of mundane matters-flattening, too, and sharpening.  
I hate the Angel of the Sleeping Cup:  
So I'm for getting-and for shutting-up.

Ambrose Bierce

# Surprised

'O son of mine age, these eyes lose their fire:  
Be eyes, I pray, to thy dying sire.'

'O father, fear not, for mine eyes are bright  
I read through a millstone at dead of night.'

'My son, O tell me, who are those men,  
Rushing like pigs to the feeding-pen?'

'Welcomers they of a statesman grand.  
They'll shake, and then they will pocket; his hand.'

'Sagacious youth, with the wondrous eye,  
They seem to throw up their headgear. Why?'

'Because they've thrown up their hands until, O,  
They're so tired!-and dinners they've none to throw.'

'My son, my son, though dull are mine ears,  
I hear a great sound like the people's cheers.'

'He's thanking them, father, with tears in his eyes,  
For giving him lately that fine surprise.'

'My memory fails as I near mine end;  
How did they astonish their grateful friend?'

'By letting him buy, like apples or oats,  
With that which has made him so good, the votes  
Which make him so wise and grand and great.  
Now, father, please die, for 'tis growing late.'

Ambrose Bierce

## T.A.H.

YES, he was that, or that, as you prefer,—  
Did so and so, though, faith, it was n't all;  
Lived like a fool, or a philosopher,  
And had whatever's needful to a fall.  
As rough inflections on a planet merge  
In the true bend of the gigantic sphere,  
Nor mar the perfect circle of its verge,  
So in the survey of his worth the small  
Asperities of spirit disappear,  
Lost in the grander curves of character.  
He lately was hit hard; none knew but I  
The strength and terror of that ghastly stroke,—  
Not even herself. He uttered not a cry,  
But set his teeth and made a revelry;  
Drank like a devil,—staining sometimes red  
The goblet 's edge; diced with his conscience; spread,  
Like Sisyphus, a feast for Death, and spoke  
His welcome in a tongue so long forgot  
That even his ancient guest remembered not  
What race had cursed him in it. Thus my friend,  
Still conjugating with each failing sense  
The verb "to die" in every mood and tense,  
Pursued his awful humor to the end.  
When, like a stormy dawn, the crimson broke  
From his white lips, he smiled and mutely bled,  
And, having meanly lived, is grandly dead.

Ambrose Bierce

# Technology

'Twas a serious person with locks of gray  
And a figure like a crescent;  
His gravity, clearly, had come to stay,  
But his smile was evanescent.

He stood and conversed with a neighbor, and  
With (likewise) a high falsetto;  
And he stabbed his forefinger into his hand  
As if it had been a stiletto.

His words, like the notes of a tenor drum,  
Came out of his head unblended,  
And the wonderful altitude of some  
Was exceptionally splendid.

While executing a shake of the head,  
With the hand, as it were, of a master,  
This agonizing old gentleman said:  
"Twas a truly sad disaster!

'Four hundred and ten longs and shorts in all,  
Went down'-he paused and snuffled.  
A single tear was observed to fall,  
And the old man's drum was muffled.

'A very calamitous year,' he said.  
And again his head-piece hoary  
He shook, and another pearl he shed,  
As if he wept *\_con amore*.

'O lacrymose person,' I cried, 'pray why  
Should these failures so affect you?  
With speculators in stocks no eye  
That's normal would ever connect you.'

He focused his orbs upon mine and smiled  
In a sinister sort of manner.  
'Young man,' he said, 'your words are wild:  
I spoke of the steamship 'Hanner.'

'For she has went down in a howlin' squall,  
And my heart is nigh to breakin'  
Four hundred and ten longs and shorts in all  
Will never need undertakin'!

'I'm in the business myself,' said he,  
'And you've mistook my expression;  
For I uses the technical terms, you see,  
Employed in my perfession.'

That old undertaker has joined the throng  
On the other side of the River,  
But I'm still unhappy to think I'm a 'long,'  
And a tape-line makes me shiver.

Ambrose Bierce

# Tempora Mutantur

'The world is dull,' I cried in my despair:  
'Its myths and fables are no longer fair.

'Roll back thy centuries, O Father Time.  
To Greece transport me in her golden prime.

'Give back the beautiful old Gods again  
The sportive Nymphs, the Dryad's jocund train,

'Pan piping on his reeds, the Naiades,  
The Sirens singing by the sleepy seas.

'Nay, show me but a Gorgon and I'll dare  
To lift mine eyes to her peculiar hair

'(The fatal horrors of her snaky pate,  
That stiffen men into a stony state)

'And die-erecting, as my soul goes hence,  
A statue of myself, without expense.'

Straight as I spoke I heard the voice of Fate:  
'Look up, my lad, the Gorgon sisters wait.'

Raising my eyes, I saw Medusa stand,  
Stheno, Euryale, on either hand.

I gazed unpetrified and unappalled  
The girls had aged and were entirely bald!

Ambrose Bierce

# Thanksgiving

\_The Superintendent of an Almshouse. A Pauper.\_

SUPERINTENDENT:

So \_you're\_ unthankful-you'll not eat the bird?  
You sit about the place all day and gird.  
I understand you'll not attend the ball  
That's to be given to-night in Pauper Hall.

PAUPER:

Why, that is true, precisely as you've heard:  
I have no teeth and I will eat no bird.

SUPERINTENDENT:

Ah! see how good is Providence. Because  
Of teeth He has denuded both your jaws  
The fowl's made tender; you can overcome it  
By suction; or at least-well, you can gum it,  
Attesting thus the dictum of the preachers  
That Providence is good to all His creatures-  
Turkeys excepted. Come, ungrateful friend,  
If our Thanksgiving dinner you'll attend  
You shall say grace-ask God to bless at least  
The soft and liquid portions of the feast.

PAUPER.

Without those teeth my speech is rather thick  
He'll hardly understand Gum Arabic.  
No, I'll not dine to-day. As to the ball,  
'Tis known to you that I've no legs at all.  
I had the gout-hereditary; so,  
As it could not be cornered in my toe  
They cut my legs off in the fond belief  
That shortening me would make my anguish brief.  
Lacking my legs I could not prosecute  
With any good advantage a pursuit;

And so, because my father chose to court  
Heaven's favor with his ortolans and Port  
(Thanksgiving every day!) the Lord supplied  
Saws for my legs, an almshouse for my pride  
And, once a year, a bird for my inside.  
No, I'll not dance-my light fantastic toe  
Took to its heels some twenty years ago.  
Some small repairs would be required for putting  
My feelings on a saltatory footing.

\_(Sings)\_

O the legless man's an unhappy chap  
\_Tum-hi, tum-hi, tum-he o'haddy  
The favors o' fortune fall not in his lap  
\_Tum-hi, tum-heedle-do hum  
The plums of office avoid his plate  
No matter how much he may stump the State  
\_Tum-hi, ho-heeee.\_  
The grass grows never beneath his feet,  
But he cannot hope to make both ends meet  
\_Tum-hi.\_  
With a gleeless eye and a somber heart,  
He plays the role of his mortal part:  
Wholly himself he can never be.  
O, a soleless corporation is he!  
\_Tum\_.

SUPERINTENDENT:

The chapel bell is calling, thankless friend,  
Balls you may not, but church you \_shall\_, attend.  
Some recognition cannot be denied  
To the great mercy that has turned aside  
The sword of death from us and let it fall  
Upon the people's necks in Montreal;  
That spared our city, steeple, roof and dome,  
And drowned the Texans out of house and home;  
Blessed all our continent with peace, to flood  
The Balkan with a cataclysm of blood.  
Compared with blessings of so high degree,  
Your private woes look mighty small-to me.



Ambrose Bierce

# The Aesthetes

The lily cranks, the lily cranks,  
The lippy, loony lasses!  
They multiply in rising ranks  
To execute their solemn pranks,  
They moon along in masses.  
Blow, sweet lily, in the shade! O,  
Sunflower decorate the dado!

The maiden ass, the maiden ass,  
The tall and tailless jenny!  
In limp attire as green as grass,  
She stands, a monumental brass,  
The one of one too many.  
Blow, sweet lily, in the shade! O,  
Sunflower decorate the dado!

Ambrose Bierce

# The American Party

Oh, Marcus D. Boruck, me hearty,  
I sympathize wid ye, poor lad!  
A man that's shot out of his party  
Is mighty onlucky, bedad!  
An' the sowl o' that man is sad.

But, Marcus, gossoon, ye deserve it  
Ye know for yerself that ye do,  
For ye j'ined not intendin' to sarve it,  
But hopin' to make it sarve you,  
Though the roll of its members wuz two.

The other wuz Pixley, an' 'Surely,'  
Ye said, 'he's a kite that wall sail.'  
An' so ye hung till him securely,  
Enactin' the role of a tail.  
But there wuzn't the ghost of a gale!

But the party to-day has behind it  
A powerful backin', I'm told;  
For just enough Irish have j'ined it  
(An' I'm m'anin' to be enrolled)  
To kick ye out into the cold.

It's hard on ye, darlint, I'm thinkin'  
So young-so American, too-  
Wid bypassers grinnin' an' winkin',  
An' sayin', wid ref'rence to you:  
'Get onto the murtherin' Joo!'

Republicans never will take ye  
They had ye for many a year;  
An' Dimocrats-angels forsake ye!  
If ever ye come about here  
We'll brand ye and scollop yer ear!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Barking Weasel

You say, John Irish, Mr. Taylor hath  
A painted beard. Quite likely that is true,  
And sure 'tis natural you spend your wrath  
On what has been least merciful to you.  
By Taylor's chin, if I am not mistaken,  
You like a rat have recently been shaken.

To wear a beard of artificial hue  
May be or this or that, I know not what;  
But, faith, 'tis better to be black-and-blue  
In beard from dallying with brush and pot  
Than to be so in body from the beating  
That hardy rogues get when detected cheating.

You're whacked about the mazzard rather more  
Of late than any other man in town.  
Certes your vulnerable back is sore  
And tender, too, your corrigible crown.  
In truth your whole periphery discloses  
More vivid colors than a bed of posies!

You call it glory! Put your tongue in sheath!  
Scars got in battle, even if on the breast,  
May be a shameful record if, beneath,  
A robber heart a lawless strife attest.  
John Sullivan had wounds, and Paddy Ryan  
Nay, as to that, even Masten has, and Bryan.

'Tis willingly conceded you've a knack  
At holding the attention of the town;  
The worse for you when you have on your back  
What did not grow there-prithee put it down!  
For pride kills thrift, and you lack board and lodging,  
Even while the brickbats of renown you're dodging.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Birth Of The Rail

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

LELAND, THE KID \_a Road Agent\_  
COWBOY CHARLEY \_Same Line of Business\_  
HAPPY HUNTY \_Ditto in All Respects\_  
SOOTYMUG \_a Devil\_

\_Scene\_ -the Dutch Flat Stage Road, at 12 P.M., on a Night  
of 1864.

### COWBOY CHARLEY:

My boss, I fear she is delayed to-night.  
Already it is past the hour, and yet  
My ears have reached no sound of wheels; no note  
Melodious, of long, luxurious oaths  
Betokens the traditional dispute  
(Unsettled from the dawn of time) between  
The driver and off wheeler; no clear chant  
Nor carol of Wells Fargo's messenger  
Unbosoming his soul upon the air  
his prowess to the tender-foot,  
And how at divers times in sundry ways  
He strewed the roadside with our carcasses.  
Clearly, the stage will not come by to-night.

### LELAND, THE KID:

I now remember that but yesterday  
I saw three ugly looking fellows start  
From Colfax with a gun apiece, and they  
Did seem on business of importance bent.  
Furtively casting all their eyes about  
And covering their tracks with all the care  
That business men do use. I think perhaps  
They were Directors of that rival line,  
The great Pacific Mail. If so, they have  
Indubitably taken in that coach,

And we are overreached. Three times before  
This thing has happened, and if once again  
These outside operators dare to cut  
Our rates of profit I shall quit the road  
And take my money out of this concern.  
When robbery no longer pays expense  
It loses then its chiefest charm for me,  
And I prefer to cheat-you hear me shout!

HAPPY HUNTY:

My chief, you do but echo back my thoughts:  
This competition is the death of trade.  
'Tis plain (unless we wish to go to work)  
Some other business we must early find.  
What shall it be? The field of usefulness  
Is yearly narrowing with the advance  
Of wealth and population on this coast.  
There's little left that any man can do  
Without some other fellow stepping in  
And doing it as well. If one essay  
To pick a pocket he is sure to feel  
(With what disgust I need not say to you)  
Another hand inserted in the same.  
You crack a crib at dead of night, and lo!  
As you explore the dining-room for plate  
You find, in session there, a graceless band  
Stuffing their coats with spoons, their skins with wine.  
And so it goes. Why even undertake  
To salt a mine and you will find it rich  
With noble specimens placed there before!

LELAND, THE KID:

And yet this line of immigration has  
Advantages superior to aught  
That elsewhere offers: all these passengers,  
If punched with care-

COWBOY CHARLEY:

Significant remark!

It opens up a prospect wide and fair,  
Suggesting to the thoughtful mind-my mind-  
A scheme that is the boss lay-out. Instead  
Of stopping passengers, let's carry them.  
Instead of crying out: 'Throw up your hands!'  
Let's say: 'Walk up and buy a ticket!' Why  
Should we unwieldy goods and bullion take,  
Watches and all such trifles, when we might  
Far better charge their value three times o'er  
For carrying them to market?

LELAND, THE KID:

Put it there,  
Old son!

HAPPY HUNTY:

You take the cake, my dear. We'll build  
A mighty railroad through this pass, and then  
The stage folk will come up to us and squeal,  
And say: 'It is bad medicine for both:  
What will you give or take?' And then we'll sell.

COWBOY CHARLEY:

Enlarge your notions, little one; this is  
No petty, slouching, opposition scheme,  
To be bought off like honest men and fools;  
Mine eye prophetic pierces through the mists  
That cloud the future, and I seem to see  
A well-devised and executed scheme  
Of wholesale robbery within the law  
(Made by ourselves)-great, permanent, sublime,  
And strong to grapple with the public throat-  
Shaking the stuffing from the public purse,  
The tears from bankrupt merchants' eyes, the blood  
From widows' famished carcasses, the bread  
From orphans' mouths!

HAPPY HUNTY:

Hooray!

LELAND, THE; KID:

Hooray!

ALL:

Hooray!

\_(They tear the masks from their faces, and discharging their shotguns, throw them into the chapparal. Then they join hands, dance and sing the following song:)\_

Ah! blessed to measure  
The glittering treasure!  
Ah! blessed to heap up the gold  
Untold  
That flows in a wide  
And deepening tide-  
Rolled, rolled, rolled  
From multifold sources,  
Converging its courses  
Upon our-

LELAND, THE KID:

Just wait a bit, my pards, I thought I heard  
A sneaking grizzly cracking the dry twigs.  
Such an intrusion might deprive the State  
Of all the good that we intend it. Ha!

\_(Enter Sootymug. He saunters carelessly in and gracefully leans his back against a redwood.)\_

SOOTYMUG:

My boys, I thought I heard  
Some careless revelry,  
As if your minds were stirred  
By some new devilry.  
I too am in that line. Indeed, the mission



On which I come-

HAPPY HUNTY:

Here's more damned competition!

\_(Curtain.)\_

Ambrose Bierce

# The Birth Of Virtue

When, long ago, the young world circling flew  
Through wider reaches of a richer blue,  
New-eyed, the men and maids saw, manifest,  
The thoughts untold in one another's breast:  
Each wish displayed, and every passion learned  
A look revealed them as a look discerned.  
But satiating Time with clouds o'er-cast their eyes;  
Desire was hidden, and the lips framed lies.  
A goddess then, emerging from the dust,  
Fair Virtue rose, the daughter of Distrust.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Boss's Choice

Listen to his wild romances:  
He advances foolish fancies,  
Each expounded as his 'view'  
Gu.

In his brain's opacous clot, ah  
He has got a maggot! What a  
Man with 'views' to overwhelm us!  
Gulielmus.

Hear his demagogic clamor  
Hear him stammer in his grammar!  
Teaching, he will learn to spell  
Gulielmus L.

Slave who paid the price demanded  
With two-handed iron branded  
By the boss-pray cease to dose us,  
Gulielmus L. Jocosus.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Bride

"YOU know, my friends, with what a brave carouse  
I made a second marriage in my house,—  
Divorced old barren Reason from my bed  
And took the Daughter of the Vine to spouse."

So sang the Lord of Poets. In a gleam  
Of light that made her like an angel seem,  
The Daughter of the Vine said: "I myself  
Am Reason, and the Other was a Dream."

Ambrose Bierce

# The Brothers

Scene- \_A lawyer's dreadful den.  
Enter stall-fed citizen.

LAWYER.-'Mornin'. How-de-do?

CITIZEN.-Sir, same to you.  
Called as counsel to retain you  
In a case that I'll explain you.  
Sad, \_so\_ sad! Heart almost broke.  
Hang it! where's my kerchief? Smoke?  
Brother, sir, and I, of late,  
Came into a large estate.  
Brother's-h'm, ha,-rather queer  
Sometimes \_(tapping forehead) \_here.  
What he needs-you know-a 'writ'-  
Something, eh? that will permit  
Me to manage, sir, in fine,  
His estate, as well as mine.  
'Course he'll \_kick\_; 't will break, I fear,  
His loving heart-excuse this tear.

LAWYER.-Have you nothing more?  
All of this you said before-  
When last night I took your case.

CITIZEN.-Why, sir, your face  
Ne'er before has met my view!

LAWYER.-Eh? The devil! True:  
My mistake-it was your brother.  
But you're very like each other.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Committee On Public Morals

The Senate met in Sacramento city;  
On public morals it had no committee  
Though greatly these abounded. Soon the quiet  
Was broken by the Senators in riot.  
Now, at the end of their contagious quarrels,  
There's a committee but no public morals.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Confederate Flags

Tut-tut! give back the flags - how can you care,  
You veterans and heroes?  
Why should you at a kind intention swear  
Like twenty Neros?

Suppose the act was not so otherwise -  
Suppose it was illegal;  
Is't well on such a question to arise  
And punch the Eagle?

Nay, let's economize his breath to scold  
And terrify the alien  
Who tackles him, as Hercules of old  
The bird Stymphalian.

Among the rebels when we made a breach  
Was it to get the banners?  
That was but incidental - 'twas to teach  
Them better manners.

They know the lessons well enough to-day;  
Now, let us try to show them  
That we're not only stronger far than they,  
(How we did mow them!)

But more magnanimous. My lads, 'tis plain  
'Twas an uncommon riot;  
The warlike tribes of Europe fight for gain;  
We fought for quiet.

If we were victors, then we all must live  
With the same flag above us;  
'Twas all in vain unless we now forgive  
And make them love us.

Let kings keep trophies to display above  
Their doors like any savage;  
The freeman's trophy is the foeman's love,  
Despite war's ravage.

'Make treason odious?' My friends, you'll find  
You can't, in right and reason,  
While 'Washington' and 'treason' are combined -  
'Hugo' and 'treason.'

All human governments must take the chance  
And hazard of sedition.  
O wretch! to pledge your manhood in advance  
To blind submission.

It may be wrong, it may be right, to rise  
In warlike insurrection:  
The loyalty that fools so dearly prize  
May mean subjection.

Be loyal to your country, yes - but how  
If tyrants hold dominion?  
The South believed they did; can't you allow  
For that opinion?

He who will never rise though rulers plot,  
His liberties despising -  
He is he manlier than the sans-culottes  
Who's always rising?

Give back the foolish flags whose bearers fell,  
Too valiant to forsake them.  
Is it presumptuous, this counsel? Well,  
I helped to take them.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Convicts' Ball

San Quentin was brilliant. Within the halls  
Of the noble pile with the frowning walls  
(God knows they've enough to make them frown,  
With a Governor trying to break them down!)  
Was a blaze of light. 'Twas the natal day  
Of his nibs the popular John S. Gray,  
And many observers considered his birth  
The primary cause of his moral worth.  
'The ball is free!' cried Black Bart, and they all  
Said a ball with no chain was a novel ball;  
'And I never have seed,' said Jimmy Hope,  
'Sech a lightsome dance withouten a rope.'  
Chinamen, Indians, Portuguese, Blacks,  
Russians, Italians, Kanucks and Kanaks,  
Chilenos, Peruvians, Mexicans-all  
Greased with their presence that notable ball.  
None were excluded excepting, perhaps,  
The Rev. Morrison's churchly chaps,  
Whom, to prevent a religious debate,  
The Warden had banished outside of the gate.  
The fiddler, fiddling his hardest the while,  
'Called off' in the regular foot-hill style:  
'Circle to the left!' and 'Forward and back!'  
And 'Hellum to port for the stabbard tack!'  
(This great *\_virtuoso\_*, it would appear,  
Was Mate of the *\_Gatherer\_* many a year.)  
'*\_Ally man\_* left!'-to a painful degree  
His French was unlike to the French of Paree,  
As heard from our countrymen lately abroad,  
And his '*\_doe cee doe\_*' was the gem of the fraud.  
But what can you hope from a gentleman barred  
From circles of culture by dogs in the yard?  
'Twas a glorious dance, though, all the same,  
The Jardin Mabille in the days of its fame  
Never saw legs perform such springs  
The cold-chisel's magic had given them wings.  
They footed it featly, those lades and gents:  
Dull care (said Long Moll) had a helly go-hence!

'Twas a very aristocratic affair:  
The \_creme de la creme\_ and \_elite\_ were there  
Rank, beauty and wealth from the highest sets,  
And Hubert Howe Bancroft sent his regrets.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Cynic's Bequest

In that fair city, Ispahan,  
There dwelt a problematic man,  
Whose angel never was released,  
Who never once let out his beast,  
But kept, through all the seasons' round,  
Silence unbroken and profound.  
No Prophecy, with ear applied  
To key-hole of the future, tried  
Successfully to catch a hint  
Of what he'd do nor when begin 't;  
As sternly did his past defy  
Mild Retrospection's backward eye.  
Though all admired his silent ways,  
The women loudest were in praise:  
For ladies love those men the most  
Who never, never, never boast-  
Who ne'er disclose their aims and ends  
To naughty, naughty, naughty friends.

Yet, sooth to say, the fame outran  
The merit of this doubtful man,  
For taciturnity in him,  
Though not a mere caprice or whim,  
Was not a virtue, such as truth,  
High birth, or beauty, wealth or youth.

'Twas known, indeed, throughout the span  
Of Ispahan, of Gulistan  
These utmost limits of the earth  
Knew that the man was dumb from birth.

Unto the Sun with deep salaams  
The Parsee spreads his morning palms  
(A beacon blazing on a height  
Warms o'er his piety by night.)  
The Moslem deprecates the deed,  
Cuts off the head that holds the creed,  
Then reverently goes to grass,  
Muttering thanks to Balaam's Ass

For faith and learning to refute  
Idolatry so dissolute!  
But should a maniac dash past,  
With straws in beard and hands upcast,  
To him (through whom, whene'er inclined  
To preach a bit to Madmankind,  
The Holy Prophet speaks his mind)  
Our True Believer lifts his eyes  
Devoutly and his prayer applies;  
But next to Solyman the Great  
Reveres the idiot's sacred state.  
Small wonder then, our worthy mute  
Was held in popular repute.  
Had he been blind as well as mum,  
Been lame as well as blind and dumb,  
No bard that ever sang or soared  
Could say how he had been adored.  
More meagerly endowed, he drew  
An homage less prodigious. True,  
No soul his praises but did utter  
All plied him with devotion's butter,  
But none had out-'t was to their credit  
The proselyting sword to spread it.  
I state these truths, exactly why  
The reader knows as well as I;  
They've nothing in the world to do  
With what I hope we're coming to  
If Pegasus be good enough  
To move when he has stood enough.  
Egad! his ribs I would examine  
Had I a sharper spur than famine,  
Or even with that if 'twould incline  
To examine his instead of mine.  
Where was I? Ah, that silent man  
Who dwelt one time in Ispahan-  
He had a name-was known to all  
As Meerza Solyman Zingall.

There lived afar in Astrabad,  
A man the world agreed was mad,  
So wickedly he broke his joke  
Upon the heads of duller folk,

So miserly, from day to day,  
He gathered up and hid away  
In vaults obscure and cellars haunted  
What many worthy people wanted,  
A stingy man!-the tradesmen's palms  
Were spread in vain: 'I give no alms  
Without inquiry'-so he'd say,  
And beat the needy duns away.  
The bastinado did, 'tis true,  
Persuade him, now and then, a few  
Odd tens of thousands to disburse  
To glut the taxman's hungry purse,  
But still, so rich he grew, his fear  
Was constant that the Shah might hear.  
(The Shah had heard it long ago,  
And asked the taxman if 'twere so,  
Who promptly answered, rather airish,  
The man had long been on the parish.)  
The more he feared, the more he grew  
A cynic and a miser, too,  
Until his bitterness and pelf  
Made him a terror to himself;  
Then, with a razor's neckwise stroke,  
He tartly cut his final joke.  
So perished, not an hour too soon,  
The wicked Muley Ben Maroon.

