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The Poet Bland and Sixteen Specimen Poems

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MARTIN SEVERIN PETERSON



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA STUDIES

DECEMBER 1943

STUDIES IN THE HUMANITIES NO. 3

University of Nebraska Studies

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MARTIN SEVERIN PETERSON

Based on the papers of Henry
Meade Bland as preserved and
systematically arranged by
Gwendolen Brooks Penniman,
Librarian, San Jose Poetry
Society, San Jose, California.

STUDIES IN THE HUMANITIES NO. 3

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA



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To Matilda Collinson Peterson
1859-1919

PREFACE

The only appeal that needs to be made for the poet, Henry Meade Bland, is that he deserves to be better known. The shadow of obscurity has fallen upon a number of our American regional poets and their places in the sun usurped by practitioners of the more currently popular forms of literature. When interest in poetry some day revives, it will be useful to have a record of the poets who responded to their surroundings because of an inward urge to sing. Some of the truly indigenous literature of our own and earlier times is to be found in regional poetry. Bland, it can be stated with assurance, was dedicated to his native region, California, and his poetry is indigenous thereto.

No extended biographical account of the poet Bland has appeared in the years since his death in 1931. A short sketch or two may be found in journalistic sources, the *Overland Monthly*, to specify one, and from the hand of the poet himself we are provided with a few hundred words of autobiography. The present short biographical essay was undertaken to supply this lack. The systematic preservation of the poet's letters, notes, and papers by Mrs. Gwendolen Penniman of San Jose, California, materially simplified the task of preparing the essay, and numerous interviews with surviving friends of the poet, particularly Mr. Roland Eberhart, provided authentic echoes from the life of a noble and gifted man.

Critical appraisals, except for such tentative ones as were written by Edwin Markham and George Wharton James in the forewords prepared for two of Bland's books of poetry, are likewise lacking. In a critical introduction to the specimen poems selected to illustrate this study, I have provided the outlines for such an appraisal, emphasizing the classical, Hebraic, Victorian, and regional strains commingled in these songs. Therein, too, will be found an account of Bland's prosodical talent. The bibliography of his poetical works and his essays on California poets is, thus far at least, unique.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge here the work of Mrs. Gwendolen Penniman, who made the initial suggestion that led to this study. Over many years she rescued, collected, and then arranged

the poet's manuscripts, letters, and clippings. From her, moreover, have come many revelations concerning the poet's life and character.

Inasmuch as this work was supported in part by a grant-in-aid from the Research Council of the University of Nebraska, a further obligation of acknowledgment rests upon me. As a manifestation of my gratitude, it gives me pleasure to present a regional study, one that pertains to the cultural history of the West and commemorates a Western poet of talent, the late Henry Meade Bland.

MARTIN SEVERIN PETERSON

Lincoln, January, 1944

The Poet Bland and Sixteen Specimen Poems

THE LIFE

NOT many Americans outside of California would have noted the passing in 1931 of the poet Henry Meade Bland. A gentle, Mr. Chips sort of man, he died, beloved by a throng of former students and a host of friends, in a hospital room at San Jose, California. An item concerning his death and a brief obituary were picked up by the Associated Press and in a laconic digest dispatched across the country.

If there are doleful aspects of the death and the last years of Henry Meade Bland, once illustrious in California as its poet laureate, his life, contrariwise, was as cheerful and sunny as his native climate. Throughout his life he anticipated the best possible outcome of the untoward circumstances that filled his days. A few years after his marriage his wife became an invalid; he was eternally hopeful for her recovery. His son Morton, a ne'er-do-well of the inelegant kind, became involved in scrapes and compromised Bland, who taught English at the San Jose State College, by being periodically jailed. The poet steadfastly clung to the theory "that Morton has just not found himself." He strolled through the insidious paths of the academic grove with serene trustfulness. No doubt he would have condoned or missed the venom of one of his colleagues, who said of him, posthumously, "Bland? He kept goats."

White Herons on the Yellow Marshes

The California world into which Henry Meade Bland was born in 1863 was one in which the forces of settlement were still working feverishly. The turbulent gold strike era was virtually over, but the magical powers of the yellow metal were at work transforming the land from the frontier of Bret Harte into the semi-frontier of agriculture and industry of Frank Norris.

To this semi-frontier, on the second tide of migration to California, Bland's parents had come in 1857. Bland's father, an ordained Methodist minister, had migrated to the state to take up the meagerly rewarded tasks of a circuit rider. With his fresh-

faced, beautiful young wife, a Virginian like himself, he settled in the Sacramento valley and began his consecrated work of taming the wild spirits who had survived the mining era. It was an appalling task.