From Astrabad to Ispahan  
At camel speed the rumor ran  
That, breaking through tradition hoar,  
And throwing all his kinsmen o'er,  
The miser'd left his mighty store  
Of gold-his palaces and lands-  
To needy and deserving hands  
(Except a penny here and there  
To pay the dervishes for prayer.)  
'Twas known indeed throughout the span  
Of earth, and into Hindostan,  
That our beloved mute was the  
Residuary legatee.  
The people said 'twas very well,  
And each man had a tale to tell

Of how he'd had a finger in 't  
By dropping many a friendly hint  
At Astrabad, you see. But ah,  
They feared the news might reach the Shah!  
To prove the will the lawyers bore 't  
Before the Kadi's awful court,  
Who nodded, when he heard it read,  
Confirmingly his drowsy head,  
Nor thought, his sleepiness so great,  
Himself to gobble the estate.  
'I give,' the dead had writ, 'my all  
To Meerza Solyman Zingall  
Of Ispahan. With this estate  
I might quite easily create  
Ten thousand ingrates, but I shun  
Temptation and create but one,  
In whom the whole unthankful crew  
The rich man's air that ever drew  
To fat their pauper lungs I fire  
Vicarious with vain desire!  
From foul Ingratitude's base rout  
I pick this hapless devil out,  
Bestowing on him all my lands,  
My treasures, camels, slaves and bands  
Of wives-I give him all this loot,  
And throw my blessing in to boot.  
Behold, O man, in this bequest  
Philanthropy's long wrongs redressed:  
To speak me ill that man I dower  
With fiercest will who lacks the power.  
Allah il Allah! now let him bloat  
With rancor till his heart's afloat,  
Unable to discharge the wave  
Upon his benefactor's grave!

Forth in their wrath the people came  
And swore it was a sin and shame  
To trick their blessed mute; and each  
Protested, serious of speech,  
That though \_he'd\_ long foreseen the worst  
He'd been against it from the first.  
By various means they vainly tried

The testament to set aside,  
Each ready with his empty purse  
To take upon himself the curse;  
For they had powers of invective  
Enough to make it ineffective.  
The ingrates mustered, every man,  
And marched in force to Ispahan  
(Which had not quite accommodation)  
And held a camp of indignation.

The man, this while, who never spoke-  
On whom had fallen this thunder-stroke  
Of fortune, gave no feeling vent  
Nor dropped a clue to his intent.  
Whereas no power to him came  
His benefactor to defame,  
Some (such a length had slander gone to)  
Even whispered that he didn't want to!  
But none his secret could divine;  
If suffering he made no sign,  
Until one night as winter neared  
From all his haunts he disappeared  
Evanished in a doubtful blank  
Like little crayfish in a bank,  
Their heads retracting for a spell,  
And pulling in their holes as well.

All through the land of Gul, the stout  
Young Spring is kicking Winter out.  
The grass sneaks in upon the scene,  
Defacing it with bottle-green.

The stumbling lamb arrives to ply  
His restless tail in every eye,  
Eats nasty mint to spoil his meat  
And make himself unfit to eat.  
Madly his throat the bulbul tears  
In every grove blasphemes and swears  
As the immodest rose displays  
Her shameless charms a dozen ways.  
Lo! now, throughout the utmost span  
Of Ispahan-of Gulistan-

A big new book's displayed in all  
The shops and cumbers every stall.  
The price is low-the dealers say 'tis-  
And the rich are treated to it gratis.  
Engraven on its foremost page  
These title-words the eye engage:  
'The Life of Muley Ben Maroon,  
Of Astrabad-Rogue, Thief, Buffoon  
And Miser-Liver by the Sweat  
Of Better Men: A Lamponette  
Composed in Rhyme and Written all  
By Meerza Solyman Zingall!'

Ambrose Bierce



## The Day Of Wrath / Dies Iræ

Day of Satan's painful duty! Dies iræ! dies illa!  
Earth shall vanish, hot and sooty; Solvet sæclum in favilla  
So says Virtue, so says Beauty. Teste David cum Sibylla.  
Ah! what terror shall be shaping Quantus tremor est futurus,  
When the Judge the truth's undraping- Quando Judex est venturus.  
Cats from every bag escaping! Cuncta stricte discussurus.  
Now the trumpet's invocation Tuba mirum spargens sonum  
Calls the dead to condemnation; Per sepulchra regionem,  
All receive an invitation. Coget omnes ante thronum  
Death and Nature now are quaking, Mors stupebit, et Natura,  
And the late lamented, waking, Quum resurget creatura  
In their breezy shrouds are shaking. Judicanti responsura.  
Lo! the Ledger's leaves are stirring, Liber scriptus proferetur,  
And the Clerk, to them referring, In quo totum continetur,  
Makes it awkward for the erring. Unde mundus judicetur.  
When the Judge appears in session, Judex ergo quum sedebit,  
We shall all attend confession, Quicquid latet apparebit,  
Loudly preaching non-suppression. Nil inultum remanebit.  
How shall I then make romances Quid sum miser tunc dicturus,  
Mitigating circumstances? Quem patronem rogaturus,  
Even the just must take their chances. Quum vix justus sit securus?  
King whose majesty amazes, Rex tremendæ majestatis,  
Save thou him who sings thy praises; Qui salvandos salvas gratis;  
Fountain, quench my private blazes. Salva me, Fons pietatis.  
Pray remember, sacred Saviour, Recordare, Jesu pie,  
Mine the playful hand that gave your Quod sum causa tuæ viæ;  
Death-blow. Pardon such behavior. Ne me perdas illa die.  
Seeking me, fatigue assailed thee, Quærens me sedisti lassus  
Calvary's outlook naught availed thee; Redemisti crucem passus,  
Now 'twere cruel if I failed thee. Tantus labor non sit cassus.  
Righteous judge and learned brother, Juste Judex ultionis,  
Pray thy prejudices smother Donum fac remissionis  
Ere we meet to try each other. Ante diem rationis.  
Sighs of guilt my conscience gushes, Ingemisco tanquam reus,  
And my face vermilion flushes; Culpa rubet vultus meus;  
Spare me for my pretty blushes. Supplicanti parce, Deus.  
Thief and harlot, when repenting, Qui Mariam absolvisti,  
Thou forgavest-complimenting Et latronem exaudisti,  
Me with sign of like relenting. Mihi quoque spem dedisti.

If too bold is my petition *Preces meæ non sunt dignæ,*  
I'll receive with due submission *Sed to bonus fac benigne*  
My dismissal-from perdition. *Ne perenni cremer igne.*  
When thy sheep thou hast selected *Inter oves locum præsta.*  
From the goats, may I, respected, *Et ab hædis me sequestra,*  
Stand amongst them undetected. *Statuens in parte dextra.*  
When offenders are indited, *Confutatis maledictis,*  
And with trial-flames ignited, *Flammis acribus addictis,*  
Elsewhere I'll attend if cited. *Voca me cum benedictis.*  
Ashen-hearted, prone and prayerful, *Oro supplex et acclinis,*  
When of death I see the air full, *Cor contritum quasi cinis;*  
Lest I perish too be careful. *Gere curam mei finis.*  
On that day of lamentation, *Lacrymosa dies illa*  
When, to enjoy the conflagration, *Qua resurget et favilla,*  
Men come forth, O be not cruel: *Judicandus homo reus,*  
Spare me, Lord-make them thy fuel. *Huic ergo parce, Deus!*

Ambrose Bierce

# The Dead King

Hawaii's King resigned his breath  
Our Legislature guffawed.  
The awful dignity of death  
Not any single rough awed.  
But when our Legislators die  
All Kings, Queens, Jacks and Aces cry.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Death Of Grant

Father! whose hard and cruel law  
Is part of thy compassion's plan,  
Thy works presumptuously we scan  
For what the prophets say they saw.

Unbidden still the awful slope  
Walling us in we climb to gain  
Assurance of the shining plain  
That faith has certified to hope.

In vain! - beyond the circling hill  
The shadow and the cloud abide.  
Subdue the doubt, our spirits guide  
To trust the record and be still.

To trust it loyally as he  
Who, heedful of his high design,  
Ne'er raised a seeking eye to thine,  
But wrought thy will unconsciously.

Disputing not of chance or fate,  
Nor questioning of cause or creed:  
For anything but duty's deed  
Too simply wise, too humbly grave.

The cannon syllabled his name;  
His shadow shifted o'er the land,  
Portentous, as at his demand  
Successive battalions sprang to flame!

He flared the continent with fire,  
The rivers ran in lines of light!  
Thy will be done on earth - if right  
Or wrong he cared not to inquire.

His was the heavy hand, and his  
The service of the despot blade;  
His the soft answer that allayed  
War's giant animosities.

Let us have peace: our clouded eyes,  
Fill, Father, with another light,  
That we may see with clearer sight  
Thy servant's soul in Paradise.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Debtor Abroad

Grief for an absent lover, husband, friend,  
Is barely felt before it comes to end:  
A score of early consolations serve  
To modify its mouth's dejected curve.  
But woes of creditors when debtors flee  
Forever swell the separating sea.  
When standing on an alien shore you mark  
The steady course of some intrepid bark,  
How sweet to think a tear for you abides,  
Not all unuseful, in the wave she rides!  
That sighs for you commingle in the gale  
Beneficently bellying her sail!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Division Superintendent

Baffled he stands upon the track  
The automatic switches clack.

Where'er he turns his solemn eyes  
The interlocking signals rise.

The trains, before his visage pale,  
Glide smoothly by, nor leave the rail.

No splinter-spitted victim he  
Hears uttering the note high C.

In sorrow deep he hangs his head,  
A-weary-would that he were dead.

Now suddenly his spirits rise  
A great thought kindles in his eyes.

Hope, like a headlight's vivid glare,  
Splendors the path of his despair.

His genius shines, the clouds roll back  
'I'll place obstructions on the track!'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Dying Statesman

It is a politician man  
He draweth near his end,  
And friends weep round that partisan,  
Of every man the friend.

Between the Known and the Unknown  
He lieth on the strand;  
The light upon the sea is thrown  
That lay upon the land.

It shineth in his glazing eye,  
It burneth on his face;  
God send that when we come to die  
We know that sign of grace!

Upon his lips his blessed sprite  
Poiseth her joyous wing.  
'How is it with thee, child of light?  
Dost hear the angels sing?'

'The song I hear, the crown I see,  
And know that God is love.  
Farewell, dark world-I go to be  
A postmaster above!'

For him no monumental arch,  
But, O, 'tis good and brave  
To see the Grand Old Party march  
To office o'er his grave!

Ambrose Bierce



# The Eastern Question

Looking across the line, the Grecian said:  
'This border I will stain a Turkey red.'  
The Moslem smiled securely and replied:  
'No Greek has ever for his country dyed.'  
While thus each patriot guarded his frontier,  
The Powers stole all the country in his rear.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Fall Of Miss Larkin

Hear me sing of Sally Larkin who, I'd have you understand,  
Played accordions as well as any lady in the land;  
And I've often heard it stated that her fingering was such  
That Professor Schweinenhauer was enchanted with her touch;  
And that beasts were so affected when her apparatus rang  
That they dropped upon their haunches and deliriously sang.  
This I know from testimony, though a critic, I opine,  
Needs an ear that is dissimilar in some respects to mine.  
She could sing, too, like a jaybird, and they say all eyes were wet  
When Sally and the ranch-dog were performing a duet  
Which I take it is a song that has to be so loudly sung  
As to overtax the strength of any single human lung.  
That, at least, would seem to follow from the tale I have to tell,  
Which (I've told you how she flourished) is how Sally Larkin fell.

One day there came to visit Sally's dad as sleek and smart  
A chap as ever wandered there from any foreign part.  
Though his gentle birth and breeding he did not at all obtrude  
It was somehow whispered round he was a simon-pure Dude.  
Howsoe'er that may have been, it was conspicuous to see  
That he was a real Gent of an uncommon high degree.  
That Sally cast her tender and affectionate regards  
On this exquisite creation was, of course, upon the cards;  
But he didn't seem to notice, and was variously blind  
To her many charms of person and the merits of her mind,  
And preferred, I grieve to say it, to play poker with her dad,  
And acted in a manner that in general was bad.

One evening-'twas in summer-she was holding in her lap  
Her accordion, and near her stood that melancholy chap,  
Leaning up against a pillar with his lip in grog imbrued,  
Thinking, maybe, of that ancient land in which he was a Dude.

Then Sally, who was melancholy too, began to hum  
And elongate the accordion with a preluding thumb.  
Then sighs of amorosity from Sally L. exhaled,  
And her music apparatus sympathetically wailed.  
'In the gloaming, O my darling!' rose that wild impassioned strain,  
And her eyes were fixed on his with an intensity of pain,

Till the ranch-dog from his kennel at the postern gate came round,  
And going into session strove to magnify the sound.  
He lifted up his spirit till the gloaming rang and rang  
With the song that to \_his\_ darling he impetuously sang!  
Then that musing youth, recalling all his soul from other scenes,  
Where his fathers all were Dudes and his mothers all Dudines,  
From his lips removed the beaker and politely, o'er the grog,  
Said: 'Miss Larkin, please be quiet: you will interrupt the dog.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Following Pair

O very remarkable mortal,  
What food is engaging your jaws  
And staining with amber their portal?  
'It's 'baccy I chaws.'

And why do you sway in your walking,  
To right and left many degrees,  
And hitch up your trousers when talking?  
'I follers the seas.'

Great indolent shark in the rollers,  
Is 'baccy,' too, one of your faults?  
You, too, display maculate molars.  
'I dines upon salts.'

Strange diet!-intestinal pain it  
Is commonly given to nip.  
And how can you ever obtain it?  
'I follers the ship.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Foot-Hill Resort

Assembled in the parlor  
Of the place of last resort,  
The smiler and the snarler  
And the guests of every sort  
The elocution chap  
With rhetoric on tap;  
The mimic and the funny dog;  
The social sponge; the money-hog;  
Vulgarian and dude;  
And the prude;  
The adiposing dame  
With pimply face aflame;  
The kitten-playful virgin  
Vergin' on to fifty years;  
The solemn-looking sturgeon  
Of a firm of auctioneers;  
The widower flirtatious;  
The widow all too gracious;  
The man with a proboscis and a sepulcher beneath.  
One assassin picks the banjo, and another picks his teeth.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Fountain Refilled

Of Hans Pietro Shanahan  
(Who was a most ingenious man)  
The Muse of History records  
That he'd get drunk as twenty lords.

He'd get so truly drunk that men  
Stood by to marvel at him when  
His slow advance along the street  
Was but a vain cycloidal feat.

And when 'twas fated that he fall  
With a wide geographical sprawl,  
They signified assent by sounds  
Heard (faintly) at its utmost bounds.

And yet this Mr. Shanahan  
(Who was a most ingenious man)  
Cast not on wine his thirsty eyes  
When it was red or otherwise.

All malt, or spirituous, tope  
He loathed as cats dissent from soap;  
And cider, if it touched his lip,  
Evoked a groan at every sip.

But still, as heretofore explained,  
He not infrequently was grained.  
(I'm not of those who call it 'corned.'  
Coarse speech I've always duly scorned.)

Though truth to say, and that's but right,  
Strong drink (it hath an adder's bite!)  
Was what had put him in the mud,  
The only kind he used was blood!

Alas, that an immortal soul  
Addicted to the flowing bowl,  
The emptied flagon should again  
Replenish from a neighbor's vein.

But, Mr. Shanahan was so  
Constructed, and his taste that low.  
Nor more deplorable was he  
In kind of thirst than in degree;

For sometimes fifty souls would pay  
The debt of nature in a day  
To free him from the shame and pain  
Of dread Sobriety's misreign.

His native land, proud of its sense  
Of his unique inabstinence,  
Abated something of its pride  
At thought of his unfilled inside.

And some the boldness had to say  
'Twere well if he were called away  
To slake his thirst forevermore  
In oceans of celestial gore.

But Hans Pietro Shanahan  
(Who was a most ingenious man)  
Knew that his thirst was mortal; so  
Remained unsainted here below

Unsainted and unsaintly, for  
He neither went to glory nor  
To abdicate his power deigned  
Where, under Providence, he reigned,

But kept his Boss's power accurst  
To serve his wild uncommon thirst.  
Which now had grown so truly great  
It was a drain upon the State.

Soon, soon there came a time, alas!  
When he turned down an empty glass  
All practicable means were vain  
His special wassail to obtain.

In vain poor Decimation tried

To furnish forth the needful tide;  
And Civil War as vainly shed  
Her niggard offering of red.

Poor Shanahan! his thirst increased  
Until he wished himself deceased,  
Invoked the firearm and the knife,  
But could not die to save his life!

He was so dry his own veins made  
No answer to the seeking blade;  
So parched that when he would have passed  
Away he could not breathe his last.

'Twas then, when almost in despair,  
(Unlaced his shoon, unkempt his hair)  
He saw as in a dream a way  
To wet afresh his mortal clay.

Yes, Hans Pietro Shanahan  
(Who was a most ingenious man)  
Saw freedom, and with joy and pride  
'Thalassa! (or Thalatta!)' cried.

Straight to the Aldermen went he,  
With many a 'pull' and many a fee,  
And many a most corrupt 'combine'  
(The Press for twenty cents a line

Held out and fought him-O, God, bless  
Forevermore the holy Press!)  
Till he had franchises complete  
For trolley lines on every street!

The cars were builded and, they say,  
Were run on rails laid every way  
Rhomboidal roads, and circular,  
And oval-everywhere a car

Square, dodecagonal (in great  
Esteem the shape called Figure 8)  
And many other kinds of shapes



As various as tails of apes.

No other group of men's abodes  
E'er had such odd electric roads,  
That winding in and winding out,  
Began and ended all about.

No city had, unless in Mars,  
That city's wealth of trolley cars.  
They ran by day, they flew by night,  
And O, the sorry, sorry sight!

And Hans Pietro Shanahan  
(Who was a most ingenious man)  
Incessantly, the Muse records,  
Lay drunk as twenty thousand lords!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Free Trader's Lament

Oft from a trading-boat I purchased spice  
And shells and corals, brought for my inspection  
From the fair tropics-paid a Christian price  
And was content in my fool's paradise,  
Where never had been heard the word 'Protection.'

'T was my sole island; there I dwelt alone  
No customs-house, collector nor collection,  
But a man came, who, in a pious tone  
Condoled with me that I had never known  
The manifest advantage of Protection.

So, when the trading-boat arrived one day,  
He threw a stink-pot into its mid-section.  
The traders paddled for their lives away,  
Nor came again into that haunted bay,  
The blessed home thereafter of Protection.

Then down he sat, that philanthropic man,  
And spat upon some mud of his selection,  
And worked it, with his knuckles in a pan,  
To shapes of shells and coral things, and span  
A thread of song in glory of Protection.

He baked them in the sun. His air devout  
Enchanted me. I made a genuflexion:  
'God help you, gentle sir,' I said. 'No doubt,'  
He answered gravely, 'I'll get on without  
Assistance now that we have got Protection.'

Thenceforth I bought his wares-at what a price  
For shells and corals of such imperfection!  
'Ah, now,' said he, 'your lot is truly nice.'  
But still in all that isle there was no spice  
To season to my taste that dish, Protection.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Fyghtyng Seventh

It is the gallant Seventh  
It fyghteth faste and free!  
God wot the where it fyghteth  
I ne desyre to be.

The Gonfalon it flyeth,  
Seeming a Flayme in Sky;  
The Bugel loud yblowen is,  
Which sayeth, Doe and dye!

And (O good Saints defende us  
Agaynst the Woes of Warr)  
Drawn Tongues are flashing deadly  
To smyte the Foeman sore!

With divers kinds of Riddance  
The smoaking Earth is wet,  
And all aflowe to seaward goe  
The Torrents wide of Sweat!

The Thunder of the Captens,  
And eke the Shouting, mayketh  
Such horrid Din the Soule within  
The boddy of me quayketh!

Who fyghteth the bold Seventh?  
What haughty Power defyes?  
Their Colonel 'tis they drubben sore,  
And dammen too his Eyes!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Gates Ajar

The Day of Judgment spread its glare  
O'er continents and seas.  
The graves cracked open everywhere,  
Like pods of early peas.

Up to the Court of Heaven sped  
The souls of all mankind;  
Republicans were at the head  
And Democrats behind.

Reub. Lloyd was there before the tube  
Of Gabriel could call:  
The dead in Christ rise first, and Reub.  
Had risen first of all.

He sat beside the Throne of Flame  
As, to the trumpet's sound,  
Four statesmen of the Party Came  
And ranged themselves around

Pure spirits shining like the sun,  
From taint and blemish free  
Great William Stow was there for one,  
And George A. Knight for three.

Souls less indubitably white  
Approached with anxious air,  
Judge Blake at head of them by right  
Of having been a Mayor.

His ermine he had donned again,  
Long laid away in gums.  
'Twas soiled a trifle by the stains  
Of politicians' thumbs.

Then Knight addressed the Judge of Heaven:  
'Your Honor, would it trench  
On custom here if Blake were given  
A seat upon the Bench?'

'Twas done. 'Tom Shannon!' Peter cried.  
He came, without ado,  
\_In forma pauperis\_ was tried,  
And was acquitted, too!

Stow rose, remarking: 'I concur.'  
Lloyd added: 'That suits \_us\_.  
I move Tom's nomination, sir,  
Be made unanimous.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Genesis Of Embarrassment

When Adam first saw Eve he said:  
'O lovely creature, share my bed.'  
Before consenting, she her gaze  
Fixed on the greensward to appraise,  
As well as vision could avouch,  
The value of the proffered couch.  
And seeing that the grass was green  
And neatly clipped with a machine-  
Observing that the flow'rs were rare  
Varieties, and some were fair,  
The posts of precious woods, besprent  
With fragrant balsams, diffluent,  
And all things suited to her worth,  
She raised her angel eyes from earth  
To his and, blushing to confess,  
Murmured: 'I love you, Adam-yes.'  
Since then her daughters, it is said,  
Look always down when asked to wed.

Ambrose Bierce

# The God's View-Point

Cheeta Raibama Chunder Sen,  
The wisest and the best of men,  
Betook him to the place where sat  
With folded feet upon a mat  
Of precious stones beneath a palm,  
In sweet and everlasting calm,  
That ancient and immortal gent,  
The God of Rational Content.  
As tranquil and unmoved as Fate,  
The deity reposed in state,  
With palm to palm and sole to sole,  
And beaded breast and beetling jowl,  
And belly spread upon his thighs,  
And costly diamonds for eyes.  
As Chunder Sen approached and knelt  
To show the reverence he felt;  
Then beat his head upon the sod  
To prove his fealty to the god;  
And then by gestures signified  
The other sentiments inside;  
The god's right eye (as Chunder Sen,  
The wisest and the best of men,  
Half-fancied) grew by just a thought  
More narrow than it truly ought.  
Yet still that prince of devotees,  
Persistent upon bended knees  
And elbows bored into the earth,  
Declared the god's exceeding worth,  
And begged his favor. Then at last,  
Within that cavernous and vast  
Thoracic space was heard a sound  
Like that of water underground  
A gurgling note that found a vent  
At mouth of that Immortal Gent  
In such a chuckle as no ear  
Had e'er been privileged to hear!

Cheeta Raibama Chunder Sen,  
The wisest, greatest, best of men,

Heard with a natural surprise  
That mighty midriff improvise.  
And greater yet the marvel was  
When from between those massive jaws  
Fell words to make the views more plain  
The god was pleased to entertain:  
'Cheeta Raibama Chunder Sen,'  
So ran the rede in speech of men  
'Foremost of mortals in assent  
To creed of Rational Content,  
Why come you here to impetrate  
A blessing on your scurvy pate?  
Can you not rationally be  
Content without disturbing me?  
Can you not take a hint-a wink  
Of what of all this rot I think?  
Is laughter lost upon you quite,  
To check you in your pious rite?  
What! know you not we gods protest  
That all religion is a jest?  
You take me seriously?-you  
About me make a great ado  
(When I but wish to be alone)  
With attitudes supine and prone,  
With genuflexions and with prayers,  
And putting on of solemn airs,  
To draw my mind from the survey  
Of Rational Content away!  
Learn once for all, if learn you can,  
This truth, significant to man:  
A pious person is by odds  
The one most hateful to the gods.'  
Then stretching forth his great right hand,  
Which shadowed all that sunny land,  
That deity bestowed a touch  
Which Chunder Sen not overmuch  
Enjoyed-a touch divine that made  
The sufferer hear stars! They played  
And sang as on Creation's morn  
When spheric harmony was born.

Cheeta Raibama Chunder Sen,



The most astonished man of men,  
Fell straight asleep, and when he woke  
The deity nor moved nor spoke,  
But sat beneath that ancient palm  
In sweet and everlasting calm.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Hermit

To a hunter from the city,  
Overtaken by the night,  
Spake, in tones of tender pity  
For himself, an aged wight:

'I have found the world a fountain  
Of deceit and Life a sham.  
I have taken to the mountain  
And a Holy Hermit am.

'Sternly bent on Contemplation,  
Far apart from human kind  
In the hill my habitation,  
In the Infinite my mind.

'Ten long years I've lived a dumb thing,  
Growing bald and bent with dole.  
Vainly seeking for a Something  
To engage my gloomy soul.

'Gentle Pilgrim, while my roots you  
Eat, and quaff my simple drink,  
Please suggest whatever suits you  
As a Theme for me to Think.'

Then the hunter answered gravely:  
'From distraction free, and strife,  
You could ponder very bravely  
On the Vanity of Life.'

'O, thou wise and learned Teacher,  
You have solved the Problem well  
You have saved a grateful creature  
From the agonies of hell.

'Take another root, another  
Cup of water: eat and drink.  
Now I have a Subject, brother,  
Tell me What, and How, to think.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Hesitating Veteran

When I was young and full of faith  
And other fads that youngsters cherish  
A cry rose as of one that saith  
With emphasis: 'Help or I perish!'  
'Twas heard in all the land, and men  
The sound were each to each repeating.  
It made my heart beat faster then  
Than any heart can now be beating.

For the world is old and the world is gray-  
Grown prudent and, I think, more witty.  
She's cut her wisdom teeth, they say,  
And doesn't now go in for Pity.  
Besides, the melancholy cry  
Was that of one, 'tis now conceded,  
Whose plight no one beneath the sky  
Felt half so poignantly as he did.

Moreover, he was black. And yet  
That sentimental generation  
With an austere compassion set  
Its face and faith to the occasion.  
Then there were hate and strife to spare,  
And various hard knocks a-plenty;  
And I ('twas more than my true share,  
I must confess) took five-and-twenty.

That all is over now-the reign  
Of love and trade stills all dissensions,  
And the clear heavens arch again  
Above a land of peace and pensions.  
The black chap-at the last we gave  
Him everything that he had cried for,  
Though many white chaps in the grave  
'Twould puzzle to say what they died for.

I hope he's better off-I trust  
That his society and his master's  
Are worth the price we paid, and must

Continue paying, in disasters;  
But sometimes doubts press thronging round  
('Tis mostly when my hurts are aching)  
If war for Union was a sound  
And profitable undertaking.

'Tis said they mean to take away  
The Negro's vote for he's unlettered.  
'Tis true he sits in darkness day  
And night, as formerly, when fettered;  
But pray observe-howe'er he vote  
To whatsoever party turning,  
He'll be with gentlemen of note  
And wealth and consequence and learning.

With saints and sages on each side,  
How could a fool through lack of knowledge,  
Vote wrong? If learning is no guide  
Why ought one to have been in college?  
O Son of Day, O Son of Night!  
What are your preferences made of?  
I know not which of you is right,  
Nor which to be the more afraid of.

The world is old and the world is bad,  
And creaks and grinds upon its axis;  
And man's an ape and the gods are mad!-  
There's nothing sure, not even our taxes!  
No mortal man can Truth restore,  
Or say where she is to be sought for.  
I know what uniform I wore-  
O, that I knew which side I fought for!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Humorist

'What is that, mother?'

'The funny man, child.

His hands are black, but his heart is mild.'

'May I touch him, mother?'

'T were foolishly done:

He is slightly touched already, my son.'

'O, why does he wear such a ghastly grin?'

'That's the outward sign of a joke within.'

'Will he crack it, mother?'

'Not so, my saint;

'T is meant for the \_Saturday Livercomplaint.'

'Does he suffer, mother?'

'God help him, yes!

A thousand and fifty kinds of distress.'

'What makes him sweat so?'

'The demons that lurk

In the fear of having to go to work.'

'Why doesn't he end, then, his life with a rope?'

'Abolition of Hell has deprived him of hope.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The In-Coming Climate

Now o' nights the ocean breeze  
Makes the patient flinch,  
For that zephyr bears a sneeze  
In every cubic inch.  
Lo! the lively population  
Chorusing in sternutation  
A catarrhal acclamation!

Ambrose Bierce

## The Key Note

I dreamed I was dreaming one morn as I lay  
In a garden with flowers teeming.  
On an island I lay in a mystical bay,  
In the dream that I dreamed I was dreaming.

The ghost of a scent-had it followed me there  
From the place where I truly was resting?  
It filled like an anthem the aisles of the air,  
The presence of roses attesting.

Yet I thought in the dream that I dreamed I dreamed  
That the place was all barren of roses-  
That it only seemed; and the place, I deemed,  
Was the Isle of Bewildered Noses.

Full many a seaman had testified  
How all who sailed near were enchanted,  
And landed to search (and in searching died)  
For the roses the Sirens had planted.

For the Sirens were dead, and the billows boomed  
In the stead of their singing forever;  
But the roses bloomed on the graves of the doomed,  
Though man had discovered them never.

I thought in my dream 'twas an idle tale,  
A delusion that mariners cherished  
That the fragrance loading the conscious gale  
Was the ghost of a rose long perished.

I said, 'I will fly from this island of woes.'  
And acting on that decision,  
By that odor of rose I was led by the nose,  
For 'twas truly, ah! truly, Elysian.

I ran, in my madness, to seek out the source  
Of the redolent river-directed  
By some supernatural, sinister force  
To a forest, dark, haunted, infected.



And still as I threaded ('twas all in the dream  
That I dreamed I was dreaming) each turning  
There were many a scream and a sudden gleam  
Of eyes all uncannily burning!

The leaves were all wet with a horrible dew  
That mirrored the red moon's crescent,  
And all shapes were fringed with a ghostly blue,  
Dim, wavering, phosphorescent.

But the fragrance divine, coming strong and free,  
Led me on, though my blood was clotting,  
Till-ah, joy!-I could see, on the limbs of a tree,  
Mine enemies hanging and rotting!

Ambrose Bierce

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Ambrose Bierce

# The King Of Bores

Abundant bores afflict this world, and some  
Are bores of magnitude that-come and-no,  
They're always coming, but they never go  
Like funeral pageants, as they drone and hum  
Their lurid nonsense like a muffled drum,  
Or bagpipe's dread unnecessary flow.  
But one superb tormentor I can show  
Prince Fiddlefaddle, Duc de Feefawfum.  
He the johndonkey is who, when I pen  
Amorous verses in an idle mood  
To nobody, or of her, reads them through  
And, smirking, says he knows the lady; then  
Calls me sly dog. I wish he understood  
This tender sonnet's application too.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Last Man

I dreamed that Gabriel took his horn  
On Resurrection's fateful morn,  
And lighting upon Laurel Hill  
Blew long, blew loud, blew high and shrill.  
The houses compassing the ground  
Rattled their windows at the sound.  
But no one rose. 'Alas!' said he,  
'What lazy bones these mortals be!'  
Again he plied the horn, again  
Deflating both his lungs in vain;  
Then stood astonished and chagrined  
At raising nothing but the wind.  
At last he caught the tranquil eye  
Of an observer standing by  
Last of mankind, not doomed to die.  
To him thus Gabriel: 'Sir, I pray  
This mystery you'll clear away.  
Why do I sound my note in vain?  
Why spring they not from out the plain?  
Where's Luning, Blythe and Michael Reese,  
Magee, who ran the \_Golden Fleece?  
Where's Asa Fisk? Jim Phelan, who  
Was thought to know a thing or two  
Of land which rose but never sank?  
Where's Con O'Connor of the Bank,  
And all who consecrated lands  
Of old by laying on of hands?  
I ask of them because their worth  
Was known in all they wished-the earth.  
Brisk boomers once, alert and wise,  
Why don't they rise, why don't they rise?'  
The man replied: 'Reburied long  
With others of the shrouded throng  
In San Mateo-carted there  
And dumped promiscuous, anywhere,  
In holes and trenches-all misfits  
Mixed up with one another's bits:  
One's back-bone with another's shin,  
A third one's skull with a fourth one's grin

Your eye was never, never fixed  
Upon a company so mixed!  
Go now among them there and blow:  
'Twill be as good as any show  
To see them, when they hear the tones,  
Compiling one another's bones!  
But here 'tis vain to sound and wait:  
Naught rises here but real estate.  
I own it all and shan't disgorge.  
Don't know me? I am Henry George.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Legatee

In fair San Francisco a good man did dwell,  
And he wrote out a will, for he didn't feel well.  
Said he: 'It is proper, when making a gift,  
To stimulate virtue by comforting thrift.'

So he left all his property, legal and straight,  
To 'the cursedest rascal in all of the State.'  
But the name he refused to insert, for, said he:  
'Let each man consider himself legatee.'

In due course of time that philanthropist died,  
And all San Francisco, and Oakland beside-  
Save only the lawyers-came each with his claim,  
The lawyers preferring to manage the same.

The cases were tried in Department Thirteen,  
Judge Murphy presided, sedate and serene,  
But couldn't quite specify, legal and straight,  
The cursedest rascal in all of the State.

And so he remarked to them, little and big-  
To claimants: 'You skip!' and to lawyers: 'You dig!'  
They tumbled, tumultuous, out of his court  
And left him victorious, holding the fort.

'Twas then that he said: 'It is plain to my mind  
This property's ownerless-how can I find  
The cursedest rascal in all of the State?'  
So he took it himself, which was legal and straight.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Legend Of Immortal Truth

A bear, having spread him a notable feast,  
Invited a famishing fox to the place.  
'I've killed me,' quoth he, 'an edible beast  
As ever distended the girdle of priest  
With 'spread of religion,' or 'inward grace.'  
To my den I conveyed her,  
I bled her and flayed her,  
I hung up her skin to dry;  
Then laid her naked, to keep her cool,  
On a slab of ice from the frozen pool;  
And there we will eat her-you and I.'

The fox accepts, and away they walk,  
Beguiling the time with courteous talk.  
You'd ne'er have suspected, to see them smile,  
The bear was thinking, the blessed while,  
How, when his guest should be off his guard,  
With feasting hard,  
He'd give him a 'wipe' that would spoil his style.  
You'd never have thought, to see them bow,  
The fox was reflecting deeply how  
He would best proceed, to circumvent  
His host, and prig  
The entire pig  
Or other bird to the same intent.  
When Strength and Cunning in love combine,  
Be sure 't is to more than merely dine.

The while these biters ply the lip,  
A mile ahead the muse shall skip:  
The poet's purpose she best may serve  
Inside the den-if she have the nerve.  
Behold! laid out in dark recess,  
A ghastly goat in stark undress,  
Pallid and still on her gelid bed,  
And indisputably very dead.  
Her skin depends from a couple of pins  
And here the most singular statement begins;  
For all at once the butchered beast,



With easy grace for one deceased,  
Upread her head,  
Looked round, and said,  
Very distinctly for one so dead:  
'The nights are sharp, and the sheets are thin:  
I find it uncommonly cold herein!'

I answer not how this was wrought:  
All miracles surpass my thought.  
They're vexing, say you? and dementing?  
Peace, peace! they're none of my inventing.  
But lest too much of mystery  
Embarrass this true history,  
I'll not relate how that this goat  
Stood up and stamped her feet, to inform'em  
With-what's the word?-I mean, to warm'em;  
Nor how she plucked her rough \_capote  
From off the pegs where Bruin threw it,  
And o'er her quaking body drew it;  
Nor how each act could so befall:  
I'll only swear she did them all;  
Then lingered pensive in the grot,  
As if she something had forgot,  
Till a humble voice and a voice of pride  
Were heard, in murmurs of love, outside.  
Then, like a rocket set aflight,  
She sprang, and streaked it for the light!

Ten million million years and a day  
Have rolled, since these events, away;  
But still the peasant at fall of night,  
Belated there near, is oft affright  
By sounds of a phantom bear in flight;  
A breaking of branches under the hill;  
The noise of a going when all is still!  
And hens asleep on the perch, they say,  
Cackle sometimes in a startled way,  
As if they were dreaming a dream that mocks  
The lope and whiz of a fleeting fox!

Half we're taught, and teach to youth,

And praise by rote,  
Is not, but merely stands for, truth.  
So of my goat:  
She's merely designed to represent  
The truth-'immortal' to this extent:  
Dead she may be, and skinned-frappe  
Hid in a dreadful den away;  
Prey to the Churches-(any will do,  
Except the Church of me and you.)  
The simplest miracle, even then,  
Will get her up and about again.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Lord's Prayer On A Coin

Upon this quarter-eagle's leveled face,  
The Lord's Prayer, legibly inscribed, I trace.  
'Our Father which'-the pronoun there is funny,  
And shows the scribe to have addressed the money  
'Which art in Heaven'-an error this, no doubt:  
The preposition should be stricken out.  
Needless to quote; I only have designed  
To praise the frankness of the pious mind  
Which thought it natural and right to join,  
With rare significancy, prayer and coin.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Lost Colonel

"Tis a woeful yarn,' said the sailor man bold  
Who had sailed the northern-lakes  
'No woefuler one has ever been told  
Exceptin' them called 'fakes."

'Go on, thou son of the wind and fog,  
For I burn to know the worst!'  
But his silent lip in a glass of grog  
Was dreamily immersed.

Then he wiped it on his sleeve and said:  
'It's never like that I drinks  
But what of the gallant gent that's dead  
I truly mournful thinks.

'He was a soldier chap-leastways  
As 'Colonel' he was knew;  
An' he hailed from some'rs where they raise  
A grass that's heavenly blue.

'He sailed as a passenger aboard  
The schooner 'Henery Jo.'  
O wild the waves and galeses roared,  
Like taggers in a show!

'But he sat at table that calm an' mild  
As if he never had let  
His sperit know that the waves was wild  
An' everlastin' wet!-

'Jest set with a bottle afore his nose,  
As was labeled 'Total Eclipse'  
(The bottle was) an' he frequent rose  
A glass o' the same to his lips.

'An' he says to me (for the steward slick  
Of the 'Henery Jo' was I):  
'This sailor life's the very old Nick  
On the lakes it's powerful dry!'

'I says: 'Aye, aye, sir, it beats the Dutch.  
I hopes you'll outlast the trip.'  
But if I'd been him-an' I said as much  
I'd 'a' took a faster ship.

'His laughture, loud an' long an' free,  
Rang out o'er the tempest's roar.  
'You're an elegant reasoner,' says he,  
'But it's powerful dry ashore!''

'O mariner man, why pause and don  
A look of so deep concern?  
Have another glass-go on, go on,  
For to know the worst I burn.'

'One day he was leanin' over the rail,  
When his footing some way slipped,  
An' (this is the woefulest part o' my tale),  
He was accidental unshipped!

'The empty boats was overboard hove,  
As he swum in the 'Henery's wake';  
But 'fore we had 'bouted ship he had drove  
From sight on the ragin' lake!'

'And so the poor gentleman was drowned  
And now I'm apprised of the worst.'  
'What! him? 'Twas an hour afore he was found  
In the yawl-stone dead o' thirst!'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Mackaiad

Mackay's hot wrath to Bonynge, direful spring  
Of blows unnumbered, heavenly goddess, sing  
That wrath which hurled to Hellman's office floor  
Two heroes, mutually smeared with gore,  
Whose hair in handfuls marked the dire debate,  
And riven coat-tails testified their hate.  
Sing, muse, what first their indignation fired,  
What words augmented it, by whom inspired.

First, the great Bonynge comes upon the scene  
And asks the favor of the British Queen.  
Suppliant he stands and urges all his claim:  
His wealth, his portly person and his name,  
His habitation in the setting sun,  
As child of nature; and his suit he won.  
No more the Sovereign, wearied with his plea,  
From slumber's chain her faculties can free.  
Low and more low the royal eyelids creep,  
She gives the assenting nod and falls asleep.  
Straightway the Bonynges all invade the Court  
And telegraph the news to every port.  
Beneath the seas, red-hot, the tidings fly,  
The cables crinkle and the fishes fry!  
The world, awaking like a startled bat,  
Exclaims: 'A Bonynge? What the devil's that?'  
Mackay, meanwhile, to envy all attent,  
Untaught to spare, unable to relent,  
Walks in our town on needles and on pins,  
And in a mean, revengeful spirit-grins!

Sing, muse, what next to break the peace occurred  
What act uncivil, what unfriendly word?  
The god of Bosh ascending from his pool,  
Where since creation he has played the fool,  
Clove the blue slush, as other gods the sky,  
And, waiting but a moment's space to dry,  
Touched Bonynge with his finger-tip. 'O son,'  
He said, 'alike of nature and a gun,  
Knowest not Mackay's insufferable sin?

Hast thou not heard that he doth stand and grin?  
Arise! assert thy manhood, and attest  
The uncommercial spirit in thy breast.  
Avenge thine honor, for by Jove I swear  
Thou shalt not else be my peculiar care!  
He spake, and ere his worshiper could kneel  
Had dived into his slush pool, head and heel.  
Full of the god and to revenges nerved,  
And conscious of a will that never swerved,  
Bonynges set sail: the world beyond the wave  
As gladly took him as the other gave.  
New York received him, but a shudder ran  
Through all the western coast, which knew the man;  
And science said that the seismic action  
Was owing to an asteroid's impaction.

O goddess, sing what Bonynges next essayed.  
Did he unscabbard the avenging blade,  
The long spear brandish and porrect the shield,  
Havoc the town and devastate the field?  
His sacred thirst for blood did he allay  
By halving the unfortunate Mackay?  
Small were the profit and the joy to him  
To hew a base-born person, limb from limb.  
Let vulgar souls to low revenge incline,  
That of diviner spirits is divine.  
Bonynges at noonday stood in public places  
And (with regard to the Mackays) made faces!  
Before those formidable frowns and scowls  
The dogs fled, tail-tucked, with affrighted howls,  
And horses, terrified, with flying feet  
O'erthrew the apple-stands along the street,  
Involving the metropolis in vast  
Financial ruin! Man himself, aghast,  
Retreated east and west and north and south  
Before the menace of that twisted mouth,  
Till Jove, in answer to their prayers, sent Night  
To veil the dreadful visage from their sight!

Such were the causes of the horrid strife  
The mother-wrongs which nourished it to life.  
O, for a quill from an archangel's wing!

O, for a voice that's adequate to sing  
The splendor and the terror of the fray,  
The scattered hair, the coat-tails all astray,  
The parted collars and the gouts of gore  
Reeking and smoking on the banker's floor,  
The interlocking limbs, embraces dire,  
Revolving bodies and deranged attire!

Vain, vain the trial: 'tis vouchsafed to none  
To sing two millionaires rolled into one!  
My hand and pen their offices refuse,  
And hoarse and hoarser grows the weary muse.  
Alone remains, to tell of the event,  
Abandoned, lost and variously rent,  
The Bonyng nethermost habiliment.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Mad Philosopher

The flabby wine-skin of his brain  
Yields to some pathologic strain,  
And voids from its unstored abyss  
The dribble of an aphorism.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Man Born Blind

A man born blind received his sight  
By a painful operation;  
And these are things he saw in the light  
Of an infant observation.

He saw a merchant, good and wise.  
And greatly, too, respected,  
Who looked, to those imperfect eyes,  
Like a swindler undetected.

He saw a patriot address  
A noisy public meeting.  
And said: 'Why, that's a calf. I guess.  
That for the teat is bleating.'

A doctor stood beside a bed  
And shook his summit sadly.  
'O see that foul assassin!' said  
The man who saw so badly.

He saw a lawyer pleading for  
A thief whom they'd been jailing,  
And said: 'That's an accomplice, or  
My sight again is failing.'

Upon the Bench a Justice sat,  
With nothing to restrain him;  
'Tis strange,' said the observer, 'that  
They ventured to unchain him.'

With theologic works supplied,  
He saw a solemn preacher;  
'A burglar with his kit,' he cried,  
'To rob a fellow creature.'

A bluff old farmer next he saw  
Sell produce in a village,  
And said: 'What, what! is there no law  
To punish men for pillage?'

A dame, tall, fair and stately, passed,  
Who many charms united;  
He thanked his stars his lot was cast  
Where sepulchers were whited.

He saw a soldier stiff and stern,  
'Full of strange oaths' and toddy;  
But was unable to discern  
A wound upon his body.

Ten square leagues of rolling ground  
To one great man belonging,  
Looked like one little grassy mound  
With worms beneath it thronging.

A palace's well-carven stones,  
Where Dives dwelt contented,  
Seemed built throughout of human bones  
With human blood cemented.

He watched the yellow shining thread  
A silk-worm was a-spinning;  
'That creature's coining gold.' he said,  
'To pay some girl for sinning.'

His eyes were so untrained and dim  
All politics, religions,  
Arts, sciences, appeared to him  
But modes of plucking pigeons.

And so he drew his final breath,  
And thought he saw with sorrow  
Some persons weeping for his death  
Who'd be all smiles to-morrow.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Militiaman

'O warrior with the burnished arms  
With bullion cord and tassel  
Pray tell me of the lurid charms  
Of service and the fierce alarms:  
The storming of the castle,  
The charge across the smoking field,  
The rifles' busy rattle  
What thoughts inspire the men who wield  
The blade-their gallant souls how steeled  
And fortified in battle.'

'Nay, man of peace, seek not to know  
War's baleful fascination-  
The soldier's hunger for the foe,  
His dread of safety, joy to go  
To court annihilation.  
Though calling bugles blow not now,  
Nor drums begin to beat yet,  
One fear unmans me, I'll allow,  
And poisons all my pleasure: How  
If I should get my feet wet!'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Mummery

THE TWO CAVEES

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

FITCH \_a Pelter of Railroges\_

PICKERING \_his Partner, an Enemy to Sin\_

OLD NICK \_a General Blackwasher\_

DEAD CAT \_a Missile\_

ANTIQUUE EGG \_Another\_

RAILROGES, DUMP-CARTERS. NAVVIES and Unassorted SHOVELRY in the Lower Distance

\_Scene\_-The Brink of a Railway Cut, a Mile Deep.

\_Time\_-1875.

FITCH:

Gods! what a steep declivity! Below  
I see the lazy dump-carts come and go,  
Creeping like beetles and about as big.  
The delving Paddies-

PICKERING:

Case of \_infra dig.\_

FITCH:

Loring, light-minded and unmeaning quips  
Come with but scant propriety from lips  
Fringed with the blue-black evidence of age.  
'Twere well to cultivate a style more sage,  
For men will fancy, hearing how you pun,  
Our foulest missiles are but thrown in fun.

(\_Enter Dead Cat.\_)

Here's one that thoughtfully has come to hand;  
Slant your fine eye below and see it land.  
( \_Seizes Dead Cat by the tail and swings it in act to throw.\_ )

DEAD CAT ( \_singing\_ ):

Merrily, merrily, round I go-  
Over and under and at.  
Swing wide and free, swing high and low  
The anti-monopoly cat!

O, who wouldn't be in the place of me,  
The anti-monopoly cat?  
Designed to admonish,  
Persuade and astonish  
The capitalist and-

FITCH ( \_letting go\_ ):\_

Scat!  
( \_Exit Dead Cat.\_ )\_

PICKERING:

Huzza! good Deacon, well and truly flung!  
Pat Stanford it has grassed, and Mike de Young.  
Mike drives a dump-cart for the villains, though  
'Twere fitter that he pull it. Well, we owe  
The traitor one for leaving us!-some day  
We'll get, if not his place, his cart away.  
Meantime fling missiles-any kind will do.  
( \_Enter Antique Egg.\_ )\_  
Ha! we can give them an \_ovation\_, too!

ANTIQUUE EGG:

In the valley of the Nile,  
Where the Holy Crocodile  
Of immeasurable smile  
Blossoms like the early rose,

And the Sacred Onion grows  
When the Pyramids were new  
And the Sphinx possessed a nose,  
By a storkess I was laid  
In the cool papyrus shade,  
Where the rushes later grew,  
That concealed the little Jew,  
Baby Mose.

Straining very hard to hatch,  
I disrupted there my yolk;  
And I felt my yellow streaming  
Through my white;  
And the dream that I was dreaming  
Of posterity was broke  
In a night.  
Then from the papyrus-patch  
By the rising waters rolled,  
Passing many a temple old,  
I proceeded to the sea.  
Memnon sang, one morn, to me,  
And I heard Cambyses sass  
The tomb of Ozymandias!

FITCH:

O, venerablest orb of all the earth,  
God rest the lady fowl that gave thee birth!  
Fit missile for the vilest hand to throw  
I freely tender thee mine own. Although  
As a bad egg I am myself no slouch,  
Thy riper years thy ranker worth avouch.  
Now, Pickering, please expose your eye and say  
If-whoop!-  
\_(Exit egg.)\_  
I've got the range.

PICKERING:

Hooray! hooray!  
A grand good shot, and Teddy Colton's down:  
It burst in thunderbolts upon his crown!  
Larry O'Crocker drops his pick and flies,

And deafening odors scream along the skies!  
Pelt 'em some more.

FITCH:

There's nothing left but tar-  
wish I were a Yahoo.

PICKERING:

Well, you are.  
But keep the tar. How well I recollect,  
When Mike was in with us-proud, strong, erect  
\_Mens conscia recti\_-flinging mud, he stood,  
Austerely brave, incomparably good,  
Ere yet for filthy lucre he began  
To drive a cart as Stanford's hired man,  
That pitch-pot bearing in his hand, Old Nick  
Appeared and tarred us all with the same stick.  
\_(Enter Old Nick)\_.  
I hope he won't return and use his arts  
To make us part with our immortal parts.

OLD NICK:

Make yourself easy on that score my lamb;  
For both your souls I wouldn't give a damn!  
I want my tar-pot-hello! where's the stick?

FITCH:

Don't look at \_me\_ that fashion!-look at Pick.

PICKERING:

Forgive me, father-pity my remorse!  
Truth is-Mike took that stick to spank his horse.  
It fills my pericardium with grief  
That I kept company with such a thief.

(\_Endeavoring to get his handkerchief, he opens his coat and  
the tar-stick falls out. Nick picks it up, looks at the culprit



reproachfully and withdraws in tears.)

FITCH (\_excitedly\_):

O Pickering, come hither to the brink-  
There's something going on down there, I think!  
With many an upward smile and meaning wink  
The navvies all are running from the cut  
Like lunatics, to right and left-

PICKERING:

Tut, tut-  
'Tis only some poor sport or boisterous joke.  
Let us sit down and have a quiet smoke.  
( \_They sit and light cigars. \_)

FITCH (\_singing\_):

When first I met Miss Toughie  
I smoked a fine cigyar,  
An' I was on de dummy  
And she was in de cyar.

BOTH (\_singing\_):

An' I was on de dummy  
And she was in de cyar.

FITCH (\_singing\_):

I couldn't go to her,  
An' she wouldn't come to me;  
An' I was as oneasy  
As a gander on a tree.

BOTH (\_singing\_):

An' I was as oneasy  
As a gander on a tree.

FITCH (\_singing\_):

But purty soon I weakened  
An' lef' de dummy's bench,  
An' frew away a ten-cent weed  
To win a five-cent wench!

BOTH (\_singing\_)

An' frew away a ten-cent weed  
To win a five-cent wench!

FITCH:

Is there not now a certain substance sold  
Under the name of fulminate of gold,  
A high explosive, popular for blasting,  
Producing an effect immense and lasting?

PICKERING:

Nay, that's mere superstition. Rocks are rent  
And excavations made by argument.  
Explosives all have had their day and season;  
The modern engineer relies on reason.  
He'll talk a tunnel through a mountain's flank  
And by fair speech cave down the tallest bank.