"There were some very sinful people in those days," Parson Bland said, years later, "and quite a few of them lived in the Sacramento valley."

In the year 1863 Parson Bland's home parish was at Fairfield, in Solano County, and it was here, on the evening of April 21st, that Henry Meade was born, the fourth child to bless the union, but the only one to that date who survived.

Fairfield, which lay on the level floor of the Suisun valley, encompassed a church, a school, a few houses, a smithy, and one false-front store. The horizon to the north was notched by the jagged outlines of the Coast Range but at all other points of the compass the horizon was only vaguely marked by flat lands or marsh. Near Fairfield was Suisun slough that fed its green and brown waters into Suisun Bay. The marshes and sloughs were the breeding grounds of the white heron.

The region had been settled by the Spanish in the late eighteenth century and much of *alta California* lore survived. Stories of Solano, a great Indian chief of the region, and of Lieutenant Mariano Vallejo were current, and there were many who remembered Jesus Molino in the flesh. The gentle splendor of old Spanish days was gone from the region; but some half dozen miles from the Blands, near the base of a beautiful wood, was the manorial home of Sam Martin, a Pennsylvanian who had come to California as adequately supplied with this world's goods as Parson Bland was with those of the Other-world. Sam Martin's fields were full of fat cattle and woolly, white sheep. His home, virtually new in Bland's time, was built in the spacious, graceful, English country-house style. Parson Bland, when he drove over the plank road to Suisun and on beyond to Rockville to preach in the new and handsome brick Methodist Church there, passed by Sam Martin's eleven thousand prosperous acres and luxurious home. He felt no envy. His devotion to his calling was absolute. Mrs. Bland, descended from one of Virginia's first families, feasted her eyes for the half hour it took to pass Sam Martin's and sighed when the mansion disappeared from view. It was she, however, whose general outlook on life was the more cheerful.

On beyond Sam Martin's was a region of rolling land checkered by woods. Most of this country was given over to grazing. Still farther along were the towns of Benicia and Napa, worldly places in the eyes of the circuit rider. There was an army post at Benicia.

On certain Sundays Parson Bland preached at centers in the opposite direction, toward Sacramento. The region here was a land of rounded hills and gently sloping valleys. It was in this country that Edwin Markham and his mother lived during the years from 1861 to 1870. On several occasions Markham and his mother heard Parson Bland preach. "His sermons were sad and oftentimes poetic; at intervals, overcome by emotion, he would openly weep," said Markham in later years. That Parson Bland was dispirited during this year of 1863, seems evident in the fact that he asked for and received a "superannuation," a furlough from preaching, for the following year, 1864. He was not yet adjusted to the semi-frontier and the rough characters whom he was expected to bring to grace.

In 1865 he was assigned to a new circuit with headquarters at Rome, California. He located on a small farm near this hamlet and, much improved in spirit, re-entered his work of circuit preaching and colportage.

The turbulent Sacramento flowed past the farm, and it was here that Meade Bland formed his earliest memories. He became aware, we are told in his autobiographical notes, of the voices of the river—the croon of the curlew, the distant call of the honkers, the whistle of the teal as they rose from the yellow swirling river, and the vague, sad notes of the kildees. He was only four years old when he first was struck by these voices, but they left an imprint on his mind and heart never to be erased.

Meade Bland remembered from these days, also, a tribe of Digger Indians who had drifted into the region in early fall to fish and to gather berries and to dig edible roots. They seemed a part of the fauna of the region as they drifted slowly downstream, harvesting the wild crops along the Sacramento shores as they went. The little children used to catch minnows with their bare hands, roast them over the tribal fire on sticks, and eat them greedily.

Another memory that fixed itself in his mind for all the years to come was the arrival and departure of the big flat-bottomed side-

wheeler that came puffing up river with water cascading from its steam-driven paddles. This boat, a floating dime store, took in exchange for its shiny pots and pans and bolts of calico the produce of the neighborhoods that bordered the river. At Knight's Landing, near the Bland farm, Meade and his parents used to board the boat to exchange potatoes, eggs, and chickens for household necessities. As they walked along past the counters, Meade revelled in the display of ribbons, buttons, yarns, hammers, saws, nails, and candies and cookies that met his eyes. But the boat was a symbol of terror, too, for a few minutes before it was scheduled to depart, the fireman would jerk a whistle cord and a blast like the crack of doom would pierce the air. Usually, he broke from his mother and father and ran all the way home as soon as he saw the fireman reach for the cord that loosed the blast. When the boat was gone, he felt lonely.