(\_The earth trembles, a deep subterranean explosion is heard and a section of the bank as big as El Capitan starts away and plunges thunderously into the cut. A part of it strikes De Young's dumpcart abaft the axletree and flings him, hurtling, skyward, a thing of legs and arms, to descend on the distant mountains, where it is cold. Fitch and Pickering pull themselves out of the debris and stand ungraveling their eyes and noses.\_)

FITCH:

Well, since I'm down here I will help to grade,  
And do dirt-throwing henceforth with a spade.

PICKERING:

God bless my soul! it gave me quit a start.  
Well, fate is fate-I guess I'll drive this cart.

Ambrose Bierce

# The National Guardsman

I'm a gorgeous golden hero  
And my trade is taking life.  
Hear the twittle-twittle-tweero  
Of my sibillating fife  
And the rub-a-dub-a-dum  
Of my big bass drum!  
I'm an escort strong and bold,  
The Grand Army to protect.  
My countenance is cold  
And my attitude erect.  
I'm a Californian Guard  
And my banner flies aloft,  
But the stones are O, so hard!  
And my feet are O, so soft!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Naval Constructor

He looked upon the ships as they  
All idly lay at anchor,  
Their sides with gorgeous workmen gay  
The riveter and planker

Republicans and Democrats,  
Statesmen and politicians.  
He saw the swarm of prudent rats  
Swimming for land positions.

He marked each 'belted cruiser' fine,  
Her poddy life-belts floating  
In tether where the hungry brine  
Impinged upon her coating.

He noted with a proud regard,  
As any of his class would,  
The poplar mast and poplar yard  
Above the hull of bass-wood.

He saw the Eastlake frigate tall,  
With quaintly carven gable,  
Hip-roof and dormer-window-all  
With ivy formidable.

In short, he saw our country's hope  
In best of all conditions-  
Equipped, to the last spar and rope,  
By working politicians.

He boarded then the noblest ship  
And from the harbor glided.  
'Adieu, adieu!' fell from his lip.  
Verdict: 'He suicided.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The New Decalogue

Have but one God: thy knees were sore  
If bent in prayer to three or four.

Adore no images save those  
The coinage of thy country shows.

Take not the Name in vain. Direct  
Thy swearing unto some effect.

Thy hand from Sunday work be held--  
Work not at all unless compelled.

Honor thy parents, and perchance  
Their wills thy fortunes may advance.

Kill not--death liberates thy foe  
From persecution's constant woe.

Kiss not thy neighbor's wife. Of course  
There's no objection to divorce.

To steal were folly, for 'tis plain  
In cheating there is greater pain.

Bear not false witness. Shake your head  
And say that you have 'heard it said.'

Who stays to covet ne'er will catch  
An opportunity to snatch.

Ambrose Bierce

# The New Enoch

Enoch Arden was an able  
Seaman; hear of his mishap  
Not in wild mendacious fable,  
As 't was told by t' other chap;

For I hold it is a youthful  
Indiscretion to tell lies,  
And the writer that is truthful  
Has the reader that is wise.

Enoch Arden, able seaman,  
On an isle was cast away,  
And before he was a freeman  
Time had touched him up with gray.

Long he searched the fair horizon,  
Seated on a mountain top;  
Vessel ne'er he set his eyes on  
That would undertake to stop.

Seeing that his sight was growing  
Dim and dimmer, day by day,  
Enoch said he must be going.  
So he rose and went away-

Went away and so continued  
Till he lost his lonely isle:  
Mr. Arden was so sinewed  
He could row for many a mile.

Compass he had not, nor sextant,  
To direct him o'er the sea:  
Ere 't was known that he was extant,  
At his widow's home was he.

When he saw the hills and hollows  
And the streets he could but know,  
He gave utterance as follows  
To the sentiments below:

'Blast my tarry toplights! (shiver,  
Too, my timbers!) but, I say,  
W'at a larruk to diskiver,  
I have lost me blessid way!

'W'at, alas, would be my bloomin'  
Fate if Philip now I see,  
Which I lammed?-or my old 'oman,  
Which has frequent basted \_me\_?'

Scenes of childhood swam around him  
At the thought of such a lot:  
In a swoon his Annie found him  
And conveyed him to her cot.

'T was the very house, the garden,  
Where their honeymoon was passed:  
'T was the place where Mrs. Arden  
Would have mourned him to the last.

Ah, what grief she'd known without him!  
Now what tears of joy she shed!  
Enoch Arden looked about him:  
'Shanghaied!'-that was all he said.

Ambrose Bierce



# The New 'Ulalume'

The skies they were ashen and sober,  
The leaves they were crisped and sere,  
' ' ' withering ' '  
It was night in the lonesome October  
Of my most immemorial year;  
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,  
' ' down ' ' dark tarn ' '  
In the misty mid region of Weir,  
' ' ghoul-haunted woodland ' '

Ambrose Bierce

# The Night Of Election

'O venerable patriot, I pray  
Stand not here coatless; at the break of day  
We'll know the grand result-and even now  
The eastern sky is faintly touched with gray.

'It ill befits thine age's hoary crown  
This rude environment of rogue and clown,  
Who, as the lying bulletins appear,  
With drunken cries incarnadine the town.

'But if with noble zeal you stay to note  
The outcome of your patriotic vote  
For Blaine, or Cleveland, and your native land,  
Take-and God bless you!-take my overcoat.'

'Done, pard-and mighty white of you. And now  
guess the country'll keep the trail somehow.  
I aint allowed to vote, the Warden said,  
But whacked my coat up on old Stanislow.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Oakland Dog

I lay one happy night in bed  
And dreamed that all the dogs were dead.  
They'd all been taken out and shot  
Their bodies strewed each vacant lot.

O'er all the earth, from Berkeley down  
To San Leandro's ancient town,  
And out in space as far as Niles  
I saw their mortal parts in piles.

One stack upreared its ridge so high  
Against the azure of the sky  
That some good soul, with pious views,  
Put up a steeple and sold pews.

No wagging tail the scene relieved:  
I never in my life conceived  
(I swear it on the Decalogue!)  
Such penury of living dog.

The barking and the howling stilled,  
The snarling with the snarler killed,  
All nature seemed to hold its breath:  
The silence was as deep as death.

True, candidates were all in roar  
On every platform, as before;  
And villains, as before, felt free  
To finger the calliope.

True, the Salvationist by night,  
And milkman in the early light,  
The lonely flutist and the mill  
Performed their functions with a will.

True, church bells on a Sunday rang  
The sick man's curtain down-the bang  
Of trains, contesting for the track,  
Out of the shadow called him back.

True, cocks, at all unheavenly hours,  
Crew with excruciating powers,  
Cats on the woodshed rang and roared,  
Fat citizens and fog-horns snored.

But this was all too fine for ears  
Accustomed, through the awful years,  
To the nocturnal monologues  
And day debates of Oakland dogs.

And so the world was silent. Now  
What else befell-to whom and how?  
\_Imprimis\_, then, there were no fleas,  
And days of worth brought nights of ease.

Men walked about without the dread  
Of being torn to many a shred,  
Each fragment holding half a cruse  
Of hydrophobia's quickening juice.

They had not to propitiate  
Some curst kioddle at each gate,  
But entered one another's grounds,  
Unscared, and were not fed to hounds.

Women could drive and not a pup  
Would lift the horse's tendons up  
And let them go-to interject  
A certain musical effect.

Even children's ponies went about,  
All grave and sober-paced, without  
A bulldog hanging to each nose  
Proud of his fragrance, I suppose.

Dog being dead, Man's lawless flame  
Burned out: he granted Woman's claim,  
Children's and those of country, art-  
all took lodgings in his heart.

When memories of his former shame

Crimsoned his cheeks with sudden flame  
He said; 'I know my fault too well  
They fawned upon me and I fell.'

Ah! 'twas a lovely world!-no more  
I met that indisposing bore,  
The unseraphic cynogogue-  
The man who's proud to love a dog.

Thus in my dream the golden reign  
Of Reason filled the world again,  
And all mankind confessed her sway,  
From Walnut Creek to San Jose.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Oleomargarine Man

Once-in the county of Marin,  
Where milk is sold to purchase gin  
Renowned for butter and renowned  
For fourteen ounces to the pound  
A bull stood watching every turn  
Of Mr. Wilson with a churn,  
As that deigning worthy stalked  
About him, eying as he walked,  
El Toro's sleek and silken hide,  
His neck, his flank and all beside;  
Thinking with secret joy: 'I'll spread  
That mammal on a slice of bread!'

Soon Mr. Wilson's keen concern  
To get the creature in his churn  
Unhorsed his caution-made him blind  
To the fell vigor of bullkind,  
Till, filled with valor to the teeth,  
He drew his dasher from its sheath  
And bravely brandished it; the while  
He smiled a dark, portentous smile;  
A deep, sepulchral smile; a wide  
And open smile, which, at his side,  
The churn to copy vainly tried;  
A smile so like the dawn of doom  
That all the field was palled in gloom,  
And all the trees within a mile,  
As tribute to that awful smile,  
Made haste, with loyalty discreet,  
To fling their shadows at his feet.  
Then rose his battle-cry: 'I'll spread  
That mammal on a slice of bread!'

To such a night the day had turned  
That Taurus dimly was discerned.  
He wore so meek and grave an air  
It seemed as if, engaged in prayer  
This thunderbolt incarnate had  
No thought of anything that's bad:

This concentrated earthquake stood  
And gave his mind to being good.  
Lightly and low he drew his breath  
This magazine of sudden death!  
All this the thrifty Wilson's glance  
Took in, and, crying, 'Now's my chance!'  
Upon the bull he sprang amain  
To put him in his churn. Again  
Rang out his battle-yell: 'I'll spread  
That mammal on a slice of bread!'

Sing, Muse, that battle-royal-sing  
The deeds that made the region ring,  
The blows, the bellowing, the cries,  
The dust that darkened all the skies,  
The thunders of the contest, all  
Nay, none of these things did befall.  
A yell there was-a rush-no more:  
El Toro, tranquil as before,  
Still stood there basking in the sun,  
Nor of his legs had shifted one  
Stood there and conjured up his cud  
And meekly munched it. Scenes of blood  
Had little charm for him. His head  
He merely nodded as he said:  
'I've spread that buttermilk upon  
A slice of Southern Oregon.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Opposing Sex

The Widows of Ashur  
Are loud in their wailing:  
'No longer the 'masher'  
Sees Widows of Ashur!  
So each is a lasher  
Of Man's smallest failing.  
The Widows of Ashur  
Are loud in their wailing.

The Cave of Adullam,  
That home of reviling  
No wooing can gull 'em  
In Cave of Adullam.  
No angel can lull 'em  
To cease their defiling  
The Cave of Adullam,  
That home of reviling.

At men they are cursing  
The Widows of Ashur;  
Themselves, too, for nursing  
The men they are cursing.  
The praise they're rehearsing  
Of every slasher  
At men. \_They\_ are cursing  
The Widows of Ashur.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Passing Of 'Boss' Shepherd

The sullen church-bell's intermittent moan,  
The dirge's melancholy monotone,  
The measured march, the drooping flags, attest  
A great man's progress to his place of rest.  
Along broad avenues himself decreed  
To serve his fellow men's disputed need  
Past parks he raped away from robbers' thrift  
And gave to poverty, wherein to lift  
Its voice to curse the giver and the gift  
Past noble structures that he reared for men  
To meet in and revile him, tongue and pen,  
Draws the long retinue of death to show  
The fit credentials of a proper woe.

'Boss' Shepherd, you are dead. Your hand no more  
Throws largess to the mobs that ramp and roar  
For blood of benefactors who disdain  
Their purity of purpose to explain,  
Their righteous motive and their scorn of gain.  
Your period of dream-'twas but a breath  
Is closed in the indifference of death.  
Sealed in your silences, to you alike  
If hands are lifted to applaud or strike.  
No more to your dull, inattentive ear  
Praise of to-day than curse of yesteryear.  
From the same lips the honied phrases fall  
That still are bitter from cascades of gall.  
We note the shame; you in your depth of dark  
The red-writ testimony cannot mark  
On every honest cheek; your senses all  
Locked, *\_incommunicado\_*, in your pall,  
Know not who sit and blush, who stand and bawl.

'Seven Grecian cities claim great Homer dead,  
Through which the living Homer begged his  
bread.'  
So sang, as if the thought had been his own,  
An unknown bard, improving on a known.  
'Neglected genius!'-that is sad indeed,

But malice better would ignore than heed,  
And Shepherd's soul, we rightly may suspect,  
Prayed often for the mercy of neglect  
When hardly did he dare to leave his door  
Without a guard behind him and before  
To save him from the gentlemen that now  
In cheap and easy reparation bow  
Their corrigible heads above his corse  
To counterfeit a grief that's half remorse.

The pageant passes and the exile sleeps,  
And well his tongue the solemn secret keeps  
Of the great peace he found afar, until,  
Death's writ of extradition to fulfill,  
They brought him, helpless, from that friendly zone  
To be a show and pastime in his own  
A final opportunity to those  
Who fling with equal aim the stone and rose;  
That at the living till his soul is freed,  
This at the body to conceal the deed!

Lone on his hill he's lying to await  
What added honors may befit his state  
The monument, the statue, or the arch  
(Where knaves may come to weep and dupes to march)  
Builded by clowns to brutalize the scenes  
His genius beautified. To get the means,  
His newly good traducers all are dunned  
For contributions to the conscience fund.  
If each subscribe (and pay) one cent 'twill rear  
A structure taller than their tallest ear.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Passing Show

I

I know not if it was a dream. I viewed  
A city where the restless multitude,  
Between the eastern and the western deep  
Had reared gigantic fabrics, strong and rude.

Colossal palaces crowned every height;  
Towers from valleys climbed into the light;  
O'er dwellings at their feet, great golden domes  
Hung in the blue, barbarically bright.

But now, new-glimmering to-east, the day  
Touched the black masses with a grace of gray,  
Dim spires of temples to the nation's God  
Studding high spaces of the wide survey.

Well did the roofs their solemn secret keep  
Of life and death stayed by the truce of sleep,  
Yet whispered of an hour when sleepers wake,  
The fool to hope afresh, the wise to weep.

The gardens greened upon the builded hills  
Above the tethered thunders of the mills  
With sleeping wheels unstirred to service yet  
By the tamed torrents and the quickened rills.

A hewn acclivity, reprieved a space,  
Looked on the builder's blocks about his base  
And bared his wounded breast in sign to say:  
'Strike! 'tis my destiny to lodge your race.

"'Twas but a breath ago the mammoth browsed  
Upon my slopes, and in my caves I housed  
Your shaggy fathers in their nakedness,  
While on their foemen's offal they caroused.'

Ships from afar afforested the bay.  
Within their huge and chambered bodies lay  
The wealth of continents; and merrily sailed

The hardy argosies to far Cathay.

Beside the city of the living spread-  
Strange fellowship!-the city of the dead;  
And much I wondered what its humble folk,  
To see how bravely they were housed, had said.

Noting how firm their habitations stood,  
Broad-based and free of perishable wood-  
How deep in granite and how high in brass  
The names were wrought of eminent and good,

I said: 'When gold or power is their aim,  
The smile of beauty or the wage of shame,  
Men dwell in cities; to this place they fare  
When they would conquer an abiding fame.'

From the red East the sun-a solemn rite-  
Crowned with a flame the cross upon a height  
Above the dead; and then with all his strength  
Struck the great city all aroar with light!

## II

I know not if it was a dream. I came  
Unto a land where something seemed the same  
That I had known as 'twere but yesterday,  
But what it was I could not rightly name.

It was a strange and melancholy land,  
Silent and desolate. On either hand  
Lay waters of a sea that seemed as dead,  
And dead above it seemed the hills to stand.

Grayed all with age, those lonely hills-ah me,  
How worn and weary they appeared to be!  
Between their feet long dusty fissures clove  
The plain in aimless windings to the sea.

One hill there was which, parted from the rest,  
Stood where the eastern water curved a-west.  
Silent and passionless it stood. I thought

I saw a scar upon its giant breast.

The sun with sullen and portentous gleam  
Hung like a menace on the sea's extreme;  
Nor the dead waters, nor the far, bleak bars  
Of cloud were conscious of his failing beam.

It was a dismal and a dreadful sight,  
That desert in its cold, uncanny light;  
No soul but I alone to mark the fear  
And imminence of everlasting night!

All presages and prophecies of doom  
Glimmered and babbled in the ghastly gloom,  
And in the midst of that accursèd scene  
A wolf sat howling on a broken tomb.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Perverted Village After Goldsmith

Sweet Auburn! liveliest village of the plain,  
Where Health and Slander welcome every train,  
Whence smiling innocence, its tribute paid,  
Retires in terror, wounded and dismayed  
Dear lovely bowers of gossip and disease,  
Whose climate cures us that thy dames may tease,  
How often have I knelt upon thy green  
And prayed for death, to mitigate their spleen!  
How often have I paused on every charm  
With mingled admiration and alarm  
The brook that runs by many a scandal-mill,  
The church whose pastor groans upon the grill,  
The cowthorn bush with seats beneath the shade,  
Where hearts are struck and reputations flayed;  
How often wished thine idle wives, some day,  
Might more at whist, less at the devil, play.

Unblest retirement! ere my life's decline  
(Killed by detraction) may I witness thine.  
How happy she who, shunning shades like these,  
Finds in a wolf-den greater peace and ease;  
Who quits the place whence truth did earlier fly,  
And rather than come back prefers to die!  
For her no jealous maids renounce their sleep,  
Contriving malices to make her weep;  
No iron-faced dames her character debate  
And spurn imploring mercy from the gate;  
But down she lies to a more peaceful end,  
For wolves do not calumniate, but rend  
Sinks piecemeal to their maws, a willing prey,  
While resignation lubricates the way,  
And all her prospects brighten at the last:  
To wolves, not women, an approved repast.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Piute

Unbeautiful is the Piute!  
Howe'er bedecked with bravery,  
His person is unsavory  
Of soap he's destitute.

He multiplies upon the earth  
In spite of all admonishing;  
All censure his astonishing  
And versatile unworth.

Upon the Reservation wide  
We give for his inhabiting  
He goes a-jackass rabbiting  
To furnish his inside.

The hopper singing in the grass  
He seizes with avidity:  
He loves its tart acidity,  
And gobbles all that pass.

He penetrates the spider's veil,  
Industriously pillages  
The toads' defenseless villages,  
And shadows home the snail.

He lightly runs to earth the quaint  
Red worm and, deftly troweling,  
He makes it with his boweling  
Familiarly acquaint.

He tracks the pine-nut to its lair,  
Surrounds it with celerity,  
Regards it with asperity  
Smiles, and it isn't there!

I wish he'd open up a grin  
Of adequate vivacity  
And carrying capacity  
To take his Agent in.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Politician

'Let Glory's sons manipulate  
The tiller of the Ship of State.  
Be mine the humble, useful toil  
To work the tiller of the soil.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Psoriad

The King of Scotland, years and years ago,  
Convened his courtiers in a gallant row  
And thus addressed them:

'Gentle sirs, from you  
Abundant counsel I have had, and true:  
What laws to make to serve the public weal;  
What laws of Nature's making to repeal;  
What old religion is the only true one,  
And what the greater merit of some new one;  
What friends of yours my favor have forgot;  
Which of your enemies against me plot.  
In harvests ample to augment my treasures,  
Behold the fruits of your sagacious measures!  
The punctual planets, to their periods just,  
Attest your wisdom and approve my trust.  
Lo! the reward your shining virtues bring:  
The grateful placemen bless their useful king!  
But while you quaff the nectar of my favor  
I mean somewhat to modify its flavor  
By just infusing a peculiar dash  
Of tonic bitter in the calabash.  
And should you, too abstemious, disdain it,  
Egad! I'll hold your noses till you drain it!

'You know, you dogs, your master long has felt  
A keen distemper in the royal pelt  
A testy, superficial irritation,  
Brought home, I fancy, from some foreign nation.  
For this a thousand simples you've prescribed  
Unguents external, draughts to be imbibed.  
You've plundered Scotland of its plants, the seas  
You've ravished, and despoiled the Hebrides,  
To brew me remedies which, in probation,  
Were sovereign only in their application.  
In vain, and eke in pain, have I applied  
Your flattering unctions to my soul and hide:  
Physic and hope have been my daily food  
I've swallowed treacle by the holy rood!

'Your wisdom, which sufficed to guide the year  
And tame the seasons in their mad career,  
When set to higher purposes has failed me  
And added anguish to the ills that ailed me.  
Nor that alone, but each ambitious leech  
His rivals' skill has labored to impeach  
By hints equivocal in secret speech.  
For years, to conquer our respective broils,  
We've plied each other with pacific oils.  
In vain: your turbulence is unallayed,  
My flame unquenched; your rioting unstayed;  
My life so wretched from your strife to save it  
That death were welcome did I dare to brave it.  
With zeal inspired by your intemperate pranks,  
My subjects muster in contending ranks.  
Those fling their banners to the startled breeze  
To champion some royal ointment; these  
The standard of some royal purge display  
And 'neath that ensign wage a wasteful fray!  
Brave tongues are thundering from sea to sea,  
Torrents of sweat roll reeking o'er the lea!  
My people perish in their martial fear,  
And rival bagpipes cleave the royal ear!

'Now, caitiffs, tremble, for this very hour  
Your injured sovereign shall assert his power!  
Behold this lotion, carefully compound  
Of all the poisons you for me have found  
Of biting washes such as tan the skin,  
And drastic drinks to vex the parts within.  
What aggravates an ailment will produce-  
I mean to rub you with this dreadful juice!  
Divided counsels you no more shall hatch  
At last you shall unanimously scratch.  
Kneel, villains, kneel, and doff your shirts-God bless us!  
They'll seem, when you resume them, robes of Nessus!'

The sovereign ceased, and, sealing what he spoke,  
From Arthur's Seat[1] confirming thunders broke.  
The conscious culprits, to their fate resigned,  
Sank to their knees, all piously inclined.

This act, from high Ben Lomond where she floats,  
The thrifty goddess, Caledonia, notes.  
Glibly as nimble sixpence, down she tilts  
Headlong, and ravishes away their kilts,  
Tears off each plaid and all their shirts discloses,  
Removes each shirt and their broad backs exposes.  
The king advanced-then cursing fled amain  
Dashing the phial to the stony plain  
(Where't straight became a fountain brimming o'er,  
Whence Father Tweed derives his liquid store)  
For lo! already on each back sans stitch  
The red sign manual of the Rosy Witch!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Pun

Hail, peerless Pun! thou last and best,  
Most rare and excellent bequest  
Of dying idiot to the wit  
He died of, rat-like, in a pit!

Thyself disguised, in many a way  
Thou let'st thy sudden splendor play,  
Adorning all where'er it turns,  
As the revealing bull's-eye burns,  
Of the dim thief, and plays its trick  
Upon the lock he means to pick.

Yet sometimes, too, thou dost appear  
As boldly as a brigadier  
Tricked out with marks and signs, all o'er,  
Of rank, brigade, division, corps,  
To show by every means he can  
An officer is not a man;  
Or naked, with a lordly swagger,  
Proud as a cur without a wagger,  
Who says: 'See simple worth prevail  
All dog, sir-not a bit of tail!'

'T is then men give thee loudest welcome,  
As if thou wert a soul from Hell come.

O obvious Pun! thou hast the grace  
Of skeleton clock without a case  
With all its boweling displayed,  
And all its organs on parade.

Dear Pun, you're common ground of bliss,  
Where Punch and I can meet and kiss;  
Than thee my wit can stoop no low'r  
No higher his does ever soar.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Retrospective Bird

His caw is a cackle, his eye is dim,  
And he mopes all day on the lowest limb;  
Not a word says he, but he snaps his bill  
And twitches his palsied head, as a quill,  
The ultimate plume of his pride and hope,  
Quits his now featherless nose-of-the-Pope,  
Leaving that eminence brown and bare  
Exposed to the Prince of the Power of the Air.  
And he sits and he thinks: 'I'm an old, old man,  
Mateless and chickless, the last of my clan,  
But I'd give the half of the days gone by  
To perch once more on the branches high,  
And hear my great-grand-daddy's comical croaks  
In authorized versions of \_Bulletin\_ jokes.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Rich Testator

He lay on his bed and solemnly 'signed,'  
Gasping-perhaps 'twas a jest he meant:  
'This of a sound and disposing mind  
Is the last ill-will and contestament.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Royal Jester

Once on a time, so ancient poets sing,  
There reigned in Godknowswhere a certain king.  
So great a monarch ne'er before was seen:  
He was a hero, even to his queen,  
In whose respect he held so high a place  
That none was higher, -nay, not even the ace.  
He was so just his Parliament declared  
Those subjects happy whom his laws had spared;  
So wise that none of the debating throng  
Had ever lived to prove him in the wrong;  
So good that Crime his anger never feared,  
And Beauty boldly plucked him by the beard;  
So brave that if his army got a beating  
None dared to face him when he was retreating.  
This monarch kept a Fool to make his mirth,  
And loved him tenderly despite his worth.  
Prompted by what caprice I cannot say,  
He called the Fool before the throne one day  
And to that jester seriously said:  
'I'll abdicate, and you shall reign instead,  
While I, attired in motley, will make sport  
To entertain your Majesty and Court.'

'T was done and the Fool governed. He decreed  
The time of harvest and the time of seed;  
Ordered the rains and made the weather clear,  
And had a famine every second year;  
Altered the calendar to suit his freak,  
Ordaining six whole holidays a week;  
Religious creeds and sacred books prepared;  
Made war when angry and made peace when scared.  
New taxes he inspired; new laws he made;  
Drowned those who broke them, who observed them, flayed,  
In short, he ruled so well that all who'd not  
Been starved, decapitated, hanged or shot  
Made the whole country with his praises ring,  
Declaring he was every inch a king;  
And the High Priest averred 't was very odd  
If one so competent were not a god.



Meantime, his master, now in motley clad,  
Wore such a visage, woeful, wan and sad,  
That some condoled with him as with a brother  
Who, having lost a wife, had got another.  
Others, mistaking his profession, often  
Approached him to be measured for a coffin.  
For years this highborn jester never broke  
The silence-he was pondering a joke.  
At last, one day, in cap-and-bells arrayed,  
He strode into the Council and displayed  
A long, bright smile, that glittered in the gloom  
Like a gilt epithet within a tomb.  
Posing his bauble like a leader's staff,  
To give the signal when (and why) to laugh,  
He brought it down with peremptory stroke  
And simultaneously cracked his joke!

I can't repeat it, friends. I ne'er could school  
Myself to quote from any other fool:  
A jest, if it were worse than mine, would start  
My tears; if better, it would break my heart.  
So, if you please, I'll hold you but to state  
That royal Jester's melancholy fate.

The insulted nation, so the story goes,  
Rose as one man-the very dead arose,  
Springing indignant from the riven tomb,  
And babes unborn leapt swearing from the womb!  
All to the Council Chamber clamoring went,  
By rage distracted and on vengeance bent.  
In that vast hall, in due disorder laid,  
The tools of legislation were displayed,  
And the wild populace, its wrath to sate,  
Seized them and heaved them at the Jester's pate.  
Mountains of writing paper; pools and seas  
Of ink, awaiting, to become decrees,  
Royal approval-and the same in stacks  
Lay ready for attachment, backed with wax;  
Pens to make laws, erasers to amend them;  
With mucilage convenient to extend them;  
Scissors for limiting their application,

And acids to repeal all legislation-  
These, flung as missiles till the air was dense,  
Were most offensive weapons of offense,  
And by their aid the Fool was nigh destroyed.  
They ne'er had been so harmlessly employed.  
Whelmed underneath a load of legal cap,  
His mouth egurgitating ink on tap,  
His eyelids mucilaginously sealed,  
His fertile head by scissors made to yield  
Abundant harvestage of ears, his pelt,  
In every wrinkle and on every welt,  
Quickset with pencil-points from feet to gills  
And thickly studded with a pride of quills,  
The royal Jester in the dreadful strife  
Was made (in short) an editor for life!

An idle tale, and yet a moral lurks  
In this as plainly as in greater works.  
I shall not give it birth: one moral here  
Would die of loneliness within a year.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Saint And The Monk

Saint Peter at the gate of Heaven displayed  
The tools and terrors of his awful trade;  
The key, the frown as pitiless as night,  
That slays intending trespassers at sight,  
And, at his side in easy reach, the curled  
Interrogation points all ready to be hurled.

Straight up the shining cloudway (it so chanced  
No others were about) a soul advanced  
A fat, orbicular and jolly soul  
With laughter-lines upon each rosy jowl-  
A monk so prepossessing that the saint  
Admired him, breathless, until weak and faint,  
Forgot his frown and all his questions too,  
Forgoing even the customary 'Who?'  
Threw wide the gate and, with a friendly grin,  
Said, "Tis a very humble home, but pray walk in.'

The soul smiled pleasantly. 'Excuse me, please  
Who's in there?' By insensible degrees  
The impudence dispelled the saint's esteem,  
As growing snores annihilate a dream.  
The frown began to blacken on his brow,  
His hand to reach for 'Whence?' and 'Why?' and 'How?'  
'O, no offense, I hope,' the soul explained;  
'I'm rather-well, particular. I've strained  
A point in coming here at all; 'tis said  
That Susan Anthony (I hear she's dead  
At last) and all her followers are here.  
As company, they'd be-confess it-rather queer.'

The saint replied, his rising anger past:  
'What can I do?-the law is hard-and-fast,  
Albeit unwritten and on earth unknown-  
An oral order issued from the Throne.  
By but one sin has Woman e'er incurred  
God's wrath. To accuse Them Loud of that would be absurd.'

That friar sighed, but, calling up a smile,

Said, slowly turning on his heel the while:  
'Farewell, my friend. Put up the chain and bar  
I'm going, so please you, where the pretty women are.'

Ambrose Bierce

## The Scurril Press

OM JONESMITH *\_(loquiter)\_*: I've slept right through  
The night-a rather clever thing to do.  
How soundly women sleep *\_(looks at his wife.)*  
They're all alike. The sweetest thing in life  
Is woman when she lies with folded tongue,  
Its toil completed and its day-song sung.  
*\_(Thump)\_* That's the morning paper. What a bore  
That it should be delivered at the door.  
There ought to be some expeditious way  
To get it *\_to\_* one. By this long delay  
The fizz gets off the news *\_(a rap is heard)\_*.  
That's Jane, the housemaid; she's an early bird;  
She's brought it to the bedroom door, good soul.  
*\_(Gets up and takes it in.)\_* Upon the whole  
The system's not so bad a one. What's here?  
Gad, if they've not got after-listen dear  
*\_(To sleeping wife)\_*-young Gastrotheos! Well,  
If Freedom shrieked when Kosciusko fell  
She'll shriek again-with laughter-seeing how  
They treated Gast. with her. Yet I'll allow  
'T is right if he goes dining at The Pup  
With Mrs. Thing.

WIFE *\_(briskly, waking up)\_*:  
With her? The hussy! Yes, it serves him right.

JONESMITH *\_(continuing to 'seek the light')\_*:  
What's this about old Impycu? That's good!  
Grip-that's the funny man-says Impy should  
Be used as a decoy in shooting tramps.  
I knew old Impy when he had the 'stamps'  
To buy us all out, and he wasn't then  
So bad a chap to have about. Grip's pen  
Is just a tickler!-and the world, no doubt,  
Is better with it than it was without.  
What? thirteen ladies-Jumping Jove! we know  
Them nearly all!-who gamble at a low  
And very shocking game of cards called 'draw'!  
O cracky, how they'll squirm! ha-ha! haw-haw!

Let's see what else (\_wife snores\_). Well, I'll be blest!  
A woman doesn't understand a jest.  
Hello! What, what? the scurvy wretch proceeds  
To take a fling at \_me\_, condemn him! (\_reads\_):  
Tom Jonesmith-my name's Thomas, vulgar cad!- \_Of  
the new Shavings Bank\_-the man's gone mad!  
That's libelous; I'll have him up for that- \_Has  
had his corns cut\_. Devil take the rat!  
What business is 't of his, I'd like to know?  
He didn't have to cut them. Gods! what low  
And scurril things our papers have become!  
You skim their contents and you get but scum.  
Here, Mary, (\_waking wife\_) I've been attacked  
In this vile sheet. By Jove, it is a fact!

WIFE (\_reading it\_): How wicked! Who do you  
Suppose 't was wrote it?

JONESMITH: Who? why, who  
But Grip, the so-called funny man-he wrote  
Me up because I'd not discount his note.  
( \_Blushes like sunset at the hideous lie-  
He'll think of one that's better by and by-  
Throws down the paper on the floor, and treads  
A lively measure on it-kicks the shreds  
And patches all about the room, and still  
Performs his jig with unabated will.\_)

WIFE (\_warbling sweetly, like an Elfland horn\_):  
Dear, do be careful of that second corn.

STANLEY.

Noting some great man's composition vile:  
A head of wisdom and a heart of guile,  
A will to conquer and a soul to dare,  
Joined to the manners of a dancing bear,  
Fools unaccustomed to the wide survey  
Of various Nature's compensating sway,  
Untaught to separate the wheat and chaff,  
To praise the one and at the other laugh,  
Yearn all in vain and impotently seek  
Some flawless hero upon whom to wreak

The sycophantic worship of the weak.  
Not so the wise, from superstition free,  
Who find small pleasure in the bended knee;  
Quick to discriminate 'twixt good and bad,  
And willing in the king to find the cad-  
No reason seen why genius and conceit,  
The power to dazzle and the will to cheat,  
The love of daring and the love of gin,  
Should not dwell, peaceful, in a single skin.  
To such, great Stanley, you're a hero still,  
Despite your cradling in a tub for swill.  
Your peasant manners can't efface the mark  
Of light you drew across the Land of Dark.

In you the extremes of character are wed,  
To serve the quick and villify the dead.  
Hero and clown! O, man of many sides,  
The Muse of Truth adores you and derides,  
And sheds, impartial, the revealing ray  
Upon your head of gold and feet of clay.

Ambrose Bierce

## The Setting Sachem

'Twas an Injin chieftain, in feathers all fine,  
Who stood on the ocean's rim;  
There were numberless leagues of excellent brine  
But there wasn't enough for him.  
So he knuckled a thumb in his painted eye,  
And added a tear to the scant supply.

The surges were breaking with thund'rous voice,  
The winds were a-shrieking shrill;  
This warrior thought that a trifle of noise  
Was needed to fill the bill.  
So he lifted the top of his head off and scowled  
Exalted his voice, did this chieftain, and howled!

The sun was aflame in a field of gold  
That hung o'er the Western Sea;  
Bright banners of light were broadly unrolled,  
As banners of light should be.  
But no one was 'speaking a piece' to that sun,  
And therefore this Medicine Man begun:

'O much heap of bright! O big ball of warm!  
I've tracked you from sea to sea!  
For the Paleface has been at some pains to inform  
Me, you are the emblem of me.  
He says to me, cheerfully: 'Westward Ho!'  
And westward I've hoed a most difficult row.

'Since you are the emblem of me, I presume  
That I am the emblem of you,  
And thus, as we're equals, 't is safe to assume,  
That one great law governs us two.  
So now if I set in the ocean with thee,  
With thee I shall rise again out of the sea.'

His eloquence first, and his logic the last!  
Such orators die!-and he died:  
The trump was against him-his luck bad-he 'passed'  
And so he 'passed out'-with the tide.



This Injin is rid of the world with a whim  
The world it is rid of his speeches and him.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Shafter Shafted

Well, James McMillan Shafter, you're a Judge  
At least you were when last I knew of you;  
And if the people since have made you budge  
I did not notice it. I've much to do  
Without endeavoring to follow, through  
The miserable squabbles, dust and smudge,  
The fate of even the veteran contenders  
Who fight with flying colors and suspenders.  
Being a Judge, 'tis natural and wrong  
That you should villify the public press  
Save while you are a candidate. That song  
Is easy quite to sing, and I confess  
It wins applause from hearers who have less  
Of spiritual graces than belong  
To audiences of another kidney  
Men, for example, like Sir Philip Sidney.

Newspapers, so you say, don't always treat  
The Judges with respect. That may be so  
And still no harm done, for I swear I'll eat  
My legs and in the long hereafter go,  
Snake-like, upon my belly if you'll show  
All Judges are respectable and sweet.  
For some of them are rogues and the world's laughter's  
Directed at some others, for they're Shafters.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Spirit Of A Sponge

I dreamed one night that Stephen Massett died,  
And for admission up at Heaven applied.  
'Who are you?' asked St. Peter. Massett said:  
'Jeems Pipes, of Pipesville.' Peter bowed his head,  
Opened the gates and said: 'I'm glad to know you,  
And wish we'd something better, sir, to show you.'  
'Don't mention it,' said Stephen, looking bland,  
And was about to enter, hat in hand,  
When from a cloud below such fumes arose  
As tickled tenderly his conscious nose.  
He paused, replaced his hat upon his head,  
Turned back and to the saintly warden said,  
O'er his already sprouting wings: 'I swear  
I smell some broiling going on down there!'  
So Massett's paunch, attracted by the smell,  
Followed his nose and found a place in Hell.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Statesmen

How blest the land that counts among  
Her sons so many good and wise,  
To execute great feats of tongue  
When troubles rise.

Behold them mounting every stump,  
By speech our liberty to guard.  
Observe their courage--see them jump,  
And come down hard!

'Walk up, walk up!' each cries aloud,  
'And learn from me what you must do  
To turn aside the thunder cloud,  
The earthquake too.

'Beware the wiles of yonder quack  
Who stuffs the ears of all that pass.  
I--I alone can show that black  
Is white as grass.'

They shout through all the day and break  
The silence of the night as well.  
They'd make--I wish they'd go and make--  
Of Heaven a Hell.

A advocates free silver, B  
Free trade and C free banking laws.  
Free board, clothes, lodging would from me  
Win wamr applause.

Lo, D lifts up his voice: 'You see  
The single tax on land would fall  
On all alike.' More evenly  
No tax at all.

'With paper money,' bellows E,  
'We'll all be rich as lords.' No doubt--  
And richest of the lot will be  
The chap without.

As many 'cures' as addle-wits  
Who know not what the ailment is!  
Meanwhile the patient foams and spits  
Like a gin fizz.

Alas, poor Body Politic,  
Your fate is all too clearly read:  
To be not altogether quick,  
Nor very dead.

You take your exercise in squirms,  
Your rest in fainting fits between.  
'Tis plain that your disorder's worms--  
Worms fat and lean.

Worm Capital, Worm Labor dwell  
Within your maw and muscle's scope.  
Their quarrels make your life a Hell,  
Your death a hope.

God send you find not such an end  
To ills however sharp and huge!  
God send you convalesce! God send  
You vermifuge.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Subdued Editor

Pope-choker Pixley sat in his den  
A-chewin' upon his quid.  
He thought it was Leo Thirteen, and then  
He bit it intenser, he did.

The amber which overflow from the cud  
Like rivers which burst out of bounds  
'Twas peculiar grateful to think it blood  
A-gushin' from Papal wounds.

A knockin' was heard uponto the door  
Where some one a-waitin' was.  
'Come in,' said the shedder of priestly gore,  
Arrestin' to once his jaws.

The person which entered was curly of hair  
And smilin' as ever you see;  
His eyes was blue, and uncommon fair  
Was his physiognomee.

And yet there was some'at remarkable grand  
And the editor says as he looks:  
'Your Height' (it was Highness, you understand,  
That he meant, but he spoke like books)

'Your Height, I am in. I'm the editor man  
Of this paper-which is to say,  
I'm the owner, too, and it's always ran  
In the independentest way!

'Not a damgaloot can interfere,  
A-shapin' my course for me:  
This paper's (and nothing can make it veer)  
Pixleian in policee!'

'It's little to me,' said the sunny youth,  
'If journals is better or worse  
Where I am to home they won't keep, in truth,  
The climate is that perverse.

'I've come, howsomever, your mind to light  
With a more superior fire:  
You'll have naught hencefor'ard to do but write,  
While I sets by and inspire.

'We'll make it hot all round, bedad!'  
And his laughture was loud and free.  
'The devil!' cried Pixley, surpassin' mad.  
'Exactly, my friend-that's me.'

So he took a chair and a feather fan,  
And he sets and sets and sets,  
Inspirin' that humbled editor man,  
Which sweats and sweats and sweats!

All unavailin' his struggles be,  
And it's, O, a weepin' sight  
To see a great editor bold and free  
Reducted to sech a plight!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Sunset Gun

Off Santa Cruz the western wave  
Was crimson as with blood:  
The sun was sinking to his grave  
Beneath that angry flood.

Sir Walter Turnbull, brave and stout,  
Then shouted, 'Ho! lads; run-  
The powder and the ball bring out  
To fire the sunset gun.

'That punctual orb did ne'er omit  
To keep, by land or sea,  
Its every engagement; it  
Shall never wait for me.'

Behold the black-mouthed cannon stand,  
Ready with charge and prime,  
The lanyard in the gunner's hand.  
Sir Walter waits the time.

The glowing orb sinks in the sea,  
And clouds of steam aspire,  
Then fade, and the horizon's free.  
Sir Walter thunders: 'Fire!'

The gunner pulls-the lanyard parts  
And not a sound ensues.  
The beating of ten thousand hearts  
Was heard at Santa Cruz!

Off Santa Cruz the western wave  
Was crimson as with blood;  
The sun, with visage stern and grave,  
Came back from out the flood.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Tables Turned

Over the man the street car ran,  
And the driver did never grin.  
'O killer of men, pray tell me when  
Your laughter means to begin.

'Ten years to a day I've observed you slay,  
And I never have missed before  
Your jubilant peals as your crunching wheels  
Were spattered with human gore.

'Why is it, my boy, that you smother your joy,  
And why do you make no sign  
Of the merry mind that is dancing behind  
A solemn face than mine?'

The driver replied: 'I would laugh till I cried  
If I had bisected you;  
But I'd like to explain, if I can for the pain,  
'T is myself that I've cut in two.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Town Of Dae

Swains and maidens, young and old,  
You to me this tale have told.

Where the squalid town of Dae  
Irks the comfortable sea,  
Spreading webs to gather fish,  
As for wealth we set a wish,  
Dwelt a king by right divine,  
Sprung from Adam's royal line,  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
Divers kinds of kings there be.

Name nor fame had Picklepip:  
Ne'er a soldier nor a ship  
Bore his banners in the sun;  
Naught knew he of kingly sport,  
And he held his royal court  
Under an inverted tun.  
Love and roses, ages through,  
Bloom where cot and trellis stand;  
Never yet these blossoms grew  
Never yet was room for two  
In a cask upon the strand.

So it happened, as it ought,  
That his simple schemes he wrought  
Through the lagging summer's day  
In a solitary way.  
So it happened, as was best,  
That he took his nightly rest  
With no dreadful incubus  
This way eyed and that way tressed,  
Featured thus, and thus, and thus,  
Lying lead-like on a breast  
By cares of State enough oppressed.  
Yet in dreams his fancies rude  
Claimed a lordly latitude.  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
Dreamers mate above their state

And waken back to their degree.

Once to cask himself away  
He prepared at close of day.  
As he tugged with swelling throat  
At a most unkingly coat  
Not to get it off, but on,  
For the serving sun was gone  
Passed a silk-appareled sprite  
Toward her castle on the height,  
Seized and set the garment right.  
Turned the startled Picklepip  
Splendid crimson cheek and lip!  
Turned again to sneak away,

But she bade the villain stay,  
Bade him thank her, which he did  
With a speech that slipped and slid,  
Sprawled and stumbled in its gait  
As a dancer tries to skate.  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
In the face of silk and lace  
Rags too bold should never be.

Lady Minnow cocked her head:  
'Mister Picklepip,' she said,  
'Do you ever think to wed?'  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
No fair lady ever made a  
Wicked speech like that to me!

Wretched little Picklepip  
Said he hadn't any ship,  
Any flocks at his command,  
Nor to feed them any land;  
Said he never in his life  
Owned a mine to keep a wife.  
But the guilty stammer so  
That his meaning wouldn't flow;  
So he thought his aim to reach  
By some figurative speech:  
Said his Fate had been unkind

Had pursued him from behind  
(How the mischief could it else?)

Came upon him unaware,  
Caught him by the collar-there  
Gushed the little lady's glee  
Like a gush of golden bells:  
'Picklepip, why, that is \_me\_!'  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
Grammar's for great scholars-she  
Loved the summer and the lea.

Stupid little Picklepip  
Allowed the subtle hint to slip  
Maundered on about the ship  
That he did not chance to own;  
Told this grievance o'er and o'er,  
Knowing that she knew before;  
Told her how he dwelt alone.  
Lady Minnow, for reply,  
Cut him off with 'So do I!'  
But she reddened at the fib;  
Servitors had she, \_ad lib.  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
In her youth who speaks no truth  
Ne'er shall young and honest be.

Witless little Picklepip  
Manned again his mental ship  
And veered her with a sudden shift.  
Painted to the lady's thought  
How he wrestled and he wrought

Stoutly with the swimming drift  
By the kindly river brought  
From the mountain to the sea,  
Fuel for the town of Dae.  
Tedious tale for lady's ear:  
From her castle on the height,  
She had watched her water-knight  
Through the seasons of a year,  
Challenge more than met his view

And conquer better than he knew.  
Now she shook her pretty pate  
And stamped her foot-'t was growing late:  
'Mister Picklepip, when I  
Drifting seaward pass you by;  
When the waves my forehead kiss  
And my tresses float above-  
Dead and drowned for lack of love-  
You'll be sorry, sir, for this!'  
And the silly creature cried  
Feared, perchance, the rising tide.  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
Madam Adam, when she had 'em,  
May have been as bad as she.

\_Fiat lux!\_ Love's lumination  
Fell in floods of revelation!  
Blinded brain by world aglare,  
Sense of pulses in the air,

Sense of swooning and the beating  
Of a voice somewhere repeating  
Something indistinctly heard!  
And the soul of Picklepip  
Sprang upon his trembling lip,  
But he spake no further word  
Of the wealth he did not own;  
In that moment had outgrown  
Ship and mine and flock and land  
Even his cask upon the strand.  
Dropped a stricken star to earth,  
Type of wealth and worldly worth.  
Clomb the moon into the sky,  
Type of love's immensity!  
Shaking silver seemed the sea,  
Throne of God the town of Dae!  
Town of Dae by the sea,  
From above there cometh love,  
Blessing all good souls that be.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Transmigrations Of A Soul

What! Pixley, must I hear you call the roll  
Of all the vices that infest your soul?  
Was't not enough that lately you did bawl  
Your money-worship in the ears of all?  
Still must you crack your brazen cheek to tell  
That though a miser you're a sot as well?  
Still must I hear how low your taste has sunk  
From getting money down to getting drunk?

Who worships money, damning all beside,  
And shows his callous knees with pious pride,  
Speaks with half-knowledge, for no man e'er scorns  
His own possessions, be they coins or corns.  
You've money, neighbor; had you gentle birth  
You'd know, as now you never can, its worth.

You've money; learning is beyond your scope,  
Deaf to your envy, stubborn to your hope.  
But if upon your undeserving head  
Science and letters had their glory shed;  
If in the cavern of your skull the light  
Of knowledge shone where now eternal night  
Breeds the blind, poddy, vapor-fatted naughts  
Of cerebation that you think are thoughts  
Black bats in cold and dismal corners hung  
That squeak and gibber when you move your tongue  
You would not write, in Avarice's defense,  
A senseless eulogy on lack of sense,  
Nor show your eagerness to sacrifice  
All noble virtues to one loathsome vice.

You've money; if you'd manners too you'd shame  
To boast your weakness or your baseness name.  
Appraise the things you have, but measure not  
The things denied to your unhappy lot.  
He values manners lighter than a cork  
Who combs his beard at table with a fork.  
Hare to seek sin and tortoise to forsake,  
The laws of taste condemn you to the stake

To expiate, where all the world may see,  
The crime of growing old disgracefully.

Religion, learning, birth and manners, too,  
All that distinguishes a man from you,  
Pray damn at will: all shining virtues gain  
An added luster from a rogue's disdain.  
But spare the young that proselyting sin,  
A toper's apotheosis of gin.  
If not our young, at least our pigs may claim  
Exemption from the spectacle of shame!

Are you not he who lately out of shape  
Blew a brass trumpet to denounce the grape?  
Who led the brave teetotalers afield  
And slew your leader underneath your shield?  
Swore that no man should drink unless he flung  
Himself across your body at the bung?  
Who vowed if you'd the power you would fine  
The Son of God for making water wine?

All trails to odium you tread and boast,  
Yourself enamored of the dirtiest most.  
One day to be a miser you aspire,  
The next to wallow drunken in the mire;  
The third, lo! you're a meritorious liar!  
Pray, in the catalogue of all your graces,  
Have theft and cowardice no honored places?

Yield thee, great Satan-here's a rival name  
With all thy vices and but half thy shame!  
Quick to the letter of the precept, quick  
To the example of the elder Nick;  
With as great talent as was e'er applied  
To fool a teacher and to fog a guide;  
With slack allegiance and boundless greed,  
To paunch the profit of a traitor deed,  
He aims to make thy glory all his own,  
And crowd his master from the infernal throne!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Unfallen Brave

Not all in sorrow and in tears,  
To pay of gratitude's arrears  
The yearly sum  
Not prompted, wholly by the pride  
Of those for whom their friends have died,  
To-day we come.

Another aim we have in view  
Than for the buried boys in blue  
To dropp a tear:  
Memorial Day revives the chin  
Of Barnes, and Salomon chimes in  
That's why we're here.

And when in after-ages they  
Shall pass, like mortal men, away,  
Their war-song sung,  
Then fame will tell the tale anew  
Of how intrepidly they drew  
The deadly tongue.

Then cull white lilies for the graves  
Of Liberty's loquacious braves,  
And roses red.  
Those represent their livers, these  
The blood that in unmeasured seas  
They did not shed.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Unpardonable Sin

I reckon that ye never knew,  
That dandy slugger, Tom Carew,  
He had a touch as light an' free  
As that of any honey-bee;  
But where it lit there wasn't much  
To jestify another touch.  
O, what a Sunday-school it was  
To watch him puttin' up his paws  
An' roominate upon their heft  
Particular his holy left!  
Tom was my style-that's all I say;  
Some others may be equal gay.  
What's come of him? Dunno, I'm sure  
He's dead-which make his fate obscure.  
I only started in to clear  
One vital p'int in his career,  
Which is to say-afore he died  
He soiled his erming mighty snide.  
Ye see he took to politics  
And learnt them statesmen-fellers' tricks;  
Pulled wires, wore stovepipe hats, used scent,  
Just like he was the President;  
Went to the Legislator; spoke  
Right out agin the British yoke  
But that was right. He let his hair  
Grow long to qualify for Mayor,  
An' once or twice he poked his snoot  
In Congress like a low galoot!  
It had to come-no gent can hope  
To wrastle God agin the rope.  
Tom went from bad to wuss. Being dead,  
I s'pose it oughtn't to be said,  
For sech inikities as flow  
From politics ain't fit to know;  
But, if you think it's actin' white  
To tell it-Thomas throwed a fight!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Valley Of Dry Bones

With crow bones all the land is white,  
From the gates of morn to the gates of night.  
Picked clean, they lie on the cumbered ground,  
And the politician's paunch is round;  
And he strokes it down and across as he sings:  
'I've eaten my fill of the legs and wings,  
The neck, the back, the pontifical nose,  
Breast, belly and gizzard, for everything goes.  
The meat that's dark (and there's none that's white)  
Exceeded the need of my appetite,  
But I've bravely stuck to the needful work  
That a hungry domestic hog would shirk.  
I've eaten the fowl that the Fates commend  
To reluctant lips of the People's Friend.  
Rank unspeakably, bitter as gall,  
Is the bird, but I've eaten it, feathers and all.  
I'm a dutiful statesman, I am, although  
I really don't like a diet of crow.  
So I've dined all alone in a furtive way,  
But my platter I've cleaned every blessed day.  
They say that I bolt; so I do-my bird;  
They say that I sulk, but they've widely erred!  
O Lord! if my enemies only knew  
How I'm full to the throat with the corvic stew  
They'd open their ears to hear me profess  
The faith compelled by the corvic stress,  
(For, alas! necessity knows no law)  
In the heavenly caucus-'Caw! Caw! Caw!'"