But loneliness, then as later, was a passing mood with Meade Bland. An innate love of nature colored all his days, and he drew from California scenes throughout his life instant alleviation from the grief and anxiety that often beset him. In the brakes and marshes near Rome, for example, there was a large colony of heron which formed a slate-blue cloud when, disturbed, it rose from the waters. Meade used to watch them for hours, entranced by their grace. One day, many years later, of course, he recalled a scene from this period of his childhood and put it down in the following stanza:

*He stands, a shining lily of the deep,
Or floats, a gossamer, above the leas,
Or all day long where murky waters sleep,
He moves, a wraith, among the willow trees.*

This graceful stanza to a heron was written shortly after the death of a beloved infant son. It is interesting because it indicates the solace that Bland so literally found in scenes from nature.

After Parson Bland had served his circuit in Rome and vicinity for a full term, he was assigned to one at Florin. At Florin it became Meade Bland's privilege to accompany his father on circuit. The Sacramento-Stockton railroad was building at this time, and passing by in their colporteur wagon, Parson Bland and his son Meade watched the Chinese laborers with pick and shovel construct the link in the chain that would tie California for all time to her sister states. Perhaps neither of these humble witnesses,

nor hosts of others, realized the import of what they saw. Actually, the picks of the laborers were playing the dirge that marked the end of the frontier. The day of the covered wagon was over, and steadily during the succeeding years the attitudes and drives of the Far Western pioneer were to vanish, or to metamorphose into patterns imitative of those of the East. The air of California was never again to be so still, so fresh with the fragrance of woods and fields and tides. The white heron were to vanish from the yellow marshes, and so, too, in turn, the marshes themselves.

After Florin came Freeport and once again a home on the Sacramento. At Freeport the big passenger steamers from San Francisco docked regularly—and almost at the door of the Blands. One of these, the *Chrysopolis*, had a calliope whistle that sounded through the green woods that bordered the river like the music of a huge brass band. The arrival of this boat, Meade Bland records, “was part and parcel of our life. We could not have continued the daily round if it had suddenly been removed from our anticipations.”

All manner of people travelled the river on the *Chrysopolis* and its sister steamers: ladies in glamorous clothes who stood at the rail and looked languidly at the crowd on the wharf, gentlemen in sober frock coats and gamblers in flashy, checked ones. It was, to Meade Bland, a section of the great city of San Francisco that he had been hearing about, floated up through the green woods just for his inspection. It was a gracious world, bright and serene, but not so beautiful, he thought, as the world of the shining river where bluebirds skimmed on silent wings across the face of the waters to alight in the live oaks that lined the banks.

From Freeport they went to South Butte and the circuit originating there. Fortunately, the new circuit headquarters was still on the Sacramento, for the country otherwise was rather parched and brown. The village itself, Meade Bland recalls in his autobiographical notes, was “grim, drear, and dusty.” It was much better, to be sure, after the rains when for a period there were grass and flowers on every hand. It was here that Meade Bland started school and here, in 1869, that his sister May was born. Here, also, he acquired a dog, Tige.

The next re-pulling and re-setting of the Bland domestic roots found them in San Luis Obispo, the farthest south that Parson Bland was ever assigned. They travelled to the new circuit by

sea, and a memorable event of the trip for Meade Bland was the near-disaster occasioned by the ship's almost failing to make the crossing of the bar into San Luis Obispo bay. The ship, the *Gussie Telfer*, was nearly stranded because of a heavy fog. Meade also remembered his attack of seasickness, which lasted for a week after he was on land again.

In the new circuit and the one at Santa Maria, Parson Bland took up ranching to eke out the miserable salary paid him by the Conference. But ranching proved not much richer as a source of revenue than preaching, and no doubt it was with relief that he received the call to return to the Sacramento valley where he had begun the stony life to which he had dedicated himself. Life was a bit easier there.

In the Sacramento valley there was once again a succession of circuits—Red Bluff, Indian Springs, and finally Butte. At Butte Parson Bland purchased a first-class ranch, and by gradual stages during the succeeding years he changed his occupation from that of circuit rider to that of farmer. This ranch, known as the Sutter Creek ranch, brought to the Blands their first feeling of security. A few good crop years gave them a store of hard cash that for the first time in California drove the wolf a safe distance from the door.