And that ornithanthropical person tried  
By flapping his arms on the air to ride;  
But I knew by the way that he clacked his bill  
He was just the poor, featherless biped, Dave Hill.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Valley Of The Shadow Of Theft

In fair Yosemite, that den of thieves  
Wherein the minions of the moon divide  
The travelers' purses, lo! the Devil grieves,  
His larger share as leader still denied.

El Capitan, foreseeing that \_his\_ reign  
May be disputed too, beclouds his head.  
The joyous Bridal Veil is torn in twain  
And the crepe steamer dangles there instead.

The Vernal Fall abates her pleasant speed  
And hesitates to take the final plunge,  
For rumors reach her that another greed  
Awaits her in the Valley of the Sponge.

The Brothers envy the accord of mind  
And peace of purpose (by the good deplored  
As honor among Commissioners) which bind  
That confraternity of crime, the Board.

The Half-Dome bows its riven face to weep,  
But not, as formerly, because bereft:  
Prophetic dreams afflict him when asleep  
Of losing his remaining half by theft.

Ambitious knaves! has not the upper sod  
Enough of room for every crime that crawls  
But you must loot the Palaces of God  
And daub your filthy names upon the walls?

Ambrose Bierce

# The Van Nessiad

From end to end, thine avenue, Van Ness,  
Rang with the cries of battle and distress!  
Brave lungs were thundering with dreadful sound  
And perspiration smoked along the ground!  
Sing, heavenly muse, to ears of mortal clay,  
The meaning, cause and finish of the fray.

Great Porter Ashe (invoking first the gods,  
Who signed their favor with assenting nods  
That snapped off half their heads-their necks grown dry  
Since last the nectar cup went circling by)  
Resolved to build a stable on his lot,  
His neighbors fiercely swearing he should not.  
Said he: 'I build that stable!' 'No, you don't,'  
Said they. 'I can!' 'You can't!' 'I will!' 'You won't!'  
'By heaven!' he swore; 'not only will I build,  
But purchase donkeys till the place is filled!'  
'Needless expense,' they sneered in tones of ice  
'The owner's self, if lodged there, would suffice.'  
For three long months the awful war they waged:  
With women, women, men with men engaged,  
While roaring babes and shrilling poodles raged!

Jove, from Olympus, where he still maintains  
His ancient session (with rheumatic pains  
Touched by his long exposure) marked the strife,  
Interminable but by loss of life;  
For malediction soon exhausts the breath  
If not, old age itself is certain death.  
Lo! he holds high in heaven the fatal beam;  
A golden pan depends from each, extreme;  
This feels of Porter's fate the downward stress,  
That bears the destiny of all Van Ness.  
Alas! the rusted scales, their life all gone,  
Deliver judgment neither pro nor con:  
The dooms hang level and the war goes on.  
With a divine, contemptuous disesteem  
Jove dropped the pans and kicked, himself, the beam:  
Then, to decide the strife, with ready wit,

The nickel that he did not care for it  
Twirled absently, remarking: 'See it spin:  
Head, Porter loses; tail, the others win.'  
The conscious nickel, charged with doom, spun round,  
Portentously and made a ringing sound,  
Then, staggering beneath its load of fate,  
Sank rattling, died at last and lay in state.

Jove scanned the disk and then, as is his wont,  
Raised his considering orbs, exclaiming: 'Front!'  
With leisurely alacrity approached  
The herald god, to whom his mind he broached:  
'In San Francisco two belligerent Powers,  
Such as contended round great Ilion's towers,  
Fight for a stable, though in either class  
There's not a horse, and but a single ass.  
Achilles Ashe, with formidable jaw  
Assails a Trojan band with fierce hee-haw,  
Firing the night with brilliant curses. They  
With dark vituperation gloom the day.  
Fate, against which nor gods nor men compete,  
Decreases their victory and his defeat.  
With haste, good Mercury, betake thee hence  
And salivate him till he has no sense!'

Sheer downward shot the messenger afar,  
Trailing a splendor like a falling star!  
With dimming lustre through the air he burned,  
Vanished, nor till another sun returned.  
The sovereign of the gods superior smiled,  
Beaming benignant, fatherly and mild:  
'Is Destiny's decree performed, my lad?  
And has he now no sense?' 'Ah, sire, he never had.'

Ambrose Bierce

# The Veteran

John Jackson, once a soldier bold,  
Hath still a martial feeling;  
So, when he sees a foe, behold!  
He charges him-with stealing.

He cares not how much ground to-day  
He gives for men to doubt him;  
He's used to giving ground, they say,  
Who lately fought with-out him.

When, for the battle to be won,  
His gallantry was needed,  
They say each time a loaded gun  
Went off-so, likewise, he did.

And when discharged (for war's a sport  
So hot he had to leave it)  
He made a very loud report,  
But no one did believe it.

Ambrose Bierce

# The 'Viduate Dame'

'Tis the widow of Thomas Blythe,  
And she goeth upon the spree,  
And red are cheeks of the bystanders  
For her acts are light and free.

In a seven-ounce costume  
The widow of Thomas Blythe,  
Y-perched high on the window ledge,  
The difficult can-can tryeth.

Ten constables they essay  
To bate the dame's halloing.  
With the widow of Thomas Blythe  
Their hands are overflowing,

And they cry: 'Call the National Guard  
To quell this parlous muss-  
For all of the widows of Thomas Blythe  
Are upon the spree and us!'

O long shall the eerie tale be told  
By that posse's surviving tithe;  
And with tears bedewed he'll sing this rude  
Ballad of the widow of Thomas Blythe.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Weather Wight

The way was long, the hill was steep,  
My footing scarcely I could keep.

The night enshrouded me in gloom,  
I heard the ocean's distant boom

The trampling of the surges vast  
Was borne upon the rising blast.

'God help the mariner,' I cried,  
'Whose ship to-morrow braves the tide!'

Then from the impenetrable dark  
A solemn voice made this remark:

'For this locality-warm, bright;  
Barometer unchanged; breeze light.'

'Unseen consoler-man,' I cried,  
'Whoe'er you are, where'er abide,

'Thanks-but my care is somewhat less  
For Jack's, than for my own, distress.

'Could I but find a friendly roof,  
Small odds what weather were aloof.

'For he whose comfort is secure  
Another's woes can well endure.'

'The latch-string's out,' the voice replied,  
'And so's the door-jes' step inside.'

Then through the darkness I discerned  
A hovel, into which I turned.

Groping about beneath its thatch,  
I struck my head and then a match.



A candle by that gleam betrayed  
Soon lent paraffinaceous aid.

A pallid, bald and thin old man  
I saw, who this complaint began:

'Through summer suns and winter snows  
I sets observin' of my toes.

'I rambles with increasin' pain  
The path of duty, but in vain.

'Rewards and honors pass me by  
No Congress hears this raven cry!'

Filled with astonishment, I spoke:  
'Thou ancient raven, why this croak?

'With observation of your toes  
What Congress has to do, Heaven knows!

'And swallow me if e'er I knew  
That one could sit and ramble too!'

To answer me that ancient swain  
Took up his parable again:

'Through winter snows and summer suns  
A Weather Bureau here I runs.

'I calls the turn, and can declare  
Jes' when she'll storm and when she'll fair.

'Three times a day I sings out clear  
The probs to all which wants to hear.

'Some weather stations run with light  
Frivolity is seldom right.

'A scientist from times remote,  
In Scienceville my birth is wrote.

'And when I h'ist the 'rainy' sign  
Jes' take your clo'es in off the line.'

'Not mine, O marvelous old man,  
The methods of your art to scan,

'Yet here no instruments there be-  
Nor 'ometer nor 'scope I see.

'Did you (if questions you permit)  
At the asylum leave your kit?'

That strange old man with motion rude  
Grew to surprising altitude.

'Tools (and sarcazzems too) I scorns-  
I tells the weather by my corns.

'No doors and windows here you see-  
The wind and m'isture enters free.

'No fires nor lights, no wool nor fur  
Here falsifies the tempercher.

'My corns unleathered I expose  
To feel the rain's foretellin' throes.

'No stockin' from their ears keeps out  
The comin' tempest's warnin' shout.

'Sich delicacy some has got  
They know next summer's to be hot.

'This here one says (for that he's best):  
'Storm center passin' to the west.'

'This feller's vitals is transfixed  
With frost for Janawary sixt'.

'One chap jes' now is occy'pied  
In fig'rin on next Fridy's tide.

'I've shaved this cuss so thin and true  
He'll spot a fog in South Peru.

'Sech are my tools, which ne'er a swell  
Observatory can excel.

'By long a-studyin' their throbs  
I catches onto all the probs.'

Much more, no doubt, he would have said,  
But suddenly he turned and fled;

For in mine eye's indignant green  
Lay storms that he had not foreseen,

Till all at once, with silent squeals,  
His toes 'caught on' and told his heels.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Wise And Good

'O father, I saw at the church as I passed  
The populace gathered in numbers so vast  
That they couldn't get in; and their voices were low,  
And they looked as if suffering terrible woe.'

"Twas the funeral, child, of a gentleman dead  
For whom the great heart of humanity bled.'

'What made it bleed, father, for every day  
Somebody passes forever away?  
Do the newspaper men print a column or more  
Of every person whose troubles are o'er?'

'O, no; they could never do that-and indeed,  
Though printers might print it, no reader would read.  
To the sepulcher all, soon or late, must be borne,  
But 'tis only the Wise and the Good that all mourn.'

'That's right, father dear, but how can our eyes  
Distinguish in dead men the Good and the Wise?'

'That's easy enough to the stupidest mind:  
They're poor, and in dying leave nothing behind.'

'Seest thou in mine eye, father, anything green?  
And takest thy son for a gaping marine?  
Go tell thy fine tale of the Wise and the Good  
Who are poor and lamented to babes in the wood.'

And that horrible youth as I hastened away  
Was building a wink that affronted the day.

Ambrose Bierce

# The Woful Tale Of Mr. Peters

I should like, good friends, to mention the disaster which befell  
Mr. William Perry Peters, of the town of Muscatel,  
Whose fate is full of meaning, if correctly understood  
Admonition to the haughty, consolation to the good.

It happened in the hot snap which we recently incurred,  
When 'twas warm enough to carbonize the feathers of a bird,  
And men exclaimed: 'By Hunky!' who were bad enough to swear,  
And pious persons supervised their adjectives with care.

Mr. Peters was a pedagogue of honor and repute,  
His learning comprehensive, multifarious, minute.  
It was commonly conceded in the section whence he came  
That the man who played against him needed knowledge of the game.

And some there were who whispered, in the town of Muscatel,  
That besides the game of Draw he knew Orthography as well;  
Though, the school directors, frigidly contemning that as stuff,  
Thought that Draw (and maybe Spelling, if it pleased him) was enough.

Withal, he was a haughty man-indubitably great,  
But too vain of his attainments and his power in debate.  
His mien was contumelious to men of lesser gift:  
'It's only \_me\_, ' he said, 'can give the human mind a lift.

'Before a proper audience, if ever I've a chance,  
You'll see me chipping in, the cause of Learning to advance.  
Just let me have a decent chance to back my mental hand  
And I'll come to center lightly in a way they'll understand.'

Such was William Perry Peters, and I feel a poignant sense  
Of grief that I'm unable to employ the present tense;  
But Providence disposes, be our scheming what it may,  
And disposed of Mr. Peters in a cold, regardless way.

It occurred in San Francisco, whither Mr. Peters came  
In the cause of Education, feeling still the holy flame  
Of ambition to assist in lifting up the human mind  
To a higher plane of knowledge than its Architect designed.

He attended the convention of the pedagogic host;  
He was first in the Pavilion, he was last to leave his post.  
For days and days he narrowly observed the Chairman's eye,  
His efforts ineffectual to catch it on the fly.

The blessed moment came at last: the Chairman tipped his head.  
'The gentleman from ah-um-er,' that functionary said.  
The gentleman from ah-um-er reflected with a grin:  
'They'll know me better by-and-by, when I'm a-chipping in.'

So William Perry Peters mounted cheerfully his feet  
And straightway was aglow with an incalculable heat!  
His face was as effulgent as a human face could be,  
And caloric emanated from his whole periphery;

For he felt himself the focus of non-Muscatelish eyes,  
And the pain of their convergence was a terror and surprise.  
As with pitiless impaction all their heat-waves on him broke  
He was seen to be evolving awful quantities of smoke!

'Put him out!' cried all in chorus; but the meaning wasn't clear  
Of that succoring suggestion to his obfuscated ear;  
And it notably augmented his incinerating glow  
To regard himself excessive, or in any way *\_de trop\_*.

Gone was all his wild ambition to lift up the human mind!-  
Gone the words he would have uttered!-gone the thought that lay behind!  
For 'words that burn' may be consumed in a superior flame,  
And 'thoughts that breathe' may breathe their last, and die a death of shame.

He'd known himself a shining light, but never had he known  
Himself so very luminous as now he knew he shone.  
'A pillar, I, of fire,' he'd said, 'to guide my race will be;'  
And now that very inconvenient thing to him was he.

He stood there all irresolute; the seconds went and came;  
The minutes passed and did but add fresh fuel to his flame.  
How long he stood he knew not-'twas a century or more  
And then that incandescent man levanted for the door!

He darted like a comet from the building to the street,

Where Fahrenheit attested ninety-five degrees of heat.  
Vicissitudes of climate make the tenure of the breath  
Precarious, and William Perry Peters froze to death!

Ambrose Bierce

# The Woman And The Devil

When Man and Woman had been made,  
All but the disposition,  
The Devil to the workshop strayed,  
And somehow gained admission.

The Master rested from his work,  
For this was on a Sunday,  
The man was snoring like a Turk,  
Content to wait till Monday.

'Too bad!' the Woman cried; 'Oh, why,  
Does slumber not benumb me?  
A disposition! Oh, I die  
To know if 'twill become me!'

The Adversary said: 'No doubt  
'Twill be extremely fine, ma'am,  
Though sure 'tis long to be without  
I beg to lend you mine, ma'am.'

The Devil's disposition when  
She'd got, of course she wore it,  
For she'd no disposition then,  
Nor now has, to restore it.

Ambrose Bierce



# The Yearly Lie

A merry Christmas? Prudent, as I live!  
You wish me something that you need not give.

Merry or sad, what does it signify?  
To you 't is equal if I laugh, or die.

Your hollow greeting, like a parrot's jest,  
Finds all its meaning in the ear addressed.

Why 'merry' Christmas? Faith, I'd rather frown  
Than grin and caper like a tickled clown.

When fools are merry the judicious weep;  
The wise are happy only when asleep.

A present? Pray you give it to disarm  
A man more powerful to do you harm.

'T was not your motive? Well, I cannot let  
You pay for favors that you'll never get.

Perish the savage custom of the gift,  
Founded in terror and maintained in thrift!

What men of honor need to aid their weal  
They purchase, or, occasion serving, steal.

Go celebrate the day with turkeys, pies,  
Sermons and psalms, and, for the children, lies.

Let Santa Claus descend again the flue;  
If Baby doubt it, swear that it is true.

'A lie well stuck to is as good as truth,'  
And God's too old to legislate for youth.

Hail Christmas! On my knees and fowl I fall:  
For greater grace and better gravy call.  
\_Vive l'Humbug!\_-that's to say, God bless us all!

Ambrose Bierce

# Thersites

So, in the Sunday papers \_you\_, Del Mar,  
Damn, all great Englishmen in English speech?  
I am no Englishman, but in my reach  
A rogue shall never rail where heroes are.

You are the man, if I mistake you not,  
Who lately with a supplicating twitch  
Plucked at the pockets of the London rich  
And paid your share-engraver all you got.

Because that you have greatly lied, because  
You libel nations, and because no hand  
Of officer is raised to bid you stand,  
And falsehood is unpunished of the laws,

I stand here in a public place to mark  
With level finger where you part the crowd  
I stand to name you and to cry aloud:  
'Behold mendacity's great hierarch!'

Ambrose Bierce

## Three Kinds Of A Rogue

Sharon, ambitious of immortal shame,  
Fame's dead-wall daubed with his illustrious name  
Served in the Senate, for our sins, his time,  
Each word a folly and each vote a crime;  
Law for our governance well skilled to make  
By knowledge gained in study how to break;  
Yet still by the presiding eye ignored,  
Which only sought him when too loud he snored.  
Auspicious thunder!-when he woke to vote  
He stilled his own to cut his country's throat;  
That rite performed, fell off again to sleep,  
While statesmen ages dead awoke to weep!  
For sedentary service all unfit,  
By lying long disqualified to sit,  
Wasting below as he decayed aloft,  
His seat grown harder as his brain grew soft,  
He left the hall he could not bring away,  
And grateful millions blessed the happy day!  
Whate'er contention in that hall is heard,  
His sovereign State has still the final word:  
For disputatious statesmen when they roar  
Startle the ancient echoes of his snore,  
Which from their dusty nooks expostulate  
And close with stormy clamor the debate.  
To low melodious thunders then they fade;  
Their murmuring lullabies all ears invade;  
Peace takes the Chair; the portal Silence keeps;  
No motion stirs the dark Lethean deeps  
Washoe has spoken and the Senate sleeps.

Lo! the new Sharon with a new intent,  
Making no laws, but keen to circumvent  
The laws of Nature (since he can't repeal)  
That break his failing body on the wheel.  
As Tantalus again and yet again  
The elusive wave endeavors to restrain  
To slake his awful thirst, so Sharon tries  
To purchase happiness that age denies;

Obtains the shadow, but the substance goes,  
And hugs the thorn, but cannot keep the rose;  
For Dead Sea fruits bids prodigally, eats,  
And then, with tardy reformation-cheats.  
Alert his faculties as three score years  
And four score vices will permit, he nears  
Dicing with Death-the finish of the game,  
And curses still his candle's wasting flame,  
The narrow circle of whose feeble glow  
Dims and diminishes at every throw.  
Moments his losses, pleasures are his gains,  
Which even in his grasp revert to pains.  
The joy of grasping them alone remains.

Ring up the curtain and the play protract!  
Behold our Sharon in his last mad act.  
With man long warring, quarreling with God,  
He crouches now beneath a woman's rod  
Predestined for his back while yet it lay  
Closed in an acorn which, one luckless day,  
He stole, unconscious of its foetal twig,  
From the scant garner of a sightless pig.  
With bleeding shoulders pitilessly scored,  
He bawls more lustily than once he snored.  
The sympathetic Comstocks droop to hear,  
And Carson river sheds a viscous tear,  
Which sturdy tumble-bugs assail amain,  
With ready thrift, and urge along the plain.  
The jackass rabbit sorrows as he lopes;  
The sage-brush glooms along the mountain slopes;  
In rising clouds the poignant alkali,  
Tearless itself, makes everybody cry.  
Washoe canaries on the Geiger Grade  
Subdue the singing of their cavalcade,  
And, wiping with their ears the tears unshed,  
Grieve for their family's unlucky head.  
Virginia City intermits her trade  
And well-clad strangers walk her streets unflayed.  
Nay, all Nevada ceases work to weep  
And the recording angel goes to sleep.  
But in his dreams his goose-quill's creaking fount

Augments the debits in the long account.  
And still the continents and oceans ring  
With royal torments of the Silver King!  
Incessant bellowings fill all the earth,  
Mingled with inextinguishable mirth.  
He roars, men laugh, Nevadans weep, beasts howl,  
Plash the affrighted fish, and shriek the fowl!  
With monstrous din their blended thunders rise,  
Peal upon peal, and brawl along the skies,  
Startle in hell the Sharons as they groan,  
And shake the splendors of the great white throne!  
Still roaring outward through the vast profound,  
The spreading circles of receding sound  
Pursue each other in a failing race  
To the cold confines of eternal space;  
There break and die along that awful shore  
Which God's own eyes have never dared explore  
Dark, fearful, formless, nameless evermore!

Look to the west! Against yon steely sky  
Lone Mountain rears its holy cross on high.  
About its base the meek-faced dead are laid  
To share the benediction of its shade.  
With crossed white hands, shut eyes and formal feet,  
Their nights are innocent, their days discreet.  
Sharon, some years, perchance, remain of life  
Of vice and greed, vulgarity and strife;  
And then-God speed the day if such His will  
You'll lie among the dead you helped to kill,  
And be in good society at last,  
Your purse unsilvered and your face unbrassed.

Ambrose Bierce

# Tidings Of Good

Old Nick from his place of last resort  
Came up and looked the world over.  
He saw how the grass of the good was short  
And the wicked lived in clover.

And he gravely said: 'This is all, all wrong,  
And never by me intended.  
If to me the power should ever belong  
I shall have this thing amended.'

He looked so solemn and good and wise  
As he made this observation  
That the men who heard him believed their eyes  
Instead of his reputation.

So they bruited the matter about, and each  
Reported the words as nearly  
As memory served-with additional speech  
To bring out the meaning clearly.

The consequence was that none understood,  
And the wildest rumors started  
Of something intended to help the good  
And injure the evil-hearted.

Then Robert Morrow was seen to smile  
With a bright and lively joyance.  
'A man,' said he, 'that is free from guile  
Will now be free from annoyance.

'The Featherstones doubtless will now increase  
And multiply like the rabbits,  
While jailers, deputy sheriffs, police,  
And writers will form good habits.

'The widows more easily robbed will be,  
And no juror will ever heed 'em,  
But open his purse to my eloquent plea  
For security, gain, or freedom.'

When Benson heard of the luck of the good  
(He was eating his dinner) he muttered:  
'It cannot help me, for 'tis understood  
My bread is already buttered.

'My plats of surveys are all false, they say,  
But that cannot greatly matter  
To me, for I'll tell the jurors that they  
May lick, if they please, my platter.'

Ambrose Bierce



# Tinker Dick

Good Parson Dickson preached, I'm told,  
A sermon-ah, 'twas very old  
And very, very, bald!  
'Twas all about-I know not what  
It was about, nor what 'twas not.  
'A Screw Loose' it was called.

Whatever, Parson Dick, you say,  
The world will get each blessed day  
Still more and more askew,  
And fall apart at last. Great snakes!  
What skillful tinker ever takes  
His tongue to turn a screw?

Ambrose Bierce

## To A Censor

Delay responsible? Why, then; my friend,  
Impeach Delay and you will make an end.  
Thrust vile Delay in jail and let it rot  
For doing all the things that it should not.  
Put not good-natured judges under bond,  
But make Delay in damages respond.  
Minos, Aeacus, Rhadamanthus, rolled  
Into one pitiless, unsmiling scold  
Unsparring censor, be your thongs uncurled  
To 'lash the rascals naked through the world.'  
The rascals? Nay, Rascality's the thing  
Above whose back your knotted scourges sing.  
\_Your\_ satire, truly, like a razor keen,  
'Wounds with a touch that's neither felt nor seen;'  
For naught that you assail with falchion free  
Has either nerves to feel or eyes to see.  
Against abstractions evermore you charge  
You hack no helmet and you need no targe.  
That wickedness is wrong and sin a vice,  
That wrong's not right and foulness never nice,  
Fearless affirm. All consequences dare:  
Smite the offense and the offender spare.  
When Ananias and Sapphira lied  
Falsehood, had you been there, had surely died.  
When money-changers in the Temple sat,  
At money-changing you'd have whirled the 'cat'  
(That John-the-Baptist of the modern pen)  
And all the brokers would have cried amen!

Good friend, if any judge deserve your blame  
Have you no courage, or has he no name?  
Upon his method will you wreak your wrath,  
Himself all unmolested in his path?  
Fall to! fall to!-your club no longer draw  
To beat the air or flail a man of straw.  
Scorn to do justice like the Saxon thrall  
Who cuffed the offender's shadow on a wall.  
Let rascals in the flesh attest your zeal  
Knocked on the mazzard or tripped up at heel!

We know that judges are corrupt. We know  
That crimes are lively and that laws are slow.  
We know that lawyers lie and doctors slay;  
That priests and preachers are but birds of pray;  
That merchants cheat and journalists for gold  
Flatter the vicious while at vice they scold.  
'Tis all familiar as the simple lore  
That two policemen and two thieves make four.

But since, while some are wicked, some are good,  
(As trees may differ though they all are wood)  
Names, here and there, to show whose head is hit,  
The bad would sentence and the good acquit.  
In sparing everybody none you spare:  
Rebukes most personal are least unfair.  
To fire at random if you still prefer,  
And swear at Dog but never kick a cur,  
Permit me yet one ultimate appeal  
To something that you understand and feel:  
Let thrift and vanity your heart persuade  
You might be read if you would learn your trade.

Good brother cynics (you have doubtless guessed  
Not one of you but all are here addressed)  
Remember this: the shaft that seeks a heart  
Draws all eyes after it; an idle dart  
Shot at some shadow flutters o'er the green,  
Its flight unheeded and its fall unseen.

Ambrose Bierce

## To A Critic Of Tennyson

Affronting fool, subdue your transient light;  
When Wisdom's dull dares Folly to be bright:  
If Genius stumble in the path to fame,  
'Tis decency in dunces to go lame.

Ambrose Bierce

# To A Dejected Poet

Thy gift, if that it be of God,  
Thou hast no warrant to appraise,  
Nor say: 'Here part, O Muse, our ways,  
The road too stony to be trod.'