But Meade Bland, never vitally interested in his material welfare, was less concerned with the moderate opulence that had come upon them than with the bounty of nature to be seen everywhere. A vignette of these days is contained in a little poem that he wrote celebrating early fall:

*The red is on the grapevine,
The purple on the pear;
The yellowhammers gaily flash
The coloring they wear.*

*The lark pipes on the sage-brush
The same old song of yore;
The south wind thrums his lyre in
The eaves above my door.*

As time went on and Meade Bland entered the final year of high school, Parson Bland began to ponder the problem of a college education for his son. Consulting with a friend, a Mr. Mering, whose sons were close friends of Meade Bland and his sister May, it was decided to send the youth to the University of the Pacific,

a Methodist college in San Jose. Oddly enough, Meade Bland, whose scholastic record had always been of the highest, was not especially interested in going to college. He had come to love ranch life and the opportunity it afforded to stroll through the fields and woods bordering Sutter Creek.

In the end it was an accident that decided him. A team of horses that he was driving became frightened at a bucket of water which spilled while Meade was watering them. Meade chased and finally caught and halted the runaways, but in one of those unexplainable adolescent piques, he soured on ranch life after this misfortune and readily consented to go to college.

But before going he worked hard to make sure of a good crop year. He toiled early and late, with the doggedness that always characterized his actions when he had made up his mind to achieve something. And his efforts, together with those of Parson Bland, resulted in a bumper crop, the financial returns from which seemed to ensure a year, possibly two, for both him and his sister who, it was decided, should be enrolled in the preparatory course at the University of the Pacific.

May was filled with excitement and joy, but something of the nostalgic response of the youth who had been growing to manhood in the region of the Sacramento is contained in his poem *Reincarnation*. As an indication of his mood at this period of his life it is included here. The scene described is the river land where he and May and the Mering children had so often roamed.

Reincarnation

*O, when I come again may it be spring!
That I may walk again through poppy bloom,
And catch the glint of sunlight brightening
The sylph-like heron's spotless lily-plume;*

*That I may watch the sunlight paint the hills
With purple, catch the odor from the lawn
Laden with clover-hay; or hear the rills
That play among the meadows; or, at dawn,*

*Walk knee-deep through the flowering April oats;
Or linger silent by the leafy groves,
Watching the gros-beaks in their shiny coats
Murmur in fairy bowers their elfin loves.*

*And when I come again I need to see,
Wreathed, as it once was wont, in witching smiles,
Your matchless face—the book of minstrelsy—
Fair magic—in your hand; and down the aisles*

*Of tule-grass, we'll wander far away
In timeless joy to where the crickets hum
Their sweet high music to declining day.
Ah! let it be spring-time when I come.*

This picture of a gentle soul, walking the hills and fields in the mellow sunlight, is as authentic a likeness of Bland as a photograph. He was, and these are his own words, "one of the moon-people."

In 1881 the Bland family arrived in San Jose. The trip there had taken them through the fair city of San Francisco and thrilled by the white-walled town on the deep blue bay, Meade Bland wrote,

*Towered and spired, mysterious with delight!
A child, I heard your tumult from afar.
To me you beacons as a shining star;
You seemed to sing exultant on the white
Wild road, Time's wonder highway, to a bright
Fair destiny . . .*

Shirtwaists and High Pompadours

San Jose, as it was in the '80's, connected with Santa Clara by means of The Alameda, a tree-lined avenue bisecting an area then building into an elite residential district. Imposing Victorian mansions reposed in the midst of formally landscaped grounds and gave an air of wealth and ease which was a great contrast to the rural regions along the Sacramento with which Meade Bland was so familiar. Windows of many-colored stained glass, cut-glass doors, highly ornamented gates, together with men dressed in stiff black hats, frock coats, and narrow trousers, and women in chiffon dresses and children in stiff, white, very clean clothes, plus open carriages driven by men in livery—all these combined in Meade Bland's mind to give a context to the word *urbanity*. He passed through this neighborhood daily on his way to and from the campus of the University of the Pacific and marveled at the opulence displayed on all sides. The owners, many of whom derived their incomes from the lucrative agricultural resources of

the Santa Clara valley, little knew the homage being paid them by the slender, earnest college freshman who passed their homes each day.