Not thine to call the labor hard  
And the reward inadequate.  
Who haggles o'er his hire with Fate  
Is better bargainer than bard.

What! count the effort labor lost  
When thy good angel holds the reed?  
It were a sorry thing indeed  
To stay him till thy palm be crossed.

'The laborer is worthy'-nay,  
The sacred ministry of song  
Is rapture!-'t were a grievous wrong  
To fix a wages-rate for play.

Ambrose Bierce

## To A Professional Eulogist

Newman, in you two parasites combine:  
As tapeworm and as graveworm too you shine.  
When on the virtues of the quick you've dwelt,  
The pride of residence was all you felt  
(What vain vulgarian the wish ne'er knew  
To paint his lodging a flamboyant hue?)  
And when the praises of the dead you've sung,  
'Twas appetite, not truth, inspired your tongue;  
As ill-bred men when warming to their wine  
Boast of its merit though it be but brine.  
Nor gratitude incites your song, nor should-  
Even charity would shun you if she could.  
You share, 'tis true, the rich man's daily dole,  
But what you get you take by way of toll.  
Vain to resist you-vermifuge alone  
Has power to push you from your robber throne.  
When to escape you he's compelled to die  
Hey! presto!-in the twinkling of an eye  
You vanish as a tapeworm, reappear  
As graveworm and resume your curst career.  
As host no more, to satisfy your need  
He serves as dinner your unaltered greed.  
O thrifty sycophant of wealth and fame,  
Son of servility and priest of shame,  
While naught your mad ambition can abate  
To lick the spittle of the rich and great;  
While still like smoke your eulogies arise  
To soot your heroes and inflame our eyes;  
While still with holy oil, like that which ran  
Down Aaron's beard, you smear each famous man,  
I cannot choose but think it very odd  
It ne'er occurs to you to fawn on God.

Ambrose Bierce

## To A Stray Dog

Well, Towser (I'm thinking your name must be Towser),  
You're a decentish puppy as puppy dogs go,  
For you never, I'm sure, could have dined upon trowser,  
And your tail's unimpeachably curled just so.

But, dear me! your name-if 'tis yours-is a 'poser':  
Its meaning I cannot get anywise at,  
When spoken correctly perhaps it is Toser,  
And means one who toses. Max Muller, how's that?

I ne'er was ingenious at all at divining  
A word's prehistorical, primitive state,  
Or finding its root, like a mole, by consigning  
Its bloom to the turnep-top's sorrowful fate.

And, now that I think of it well, I'm no nearer  
The riddle's solution than ever-for how's  
My pretty invented word, 'tose,' any clearer  
In point of its signification than 'towse'?

So, Towser (or Toser), I mean to rename you  
In honor of some good and eminent man,  
In the light and the heat of whose quickening fame you  
May grow to an eminent dog if you can.

In sunshine like his you'll not long be a croucher:  
The Senate shall hear you-for that I will vouch.  
Come here, sir. Stand up. I rechristen you Goucher.  
But damn you! I'll shoot you if ever you gouch!

Ambrose Bierce

# To A Summer Poet

Yes, the Summer girl is flirting on the beach,  
With a him.  
And the damboy is a-climbing for the peach,  
On the limb;  
Yes, the bullfrog is a-croaking  
And the dudelet is a-smoking  
Cigarettes;  
And the hackman is a-hacking  
And the showman is a-cracking  
Up his pets;  
Yes, the Jersey 'skeeter flits along the shore  
And the snapdog-we have heard it o'er and o'er;  
Yes, my poet,  
Well we know it-  
Know the spooners how they spoon  
In the bright  
Dollar light  
Of the country tavern moon;  
Yes, the caterpillars fall  
From the trees (we know it all),  
And with beetles all the shelves  
Are alive.

Please unbuttonhole us-O,  
Have the grace to let us go,  
For we know  
How you Summer poets thrive,  
By the recapitulation  
And insistent iteration  
Of the wondrous doings incident to Life Among  
Ourselves!  
So, I pray you stop the fervor and the fuss.  
For you, poor human linnet,  
There's a half a living in it,  
But there's not a copper cent in it for us!

Ambrose Bierce



# To A Word-Warrior

Frank Pixley, you, who kiss the hand  
That strove to cut the country's throat,  
Cannot forgive the hands that smote  
Applauding in a distant land,

Applauding carelessly, as one  
The weaker willing to befriend  
Until the quarrel's at an end,  
Then learn by whom it was begun.

When North was pitted against South  
Non-combatants on either side  
In calculating fury vied,  
And fought their foes by word of mouth.

That devil's-camisade you led  
With formidable feats of tongue.  
Upon the battle's rear you hung  
With Samson's weapon slew the dead!

So hot the ardor of your soul  
That every fierce civilian came,  
His torch to kindle at your name,  
Or have you blow his cooling coal.

Men prematurely left their beds  
And sought the gelid bath-so great  
The heat and splendor of your hate  
Of Englishmen and 'Copperheads.'

King Liar of deceitful men,  
For imposition doubly armed!  
The patriots whom your speaking charmed  
You stung to madness with your pen.

There was a certain journal here,  
Its English owner growing rich-  
Your hand the treason wrote for which  
A mob cut short its curst career.

If, Pixley, you had not the brain  
To know the true from false, or you  
To Truth had courage to be true,  
And loyal to her perfect reign;

If you had not your powers arrayed  
To serve the wrong by tricky speech,  
Nor pushed yourself within the reach  
Of retribution's accolade,

I had not had the will to go  
Outside the olive-bordered path  
Of peace to cut the birch of wrath,  
And strip your body for the blow.

Behold how dark the war-clouds rise  
About the mother of our race!  
The lightnings gild her tranquil face  
And glitter in her patient eyes.

Her children throng the hither flood  
And lean intent above the beach.  
Their beating hearts inhibit speech  
With stifling tides of English blood.

'Their skies, but not their hearts, they change  
Who go in ships across the sea'-  
Through all centuries to be  
The strange new land will still be strange.

The Island Mother holds in gage  
The souls of sons she never saw;  
Superior to law, the law  
Of sympathetic heritage.

Forgotten now the foolish reign  
Of wrath which sundered trivial ties.  
A soldier's sabre vainly tries  
To cleave a spiritual chain.

The iron in our blood affines,

Though fratricidal hands may spill.  
Shall Hate be throned on Bunker Hill,  
Yet Love abide at Seven Pines?

Ambrose Bierce

## To An Aspirant

What! you a Senator-you, Mike de Young?  
Still reeking of the gutter whence you sprung?  
Sir, if all Senators were such as you,  
Their hands so crimson and so slender, too,  
(Shaped to the pocket for commercial work,  
For literary, fitted to the dirk)  
So black their hearts, so lily-white their livers,  
The toga's touch would give a man the shivers.

Ambrose Bierce

# To An Insolent Attorney

So, Hall McAllister, you'll not be warned  
My protest slighted, admonition scorned!  
To save your scoundrel client from a cell  
As loth to swallow him as he to swell  
Its sum of meals insurgent (it decries  
All wars intestinal with meats that rise)  
You turn your scurril tongue against the press  
And damn the agency you ought to bless.  
Had not the press with all its hundred eyes  
Discerned the wolf beneath the sheep's disguise  
And raised the cry upon him, he to-day  
Would lack your company, and you would lack his pay.

Talk not of 'hire' and consciences for sale  
You whose profession 'tis to threaten, rail,  
Calumniate and libel at the will  
Of any villain who can pay the bill  
You whose most honest dollars all were got  
By saying for a fee 'the thing that's not!'  
To you 'tis one, to challenge or defend;  
Clients are means, their money is an end.  
In my profession sometimes, as in yours  
Always, a payment large enough secures  
A mercenary service to defend  
The guilty or the innocent to rend.  
But mark the difference, nor think it slight:  
\_We\_ do not hold it proper, just and right;  
Of selfish lies a little still we shame  
And give our villainies another name.  
Hypocrisy's an ugly vice, no doubt,  
But blushing sinners can't get on without.  
Happy the lawyer!-at his favored hands  
Nor truth nor decency the world demands.  
Secure in his immunity from shame,  
His cheek ne'er kindles with the tell-tale flame.  
His brains for sale, morality for hire,  
In every land and century a licensed liar!

No doubt, McAllister, you can explain

How honorable 'tis to lie for gain,  
Provided only that the jury's made  
To understand that lying is your trade.  
A hundred thousand volumes, broad and flat,  
(The Bible not included) proving that,  
Have been put forth, though still the doubt remains  
If God has read them with befitting pains.  
No Morrow could get justice, you'll declare,  
If none who knew him foul affirmed him fair.  
Ingenious man! how easy 'tis to raise  
An argument to justify the course that pays!

I grant you, if you like, that men may need  
The services performed for crime by greed,  
Grant that the perfect welfare of the State  
Requires the aid of those who in debate  
As mercenaries lost in early youth  
The fine distinction between lie and truth-  
Who cheat in argument and set a snare  
To take the feet of Justice unaware-  
Who serve with livelier zeal when rogues assist  
With perjury, embracery (the list  
Is long to quote) than when an honest soul,  
Scorning to plot, conspire, intrigue, cajole,  
Reminds them (their astonishment how great!)  
He'd rather suffer wrong than perpetrate.  
I grant, in short, 'tis better all around  
That ambidextrous consciences abound  
In courts of law to do the dirty work  
That self-respecting scavengers would shirk.  
What then? Who serves however clean a plan  
By doing dirty work, he is a dirty man!

Ambrose Bierce

## To 'Colonel' Dan. Burns

They say, my lord, that you're a Warwick. Well,  
The title's an absurd one, I believe:  
You make no kings, you have no kings to sell,  
Though really 'twere easy to conceive  
You stuffing half-a-dozen up your sleeve.  
No, you're no Warwick, skillful from the shell  
To hatch out sovereigns. On a mare's nest, maybe,  
You'd incubate a little jackass baby.

I fancy, too, that it is naught but stuff,  
This 'power' that you're said to be 'behind  
The throne.' I'm sure 'twere accurate enough  
To represent you simply as inclined  
To push poor Markham (ailing in his mind  
And body, which were never very tough)  
Round in an invalid's wheeled chair. Such menial  
Employment to low natures is congenial.

No, Dan, you're an impostor every way:  
A human bubble, for 'the earth,' you know,  
'Hath bubbles, as the water hath.' Some day  
Some careless hand will prick your film, and O,  
How utterly you'll vanish! Daniel, throw  
(As fallen Woolsey might to Cromwell say)  
Your curst ambition to the pigs-though truly  
'Twould make them greater pigs, and more unruly.

Ambrose Bierce

## To E.S. Salomon

What! Salomon! such words from you,  
Who call yourself a soldier? Well,  
The Southern brother where he fell  
Slept all your base oration through.

Alike to him-he cannot know  
Your praise or blame: as little harm  
Your tongue can do him as your arm  
A quarter-century ago.

The brave respect the brave. The brave  
Respect the dead; but you-you draw  
That ancient blade, the ass's jaw,  
And shake it o'er a hero's grave.

Are you not he who makes to-day  
A merchandise of old renown  
Which he persuades this easy town  
He won in battle far away?

Nay, those the fallen who revile  
Have ne'er before the living stood  
And stoutly made their battle good  
And greeted danger with a smile.

What if the dead whom still you hate  
Were wrong? Are you so surely right?  
We know the issue of the fight  
The sword is but an advocate.

Men live and die, and other men  
Arise with knowledges diverse:  
What seemed a blessing seems a curse,  
And Now is still at odds with Then.

The years go on, the old comes back  
To mock the new-beneath the sun.  
Is nothing new; ideas run  
Recurrent in an endless track.



What most we censure, men as wise  
Have reverently practiced; nor  
Will future wisdom fail to war  
On principles we dearly prize.

We do not know-we can but deem,  
And he is loyalest and best  
Who takes the light full on his breast  
And follows it throughout the dream.

The broken light, the shadows wide  
Behold the battle-field displayed!  
God save the vanquished from the blade,  
The victor from the victor's pride!

If, Salomon, the blessed dew  
That falls upon the Blue and Gray  
Is powerless to wash away  
The sin of differing from you.

Remember how the flood of years  
Has rolled across the erring slain;  
Remember, too, the cleansing rain  
Of widows' and of orphans' tears.

The dead are dead-let that atone:  
And though with equal hand we strew  
The blooms on saint and sinner too,  
Yet God will know to choose his own.

The wretch, whate'er his life and lot,  
Who does not love the harmless dead  
With all his heart and all his head-  
May God forgive him- I shall not.

When, Salomon, you come to quaff  
The Darker Cup with meeker face,  
I, loving you at last, shall trace  
Upon your tomb this epitaph:

'Draw near, ye generous and brave  
Kneel round this monument and weep:  
It covers one who tried to keep  
A flower from a dead man's grave.'

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Ambrose Bierce

# To Either

Back further than  
I know, in San  
Francisco dwelt a wealthy man.  
So rich was he  
That none could be  
Wise, good and great in like degree.

'Tis true he wrought,  
In deed or thought,  
But few of all the things he ought;  
But men said: 'Who  
Would wish him to?  
Great souls are born to be, not do!'

One thing, indeed,  
He did, we read,  
Which was becoming, all agreed:  
Grown provident,  
Ere life was spent  
He built a mighty monument.

For longer than  
I know, in San  
Francisco lived a beggar man;  
And when in bed  
They found him dead  
'Just like the scamp!' the people said.

He died, they say,  
On the same day  
His wealthy neighbor passed away.  
What matters it  
When beggars quit  
Their beats? I answer: Not a bit.

They got a spade  
And pick and made  
A hole, and there the chap was laid.  
'He asked for bread,'

'Twas neatly said:  
'He'll get not even a stone instead.'

The years rolled round:  
His humble mound  
Sank to the level of the ground;  
And men forgot  
That the bare spot  
Was like (and was) the beggar's lot.

Forgotten, too,  
Was t'other, who  
Had reared the monument to woo  
Inconstant Fame,  
Though still his name  
Shouted in granite just the same.

That name, I swear,  
They both did bear  
The beggar and the millionaire.  
That lofty tomb,  
Then, honored-whom?  
For argument here's ample room.

I'll not debate,  
But only state  
The scamp first claimed it at the Gate.  
St. Peter, proud  
To serve him, bowed  
And showed him to the softest cloud.

Ambrose Bierce

# To Her

O, Sinner A, to me unknown  
Be such a conscience as your own!  
To ease it you to Sinner B  
Confess the sins of Sinner C.

Ambrose Bierce



## To Maude

Not as two errant spheres together grind  
With monstrous ruin in the vast of space,  
Destruction born of that malign embrace,  
Their hapless peoples all to death consigned  
Not so when our intangible worlds of mind,  
Even mine and yours, each with its spirit race  
Of beings shadowy in form and face,  
Shall drift together on some blessed wind.  
No, in that marriage of gloom and light  
All miracles of beauty shall be wrought,  
Attesting a diviner faith than man's;  
For all my sad-eyed daughters of the night  
Shall smile on your sweet seraphim of thought,  
Nor any jealous god forbid the banns.

Ambrose Bierce

# To My Laundress

Saponacea, wert thou not so fair  
I'd curse thee for thy multitude of sins  
For sending home my clothes all full of pins  
A shirt occasionally that's a snare  
And a delusion, got, the Lord knows where,  
The Lord knows why-a sock whose outs and ins  
None know, nor where it ends nor where begins,  
And fewer cuffs than ought to be my share.  
But when I mark thy lilies how they grow,  
And the red roses of thy ripening charms,  
I bless the lovelight in thy dark eyes dreaming.  
I'll never pay thee, but I'd gladly go  
Into the magic circle of thine arms,  
Supple and fragrant from repeated steaming.

Ambrose Bierce

# To My Liars

Attend, mine enemies of all degrees,  
From sandlot orators and sandlot fleas  
To fallen gentlemen and rising louts  
Who babble slander at your drinking bouts,  
And, filled with unfamiliar wine, begin  
Lies drowned, ere born, in more congenial gin.  
But most attend, ye persons of the press  
Who live (though why, yourselves alone can guess)  
In hope deferred, ambitious still to shine  
By hating me at half a cent a line  
Like drones among the bees of brighter wing,  
Sunless to shine and impotent to sting.  
To estimate in easy verse I'll try  
The controversial value of a lie.  
So lend your ears-God knows you have enough!  
I mean to teach, and if I can't I'll cuff.

A lie is wicked, so the priests declare;  
But that to us is neither here nor there.  
'Tis worse than wicked, it is vulgar too;  
\_N'importe\_-with that we've nothing here to do.  
If 'twere artistic I would lie till death,  
And shape a falsehood with my latest breath.  
Parrhasius never more did pity lack,  
The while his model writhed upon the rack,  
Than I for my collaborator's pain,  
Who, stabbed with fibs again and yet again,  
Would vainly seek to move my stubborn heart  
If slander were, and wit were not, an art.  
The ill-bred and illiterate can lie  
As fast as you, and faster far than I.  
Shall I compete, then, in a strife accurst  
Where Allen Forman is an easy first,  
And where the second prize is rightly flung  
To Charley Shortridge or to Mike de Young?

In mental combat but a single end  
Inspires the formidable to contend.  
Not by the raw recruit's ambition fired,

By whom foul blows, though harmless, are admired;  
Not by the coward's zeal, who, on his knee  
Behind the bole of his protecting tree,  
So curves his musket that the bark it fits,  
And, firing, blows the weapon into bits;  
But with the noble aim of one whose heart  
Values his foeman for he loves his art  
The veteran debater moves afield,  
Untaught to libel as untaught to yield.  
Dear foeman mine, I've but this end in view  
That to prevent which most you wish to do.  
What, then, are you most eager to be at?  
To hate me? Nay, I'll help you, sir, at that.  
This only passion does your soul inspire:  
You wish to scorn me. Well, you shall admire.

'Tis not enough my neighbors that you school  
In the belief that I'm a rogue or fool;  
That small advantage you would gladly trade  
For what one moment would yourself persuade.  
Write, then, your largest and your longest lie:  
You sha'n't believe it, howsoe'er you try.  
No falsehood you can tell, no evil do,  
Shall turn me from the truth to injure you.  
So all your war is barren of effect;  
I find my victory in your respect.  
What profit have you if the world you set  
Against me? For the world will soon forget  
It thought me this or that; but I'll retain  
A vivid picture of your moral stain,  
And cherish till my memory expire  
The sweet, soft consciousness that you're a liar  
Is it your triumph, then, to prove that you  
Will do the thing that I would scorn to do?  
God grant that I forever be exempt  
From such advantage as my foe's contempt.

Ambrose Bierce

## To Nanine

Dear, if I never saw your face again;  
If all the music of your voice were mute  
As that of a forlorn and broken lute;  
If only in my dreams I might attain  
The benediction of your touch, how vain  
Were Faith to justify the old pursuit  
Of happiness, or Reason to confute  
The pessimist philosophy of pain.  
Yet Love not altogether is unwise,  
For still the wind would murmur in the corn,  
And still the sun would splendor all the mere;  
And I-I could not, dearest, choose but hear  
Your voice upon the breeze and see your eyes  
Shine in the glory of the summer morn.

Ambrose Bierce

# To One Across The Way

When at your window radiant you've stood  
I've sometimes thought-forgive me if I've erred  
That some slight thought of me perhaps has stirred  
Your heart to beat less gently than it should.  
I know you beautiful; that you are good  
I hope-or fear-I cannot choose the word,  
Nor rightly suit it to the thought. I've heard  
Reason at love's dictation never could.  
Blindly to this dilemma so I grope,  
As one whose every pathway has a snare:  
If you are minded in the saintly fashion  
Of your pure face my passion's without hope;  
If not, alas! I equally despair,  
For what to me were hope without the passion?

Ambrose Bierce

# To One Detested

Sir, you're a veteran, revealed  
In history and fable  
As warrior since you took the field,  
Defeating Abel.

As Commissary later (or  
If not, in every cottage  
The tale is) you contracted for  
A mess of pottage.

In civil life you were, we read  
(And our respect increases)  
A man of peace-a man, indeed,  
Of thirty pieces.

To paying taxes when you turned  
Your mind, or what you call so,  
A wide celebrity you earned  
Saphira also.

In every age, by various names,  
You've won renown in story,  
But on your present record flames  
A greater glory.

Cain, Esau, and Iscariot, too,  
And Ananias, likewise,  
Each had peculiar powers, but who  
Could lie as Mike lies?

Ambrose Bierce

## To Oscar Wilde

Because from Folly's lips you got  
Some babbled mandate to subdue  
The realm of Common Sense, and you  
Made promise and considered not

Because you strike a random blow  
At what you do not understand,  
And beckon with a friendly hand  
To something that you do not know,

I hold no speech of your desert,  
Nor answer with porrected shield  
The wooden weapon that you wield,  
But meet you with a cast of dirt.

Dispute with such a thing as you  
Twin show to the two-headed calf?  
Why, sir, if I repress my laugh,  
'T is more than half the world can do.

Ambrose Bierce



# To The Bartholdi Statue

O Liberty, God-gifted  
Young and immortal maid  
In your high hand uplifted;  
The torch declares your trade.

Its crimson menace, flaming  
Upon the sea and shore,  
Is, trumpet-like, proclaiming  
That Law shall be no more.

Austere incendiary,  
We're blinking in the light;  
Where is your customary  
Grenade of dynamite?

Where are your staves and switches  
For men of gentle birth?  
Your mask and dirk for riches?  
Your chains for wit and worth?

Perhaps, you've brought the halters  
You used in the old days,  
When round religion's altars  
You stabled Cromwell's bays?

Behind you, unsuspected,  
Have you the axe, fair wench,  
Wherewith you once collected  
A poll-tax from the French?

America salutes you  
Preparing to disgorge.  
Take everything that suits you,  
And marry Henry George.

1894

Ambrose Bierce

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Ambrose Bierce

# To The Fool-Killer

Ah, welcome, welcome! Sit you down, old friend;  
Your pipe I'll serve, your bottle I'll attend.  
'Tis many a year since you and I have known  
Society more pleasant than our own  
In our brief respites from excessive work  
I pointing out the hearts for you to dirk.  
What have you done since lately at this board  
We canvassed the deserts of all the horde  
And chose what names would please the people best,  
Engraved on coffin-plates-what bounding breast  
Would give more satisfaction if at rest?  
But never mind-the record cannot fail:  
The loftiest monuments will tell the tale.

I trust ere next we meet you'll slay the chap  
Who calls old Tyler 'Judge' and Merry 'Cap'  
Calls John P. Irish 'Colonel' and John P.,  
Whose surname Jack-son speaks his pedigree,  
By the same title-men of equal rank  
Though one is belly all, and one all shank,  
Showing their several service in the fray:  
One fought for food and one to get away.  
I hope, I say, you'll kill the 'title' man  
Who saddles one on every back he can,  
Then rides it from Beersheba to Dan!  
Another fool, I trust, you will perform  
Your office on while my resentment's warm:  
He shakes my hand a dozen times a day  
If, luckless, I so often cross his way,  
Though I've three senses besides that of touch,  
To make me conscious of a fool too much.  
Seek him, friend Killer, and your purpose make  
Apparent as his guilty hand you take,  
And set him trembling with a solemn: 'Shake!'

But chief of all the addle-witted crew  
Conceded by the Hangman's League to you,  
The fool (his dam's acquainted with a knave)  
Whose fluent pen, of his no-brain the slave,

Strews notes of introduction o'er the land  
And calls it hospitality-his hand  
May palsy seize ere he again consign  
To me his friend, as I to Hades mine!  
Pity the wretch, his faults howe'er you see,  
Whom A accredits to his victim, B.  
Like shuttlecock which battledores attack  
(One speeds it forward, one would drive it back)  
The trustful simpleton is twice unblest-  
A rare good riddance, an unwelcome guest.  
The glad consignor rubs his hands to think  
How duty is commuted into ink;  
The consignee (his hands he cannot rub  
He has the man upon them) mutters: 'Cub!'  
And straightway plans to lose him at the Club.  
You know, good Killer, where this dunce abides  
The secret jungle where he writes and hides  
Though no exploring foot has e'er upstirred  
His human elephant's exhaustless herd.  
Go, bring his blood! We'll drink it-letting fall  
A due libation to the gods of Gall.  
On second thought, the gods may have it all.

Ambrose Bierce

# To The Happy Hunting Grounds

Wide windy reaches of high stubble field;  
A long gray road, bordered with dusty pines;  
A wagon moving in a 'cloud by day.'  
Two city sportsmen with a dove between,  
Breast-high upon a fence and fast asleep  
A solitary dove, the only dove  
In twenty counties, and it sick, or else  
It were not there. Two guns that fire as one,  
With thunder simultaneous and loud;  
Two shattered human wrecks of blood and bone!  
And later, in the gloaming, comes a man  
The worthy local coroner is he,  
Renowned all thereabout, and popular  
With many a remain. All tenderly  
Compiling in a game-bag the debris,  
He glides into the gloom and fades from sight.  
The dove, cured of its ailment by the shock,  
Has flown, meantime, on pinions strong and fleet,  
To die of age in some far foreign land.

Ambrose Bierce

# To-Day

I saw a man who knelt in prayer,  
And heard him say:  
'I'll lay my inmost spirit bare  
To-day.

'Lord, for to-morrow and its need  
I do not pray;  
Let me upon my neighbor feed  
To-day.

'Let me my duty duly shirk  
And run away  
From any form or phase of work  
To-day.

'From Thy commands exempted still  
Let me obey  
The promptings of my private will  
To-day.

'Let me no word profane, no lie  
Unthinking say  
If anyone is standing by  
To-day.

'My secret sins and vices grave  
Let none betray;  
The scoffer's jeers I do not crave  
To-day.

'And if to-day my fortune all  
Should ebb away,  
Help me on other men's to fall  
To-day.