On the campus Meade Bland was an inconspicuous but respected student. A picture of him, dating from the period, shows him wearing a suit with tight-fitting trousers and a coat buttoned right up to a high stiff collar and wide cravat. His hair is plastered down and parted in the middle. The total effect is not too bad, but the ears and the bones in the face get more than their rightful share of emphasis. Pictures of his classmates look much the same although an occasional handsome face seems able to surmount the stiff fashions of the period. The women as shown in the albums treasured by Meade Bland's classmates fare somewhat better. They wore their hair in high pompadours, and despite high-collared shirtwaists, generously plaited and embroidered, long skirts and high shoes, they yet seem able to retain their beauty or winsomeness. These were the collegiate costumes of the eighties. College life in the period was not out of harmony with them.

For Meade Bland college was a place for work, and he established himself very quickly as the leading student of his class. During the first year at the University of the Pacific his social life consisted of a few "sociables" and a monthly attendance at a literary society where the poems of Browning and Tennyson were read. There were lawn parties, with festoons of Japanese lanterns hanging from the trees, at the homes of faculty members, and picnics, two or three times a year, at Penitencia Canyon or in the foothills of the Hamilton range. All college students form cliques and hold parties not entered on the official social calendar and to this rule the University of the Pacific, strict Methodist institution though it was, was no exception. But at these affairs Meade Bland was not often present. He was at home reading or studying. On one hilarious occasion, to be sure, he lent his moral support to a daredevil group who boosted an unhappy cow to the belfry of the main building. On another, one learns from his notes, he was standing in a grove on the campus with a few other students. One of the boys was smoking—a cardinal offense. Just as this lad was thrilling the group with the nonchalant declaration that he would continue smoking even if a faculty member passed, one did pass, the most severe disciplinarian on the staff. The haste with which the youth who was smoking threw down his cigarette and stamped

on it amused Bland at the time, and for years after. In recounting the story, Bland always chuckled, "Walter was just saying, 'If any professor gets after me, I'll twist his neck off.'"

At the end of his first year Meade Bland had made an enviable record at the University of the Pacific. He had, in fact, only two rivals, his friends Ed Mering and Francis Reid. His excellent record was marked by the faculty, and they approved also his model behaviour. He had during his entire first year not a single date with a girl. He had taken his sister May to a few college functions but that was all.

During the summer vacation Mrs. Bland, Meade, and May returned to the ranch at Sutter, to "Saint's Rest" as his father had named the place, and picked up the ranch work again. Parson Bland had returned to the ranch earlier in the spring to plant the crops. Meade immediately "pitched in" and the summer passed quickly and pleasantly. In the fall he was almost loathe to return to college.

But return he did, and the first adventure to befall this innocent youth was an encounter with love.

Perhaps, although there is no hint of it, he may have noticed the lively, blond-haired girl, who was to become the object of his affections, during his freshman year. At any rate, on the word of his sister May, he fell in love with a girl named Josie Stone at the very beginning of his second year at college, and the world became a miracle of color and light. He read poetry avidly—Tennyson, Browning, Goldsmith, and Swinburne. His copies of these poets' works, bought in this second year at the University of the Pacific, are frequently annotated and underscored.

That Bland was in love we know, and that his interest in poetry developed at the same time we also know. Through a habit Bland had of dating his books on purchase, most useful to the biographer, we can trace Bland's interests in poetry and deduce from these interests some of the derivations of his poetic subject matter and style. It is clear, for example, that Bland was much influenced by Goldsmith's poetry, particularly that descriptive of natural scenes. Many of these passages are scanned and some, as these two lines that follow, heavily underscored:

As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale . . .

He sought in Goldsmith scenes of nature in turmoil, storms and high gales, or scenes describing the majesty of the mountains.

It was in his second year that he joined Professor Blackmore's Reading Club. Here, seated stiffly in a circle, Bland and his fellow-members listened to this much revered teacher of literature, suffused in the glow of yellow lamp-light, read the poems of Tennyson and Browning for two and even three hours at a stretch. Occasionally, Blackmore read from Pope; the volume of Pope that Meade Bland purchased in this year shows some dutiful scansion and underscoring but not enough to indicate that he responded as well to the classic couplets of Pope as he did to the freer poetry of the neo-romantics, Browning and Tennyson, to whom, it is apparent, the club was devoted.

A copy of Petrarch's *Sonnets*, purchased later in his college career, shows a careful perusal by Bland of the Petrarchan form. Judging from the annotations, one might say that Bland made an intensive study of Petrarch.