'So, for to-morrow and its mite  
I do not pray;  
Just give me everything in sight  
To-day.'

I cried: 'Amen!' He rose and ran  
Like oil away.  
I said: 'I've seen an honest man  
To-day.'

Ambrose Bierce

## Twin Unworthies

Ye parasites that to the rich men stick,  
As to the fattest sheep the thrifty tick  
Ed'ard to Stanford and to Crocker Ben  
(To Ben and Ed'ard many meaner men,  
And lice to these)-who do the kind of work  
That thieves would have the honesty to shirk  
Whose wages are that your employers own  
The fat that reeks upon your every bone  
And deigns to ask (the flattery how sweet!)  
About its health and how it stands the heat,  
Hail and farewell! I meant to write about you,  
But, no, my page is cleaner far without you.

Ambrose Bierce



## Two Methods

To bucks and ewes by the Good Shepherd fed  
The Priest delivers masses for the dead,  
And even from estrays outside the fold  
Death for the masses he would not withhold.  
The Parson, loth alike to free or kill,  
Forsakes the souls already on the grill,  
And, God's prerogative of mercy shamming,  
Spares living sinners for a harder damning.

Ambrose Bierce

## Two Rogues

Dim, grim, and silent as a ghost,  
The sentry occupied his post,  
To all the stirrings of the night  
Alert of ear and sharp of sight.  
A sudden something-sight or sound,  
About, above, or underground,  
He knew not what, nor where-ensued,  
Thrilling the sleeping solitude.  
The soldier cried: 'Halt! Who goes there?'  
The answer came: 'Death-in the air.'  
'Advance, Death-give the countersign,  
Or perish if you cross that line!'  
To change his tone Death thought it wise  
Reminded him they 'd been allies  
Against the Russ, the Frank, the Turk,  
In many a bloody bit of work.  
'In short,' said he, 'in every weather  
We've soldiered, you and I, together.'  
The sentry would not let him pass.  
'Go back,' he growled, 'you tiresome ass  
Go back and rest till the next war,  
Nor kill by methods all abhor:  
Miasma, famine, filth and vice,  
With plagues of locusts, plagues of lice,  
Foul food, foul water, and foul gases,  
Rank exhalations from morasses.  
If you employ such low allies  
This business you will vulgarize.  
Renouncing then the field of fame  
To wallow in a waste of shame,  
I'll prostitute my strength and lurk  
About the country doing work  
These hands to labor I'll devote,  
Nor cut, by Heaven, another throat!'

Ambrose Bierce

## Two Shows

The showman (blessing in a thousand shapes!)  
Parades a 'School of Educated Apes!'  
Small education's needed, I opine,  
Or native wit, to make a monkey shine;  
The brute exhibited has naught to do  
But ape the larger apes who come to view  
The hoodlum with his horrible grimace,  
Long upper lip and furtive, shuffling pace,  
Significant reminders of the time  
When hunters, not policemen, made him climb;  
The lady loafer with her draggling 'trail,'  
That free translation of an ancient tail;  
The sand-lot quadrumane in hairy suit,  
Whose heels are thumbs perverted by the boot;  
The painted actress throwing down the gage  
To elder artists of the sylvan stage,  
Proving that in the time of Noah's flood  
Two ape-skins held her whole profession's blood;  
The critic waiting, like a hungry pup,  
To write the school-perhaps to eat it-up,  
As chance or luck occasion may reveal  
To earn a dollar or maraud a meal.  
To view the school of apes these creatures go,  
Unconscious that themselves are half the show.  
These, if the simian his course but trim  
To copy them as they have copied him,  
Will call him 'educated.' Of a verity  
There's much to learn by study of posterity.

Ambrose Bierce

## Two Statesmen

In that fair city by the inland sea,  
Where Blaine unhived his Presidential bee,  
Frank Pixley's meeting with George Gorham sing,  
Celestial muse, and what events did spring  
From the encounter of those mighty sons  
Of thunder, and of slaughter, and of guns.  
Great Gorham first, his yearning tooth to sate  
And give him stomach for the day's debate,  
Entering a restaurant, with eager mien,  
Demands an ounce of bacon and a bean.  
The trembling waiter, by the statesman's eye  
Smitten with terror, hastens to comply;  
Nor chairs nor tables can his speed retard,  
For famine's fixed and horrible regard  
He takes for menace. As he shaking flew,  
Lo! the portentous Pixley heaved in view!  
Before him yawned invisible the cell,  
Unheard, behind, the warden's footsteps fell.  
Thrice in convention rising to his feet,  
He thrice had been thrust back into his seat;  
Thrice had protested, been reminded thrice  
The nation had no need of his advice.  
Balked of his will to set the people right,  
His soul was gloomy though his hat was white,  
So fierce his mien, with provident accord  
The waiters swarmed him, thinking him a lord.  
He spurned them, roaring grandly to their chief:  
'Give me (Fred. Crocker pays) a leg of beef!'  
His wandering eye's deluminating flame  
Fell upon Gorham and the crisis came!  
For Pixley scowled and darkness filled the room  
Till Gorham's flashing orbs dispelled the gloom.  
The patrons of the place, by fear dismayed,  
Sprang to the street and left their scores unpaid.  
So, when Jove thunders and his lightnings gleam  
To sour the milk and curdle, too, the cream,  
And storm-clouds gather on the shadowed hill,  
The ass forsakes his hay, the pig his swill.  
Hotly the heroes now engaged-their breath

Came short and hard, as in the throes of death.  
They clenched their hands, their weapons brandished high,  
Cut, stabbed, and hewed, nor uttered any cry,  
But gnashed their teeth and struggled on! In brief,  
One ate his bacon, t'other one his beef.

Ambrose Bierce

# Unarmed

Saint Peter sat at the jasper gate,  
When Stephen M. White arrived in state.

'Admit me.' 'With pleasure,' Peter said,  
Pleased to observe that the man was dead;

'That's what I'm here for. Kindly show  
Your ticket, my lord, and in you go.'

White stared in blank surprise. Said he  
'I \_run\_ this place-just turn that key.'

'Yes?' said the Saint; and Stephen heard  
With pain the inflection of that word.

But, mastering his emotion, he  
Remarked: 'My friend, you're too d-- free;

'I'm Stephen M., by thunder, White!'  
And, 'Yes?' the guardian said, with quite

The self-same irritating stress  
Distinguishing his former yes.

And still demurely as a mouse  
He twirled the key to that Upper House.

Then Stephen, seeing his bluster vain  
Admittance to those halls to gain,

Said, neighborly: 'Pray tell me. Pete,  
Does any one contest my seat?'

The Saint replied: 'Nay, nay, not so;  
But you voted always wrong below:

'Whate'er the question, clear and high  
You're voice rang: '\_I\_', '\_I\_', ever '\_I\_'."

Now indignation fired the heart  
Of that insulted immortal part.

'Die, wretch!' he cried, with blanching lip,  
And made a motion to his hip,

With purpose murderous and hearty,  
To draw the Democratic party!

He felt his fingers vainly slide  
Upon his unappareled hide

(The dead arise from their 'silent tents'  
But not their late habiliments)

Then wailed-the briefest of his speeches:  
'I've left it in my other breeches!'

Ambrose Bierce

# Uncoloneled

Though war-signs fail in time of peace, they say,  
Two awful portents gloom the public mind:  
All Mexico is arming for the fray  
And Colonel Mark McDonald has resigned!  
We know not by what instinct he divined  
The coming trouble-may be, like the steed  
Described by Job, he smelled the fight afar.  
Howe'er it be, he left, and for that deed  
Is an aspirant to the G.A.R.  
When cannon flame along the Rio Grande  
A citizen's commission will be handy.

Ambrose Bierce



# Unexpounded

On Evidence, on Deeds, on Bills,  
On Copyhold, on Loans, on Wills,  
Lawyers great books indite;  
The creaking of their busy quills  
I've never heard on Right.

Ambrose Bierce

## Vanished At Cock-Crow

'I've found the secret of your charm,' I said,  
Expounding with complacency my guess.  
Alas! the charm, even as I named it, fled,  
For all its secret was unconsciousness.

Ambrose Bierce

## Vice Versa

Down in the state of Maine, the story goes,  
A woman, to secure a lapsing pension,  
Married a soldier-though the good Lord knows  
That very common act scarce calls for mention.  
What makes it worthy to be writ and read  
The man she married had been nine hours dead!

Now, marrying a corpse is not an act  
Familiar to our daily observation,  
And so I crave her pardon if the fact  
Suggests this interesting speculation:  
Should some mischance restore the man to life  
Would she be then a widow, or a wife?

Let casuists contest the point; I'm not  
Disposed to grapple with so great a matter.  
'T would tie my thinker in a double knot  
And drive me staring mad as any hatter  
Though I submit that hatters are, in fact,  
Sane, and all other human beings cracked.

Small thought have I of Destiny or Chance;  
Luck seems to me the same thing as Intention;  
In metaphysics I could ne'er advance,  
And think it of the Devil's own invention.  
Enough of joy to know though when I wed  
I must be married, yet I may be dead.

Ambrose Bierce

# Visions Of Sin

KRASLAJORSK, SIBERIA, March 29.

'My eyes are better, and I shall travel slowly toward home.'  
DANENHOWER.

From the regions of the Night,  
Coming with recovered sight  
From the spell of darkness free,  
What will Danenhower see?

He will see when he arrives,  
Doctors taking human lives.  
He will see a learned judge  
Whose decision will not budge  
Till both litigants are fleeced  
And his palm is duly greased.  
Lawyers he will see who fight  
Day by day and night by night;  
Never both upon a side,  
Though their fees they still divide.  
Preachers he will see who teach  
That it is divine to preach  
That they fan a sacred fire  
And are worthy of their hire.  
He will see a trusted wife

(Pride of some good husband's life)  
Enter at a certain door  
And-but he will see no more.  
He will see Good Templars reel  
See a prosecutor steal,  
And a father beat his child.  
He'll perhaps see Oscar Wilde.

From the regions of the Night  
Coming with recovered sight  
From the bliss of blindness free,  
That's what Danenhower'll see.

1882.

Ambrose Bierce

# Weather

Once I dipt into the future far as human eye could see,  
And I saw the Chief Forecaster, dead as any one can be--  
Dead and damned and shut in Hades as a liar from his birth,  
With a record of unreason seldome paralleled on earth.  
While I looked he reared him solemnly, that incandescent youth,  
From the coals that he'd preferred to the advantages of truth.  
He cast his eyes about him and above him; then he wrote  
On a slab of thin asbestos what I venture here to quote--  
For I read it in the rose-light of the everlasting glow:  
'Cloudy; variable winds, with local showers; cooler; snow.'

Ambrose Bierce

## With A Book

Words shouting, singing, smiling, frowning--  
Sense lacking.

Ah, nothing, more obscure than Browning,  
Save blacking.

Ambrose Bierce

## With Mine Own Petard

Time was the local poets sang their songs  
Beneath their breath in terror of the thongs  
I snapped about their shins. Though mild the stroke  
Bards, like the conies, are 'a feeble folk,'  
Fearing all noises but the one they make  
Themselves-at which all other mortals quake.  
Now from their cracked and disobedient throats,  
Like rats from sewers scampering, their notes  
Pour forth to move, where'er the season serves,  
If not our legs to dance, at least our nerves;  
As once a ram's-horn solo maddened all  
The sober-minded stones in Jerich's wall.  
A year's exemption from the critic's curse  
Mends the bard's courage but impairs his verse.  
Thus poolside frogs, when croaking in the night,  
Are frayed to silence by a meteor's flight,  
Or by the sudden plashing of a stone  
From some adjacent cottage garden thrown,  
But straight renew the song with double din  
Whene'er the light goes out or man goes in.  
Shall I with arms unbraced (my casque unlatched,  
My falchion pawned, my buckler, too, attached)  
Resume the cuishes and the broad cuirass,  
Accomplishing my body all in brass,  
And arm in battle royal to oppose  
A village poet singing through the nose,  
Or strolling troubadour his lyre who strums  
With clumsy hand whose fingers all are thumbs?  
No, let them rhyme; I fought them once before  
And stilled their songs-but, Satan! how they swore!  
Cuffed them upon the mouth whene'er their throats  
They cleared for action with their sweetest notes;  
Twisted their ears (they'd oft tormented mine)  
And damned them roundly all along the line;  
Clubbed the whole crew from the Parnassian slopes,  
A wreck of broken heads and broken hopes!  
What gained I so? I feathered every curse  
Launched at the village bards with lilting verse.  
The town approved and christened me (to show its



High admiration) Chief of Local Poets!

Ambrose Bierce

## Woman In Politics

What, madam, run for School Director? You?  
And want my vote and influence? Well, well,  
That beats me! Gad! where are we drifting to?  
In all my life I never have heard tell  
Of such sublime presumption, and I smell  
A nigger in the fence! Excuse me, madam;  
We statesmen sometimes speak like the old Adam.

But now you mention it-well, well, who knows?  
We might, that's certain, give the sex a show.  
I have a cousin-teacher. I suppose  
If I stand in and you 're elected-no?  
You'll make no bargains? That's a pretty go!  
But understand that school administration  
Belongs to Politics, not Education.

We'll pass the teacher deal; but it were wise  
To understand each other at the start.  
You know my business-books and school supplies;  
You'd hardly, if elected, have the heart  
Some small advantage to deny me-part  
Of all my profits to be yours. What? Stealing?  
Please don't express yourself with so much feeling.

You pain me, truly. Now one question more.  
Suppose a fair young man should ask a place  
As teacher-would you (pardon) shut the door  
Of the Department in his handsome face  
Until-I know not how to put the case  
Would you extort a kiss to pay your favor?  
Good Lord! you laugh? I thought the matter graver.

Well, well, we can't do business, I suspect:  
A woman has no head for useful tricks.  
My profitable offers you reject  
And will not promise anything to fix  
The opposition. That's not politics.  
Good morning. Stay-I'm chaffing you, conceitedly.  
Madam, I mean to vote for you-repeatedly.

Ambrose Bierce

## Y'E Foe To Cathaye

O never an oathe sweares he,  
And never a pig-taile jerkes;  
With a brick-batte he ne lurkes  
For to buste y'e crust, perdie,  
Of y'e man from over sea,  
A-synging as he werkes.  
For he knows ful well, y's youth,  
A tricke of exceeding worth:  
And he plans withouten ruth  
A conflagration's birth!

Ambrose Bierce

# Ye Idyll Of Ye Hippopotamus

With a Methodist hymn in his musical throat,  
The Sun was emitting his ultimate note;  
His quivering larynx enwrinkled the sea  
Like an Ichthyosaurian blowing his tea;  
When sweetly and pensively rattled and rang  
This plaint which an Hippopotamus sang:

'O, Camomile, Calabash, Cartilage-pie,  
Spread for my spirit a peppermint fry;  
Crown me with doughnuts, and drape me with cheese,  
Settle my soul with a codliver sneeze.  
Lo, how I stand on my head and repine-  
Lollipop Lumpkin can never be mine!'

Down sank the Sun with a kick and a plunge,  
Up from the wave rose the head of a Sponge;  
Ropes in his ringlets, eggs in his eyes,  
Tip-tilted nose in a way to surprise.  
These the conundrums he flung to the breeze,  
The answers that Echo returned to him these:

'Cobblestone, Cobblestone, why do you sigh-  
Why do you turn on the tears?'

'My mother is crazy on strawberry jam,  
And my father has petrified ears.'

'Liverwort, Liverwort, why do you droop-  
Why do you snuffle and scowl?'

'My brother has cockle-burs into his eyes,  
And my sister has married an owl.'

'Simia, Simia, why do you laugh-  
Why do you cackle and quake?'

'My son has a pollywog stuck in his throat,  
And my daughter has bitten a snake.'

Slow sank the head of the Sponge out of sight,  
Soaken with sea-water-then it was night.  
The Moon had now risen for dinner to dress,  
When sweetly the Pachyderm sang from his nest;  
He sang through a pestle of silvery shape,  
Encrusted with custard-empurpled with crape;  
And this was the burden he bore on his lips,  
And blew to the listening Sturgeon that sips  
From the fountain of opium under the lobes  
Of the mountain whose summit in buffalo robes  
The winter envelops, as Venus adorns  
An elephant's trunk with a chaplet of thorns:

'Chasing mastodons through marshes upon stilts of light ratan,  
Hunting spiders with a shotgun and mosquitoes with an axe,  
Plucking peanuts ready roasted from the branches of the oak,  
Waking echoes in the forest with our hymns of blessed bosh,  
We roamed-my love and I.

By the margin of the fountain spouting thick with clabbered milk,  
Under spreading boughs of bass-wood all alive with cooing toads,  
Loafing listlessly on boulders of octagonal design,  
Standing gracefully inverted with our toes together knit,

We loved-my love and I.'

Hippopotamus comforts his heart  
Biting half-moons out of strawberry tart.

Epitaph on George Francis Train.

(Inscribed on a Pork-barrel.)

Beneath this casket rots unknown  
A Thing that merits not a stone,  
Save that by passing urchin cast;  
Whose fame and virtues we express  
By transient urn of emptiness,  
With apt inscription (to its past  
Relating-and to his): 'Prime Mess.'  
No honour had this infidel,  
That doth not appertain, as well,  
To altered caitiff on the drop;  
No wit that would not likewise pass  
For wisdom in the famished ass

Who breaks his neck a weed to crop,  
When tethered in the luscious grass.  
And now, thank God, his hateful name  
Shall never rescued be from shame,  
Though seas of venal ink be shed;  
No sophistry shall reconcile  
With sympathy for Erin's Isle,  
Or sorrow for her patriot dead,  
The weeping of this crocodile.  
Life's incongruity is past,  
And dirt to dirt is seen at last,  
The worm of worm afoul doth fall.  
The sexton tolls his solemn bell  
For scoundrel dead and gone to-well,  
It matters not, it can't recall  
This convict from his final cell.  
Jerusalem, Old and New.  
Didymus Dunkleton Doty Don John  
Is a parson of high degree;  
He holds forth of Sundays to marvelling crowds  
Who wonder how vice can still be  
When smitten so stoutly by Didymus Don-  
Disciple of Calvin is he.  
But sinners still laugh at his talk of the New  
Jerusalem-ha-ha, te-he!  
And biting their thumbs at the doughty Don-John  
This parson of high degree-  
They think of the streets of a village they know,  
Where horses still sink to the knee,  
Contrasting its muck with the pavement of gold  
That's laid in the other citee.  
They think of the sign that still swings, uneffaced  
By winds from the salt, salt sea,  
Which tells where he trafficked in tippie, of yore-  
Don Dunkleton Johnny, D. D.  
Didymus Dunkleton Doty Don John  
Still plays on his fiddle-D. D.,  
His lambkins still bleat in full psalmody sweet,  
And the devil still pitches the key.  
Communing with Nature.  
One evening I sat on a heavenward hill,  
The winds were asleep and all nature was still,

Wee children came round me to play at my knee,  
As my mind floated rudderless over the sea.  
I put out one hand to caress them, but held  
With the other my nose, for these cherubim smelled.  
I cast a few glances upon the old sun;  
He was red in the face from the race he had run,  
But he seemed to be doing, for aught I could see,  
Quite well without any assistance from me.  
And so I directed my wandering eye  
Around to the opposite side of the sky,  
And the rapture that ever with ecstasy thrills  
Through the heart as the moon rises bright from the hills,  
Would in this case have been most exceedingly rare,  
Except for the fact that the moon was not there.  
But the stars looked right lovingly down in the sea,  
And, by Jupiter, Venus was winking at me!  
The gas in the city was flaring up bright,  
Montgomery Street was resplendent with light;  
But I did not exactly appear to advance  
A sentiment proper to that circumstance.  
So it only remains to explain to the town  
That a rainstorm came up before I could come down.  
As the boots I had on were uncommonly thin  
My fancy leaked out as the water leaked in.  
Though dampened my ardour, though slackened my strain,  
I'll 'strike the wild lyre' who sings the sweet rain!  
Conservatism and Progress.  
Old Zephyr, dawdling in the West,  
Looked down upon the sea,  
Which slept unfretted at his feet,  
And balanced on its breast a fleet  
That seemed almost to be  
Suspended in the middle air,  
As if a magnet held it there,  
Eternally at rest.  
Then, one by one, the ships released  
Their folded sails, and strove  
Against the empty calm to press  
North, South, or West, or East,  
In vain; the subtle nothingness  
Was impotent to move.  
Ten Zephyr laughed aloud to see:



'No vessel moves except by me,  
And, heigh-ho! I shall sleep.'  
But lo! from out the troubled North  
A tempest strode impatient forth,  
And trampled white the deep;  
The sloping ships flew glad away,  
Laving their heated sides in spray.  
The West then turned him red with wrath,  
And to the North he shouted:  
'Hold there! How dare you cross my path,  
As now you are about it?'  
The North replied with laboured breath-  
His speed no moment slowing:-  
'My friend, you'll never have a path,  
Unless you take to blowing.'  
Inter Arma Silent Leges.  
(An Election Incident.)  
About the polls the freedmen drew,  
To vote the freemen down;  
And merrily their caps up-flew  
As Grant rode through the town.  
From votes to staves they next did turn,  
And beat the freemen down;  
Full bravely did their valour burn  
As Grant rode through the town.  
Then staves for muskets they forsook,  
And shot the freemen down;  
Right royally their banners shook  
As Grant rode through the town.  
Hail, final triumph of our cause!  
Hail, chief of mute renown!  
Grim Magistrate of Silent Laws,  
A-riding freedom down!  
Quintessence.

'To produce these spicy paragraphs, which have been unsuccessfully imitated by every newspaper in the State, requires the combined efforts of five able-bodied persons associated on the editorial staff of this journal.'-New York Herald.

Sir Muscle speaks, and nations bend the ear:

'Hark ye these Notes-our wit quintuple hear;  
Five able-bodied editors combine  
Their strength prodigious in each laboured line!  
O wondrous vintner! hopeless seemed the task  
To bung these drainings in a single cask;  
The riddle's read-five leathern skins contain  
The working juice, and scarcely feel the strain.  
Saviours of Rome! will wonders never cease?  
A ballad cackled by five tuneful geese!  
Upon one Rosinante five stout knights  
Ride fiercely into visionary fights!  
A cap and bells five sturdy fools adorn,  
Five porkers battle for a grain of corn,  
Five donkeys squeeze into a narrow stall,  
Five tumble-bugs propel a single ball!  
Resurgam.

Dawns dread and red the fateful morn  
Lo, Resurrection's Day is born!  
The striding sea no longer strides,  
No longer knows the trick of tides;  
The land is breathless, winds relent,  
All nature waits the dread event.  
From wassail rising rather late,  
Awarding Jove arrives in state;  
O'er yawning graves looks many a league,  
Then yawns himself from sheer fatigue.  
Lifting its finger to the sky,  
A marble shaft arrests his eye  
This epitaph, in pompous pride,  
Engraven on its polished side:  
'Perfection of Creation's plan,  
Here resteth Universal Man,  
Who virtues, segregated wide,  
Collated, classed, and codified,  
Reduced to practice, taught, explained,  
And strict morality maintained.  
Anticipating death, his pelf  
He lavished on this monolith;  
Because he leaves nor kin nor kith  
He rears this tribute to himself,  
That Virtue's fame may never cease.  
Hic jacet-let him rest in peace!'

With sober eye Jove scanned the shaft,  
Then turned away and lightly laughed  
'Poor Man! since I have careless been  
In keeping books to note thy sin,  
And thou hast left upon the earth  
This faithful record of thy worth,  
Thy final prayer shall now be heard:  
Of life I'll not renew thy lease,  
But take thee at thy carven word,  
And let thee rest in solemn peace!'

Ambrose Bierce

# Yorick

Hard by an excavated street one sat  
In solitary session on the sand;  
And ever and anon he spake and spat  
And spake again-a yellow skull in hand,  
To which that retrospective Pioneer  
Addressed the few remarks that follow here:

'Who are you? Did you come 'der blains agross,  
Or 'Horn aroundt'? In days o' '49  
Did them thar eye-holes see the Southern Cross  
From the Antarctic Sea git up an' shine?  
Or did you drive a bull team 'all the way  
From Pike,' with Mr. Joseph Bowers?-say!

'Was you in Frisco when the water came  
Up to Montgum'ry street? and do you mind  
The time when Peters run the faro game  
Jim Peters from old Mississip-behind  
Wells Fargo's, where he subsequent was bust  
By Sandy, as regards both bank and crust?

'I wonder was you here when Casey shot  
James King o' William? And did you attend  
The neck-tie dance ensuin'? I did not,  
But j'ined the rush to Go Creek with my friend  
Ed'ard McGowan; for we was resolved  
In sech diversions not to be involved.

'Maybe I knowed you; seems to me I've seed  
Your face afore. I don't forget a face,  
But names I disremember-I'm that breed  
Of owls. I'm talking some'at into space  
An' maybe my remarks is too derved free,  
Seein' yer name is unbeknown to me.

'Ther' was a time, I reckon, when I knowed  
Nigh onto every dern galoot in town.  
That was as late as '50. Now she's growed  
Surprisin'! Yes, me an' my pardner, Brown,

Was wide acquainted. If ther' was a cuss  
We didn't know, the cause was-he knowed us.

'Maybe you had that claim adjoinin' mine  
Up thar in Calaveras. Was it you  
To which Long Mary took a mighty shine,  
An' threwed squar' off on Jake the Kangaroo?  
I guess if she could see ye now she'd take  
Her chance o' happiness along o' Jake.

'You ain't so purty now as you was then:  
Yer eyes is nothin' but two prospect holes,  
An' women which are hitched to better men  
Would hardly for sech glances damn their souls,  
As Lengthie did. By G--! I \_hope\_ it's you,  
For' \_(kicks the skull)\_ 'I'm Jake the Kangaroo.'

Ambrose Bierce