Many of the poetic touches, characteristic of Bland's later poetry, may be traced to these early influences. Goldsmith's poetry most certainly influenced Bland toward somewhat lush descriptive verse, appropriate, one might add, to the California scene. And the sentiments of Tennyson and Browning are often emulated, particularly those of idyllic love.

For one in love, as Bland was in this second college year, the poetry of Byron would be stimulating. On the flyleaf of Bland's copy of Byron is this verse, undoubtedly his own:

All night the meadow-kildee piped . . .

Whatever happened to his inspiration after the first line was written must remain a mystery, but it is interesting to note that Byron's familiar tetrameter is here being imitated. And yet this wisp of poetry is redolent of Bland, too.

Emerson's *Essays*, the poems of James Russell Lowell, and a copy of Whittier's poetic works mark other influences that became evident in his later poetry. Oddly enough, it was not until 1897 that he became sufficiently interested in Walt Whitman to purchase and annotate a copy¹ of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Since we are on the subject of formative influences, it will not be out of

¹ Most of Bland's books are preserved in the County Library at San Jose, California.

place to mention here that in this volume Bland tried his first, and presumably last, flight in free verse. The poem is of no great significance, and it is apparent that Bland was merely experimenting in the Whitmanic vein. More interesting than his poem is a note jotted down in this book that describes Bland's own interests in poetry. They are, as he lists them on the flyleaf, the infinite, the soul, yearning for happiness, spiritual beauty, brotherhood, nature, and love.

But, returning to Bland in his second year of college, it was in this year that he began to join in the life of the college. With Ralph and Mabel Urmy, with the Mering boys and their sisters, with the Harleys, the Misses McMurty, Maybury, and Ross, Will Beach, the handsome Mr. Ballard, Francis Reid, and Josie Stone, he went on picnics, often to Congress Springs, a wooded retreat in the Santa Cruz Mountains, in a huge carryall. Much of the pleasure of these trips was derived from the long rides to and from the picnic grounds. As the horses plodded over the dusty roads, there were singing and laughter and a great deal of banter. Meade added his sonorous baritone to the singing.

On one of these trips some sort of tryst between Meade and Josie occurred. One gathers this fact from letters exchanged between the two at a later date.

And then there is this curious poem:

Like Sunlight Joyous

*Like sunlight joyous when midsummer bloom
Of red azalea thrums the lyric breeze,
Vying with tunes that fill the elder trees,
Inscrutable as if in leafy gloom
New grace eterne should, magic-like, assume
Glintings of fire, flashing like the fountainries
Jetting their pure eternal rays in a loom
Of light from fair Edenic silvery seas
Superne! Like lotus flowers that rich perfume
Islands long lost in olden ease and grace;
Enrapturing like the mysterious lace
Surging on bosoms full of murmurous sighs
That soothe the heart and give it deepening peace,
Opening the soul unto a sweet release,
New as the dew that in a rose heart lies—
Even so, your love comes fresh from Paradise!*

That the poem is inscribed to Josie Stone is indicated by the initial letters of each of the lines. Bland employed this quaint device in more than one poem, and it often serves, as here, to give a meager biographical clue.

During the rest of Meade Bland's college days, we hear no more of Josie Stone. What happened to the romance is and will be one of the enigmas of the poet's life. Not that Josie Stone disappeared from the scene. As a matter of fact, she plays an interesting role during the last years of his life, as will be seen.

Of the remaining days of Meade Bland's college career not much can be related. During one summer's vacation he was for a short period a book salesman, the commodity he vended from door to door being *The Practical and Home Physician*. He was on the staff of the college during his last year, as an instructor in the commercial department. He was graduated with honors in 1886, and he set forth, shortly thereafter, to joust with the world for a livelihood. He had decided to become a pedagogue.

After an interim of teaching at Eden Plains in the Contra Costa hills, he was called to the principalship at Los Gatos. At Los Gatos he met and fell in love with a young woman named Annie Mabel Haskell, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Haskell of Bangor, Maine. All accounts agree that Miss Haskell was a beautiful girl, strikingly beautiful, and in a courtship that began with an attendance at a performance of *Hamlet* by Edwin Booth in a San Jose theater in March of the year 1888, Meade Bland succeeded in the space of a few months in winning her hand. They were married in July, 1888, in Alameda, where Miss Haskell's parents were staying. After a brief wedding trip, they returned to Los Gatos to take up residence there.

Celebrities—and Friend

The decade between 1888 and 1898 was a full one for Bland. In that period he took a master's degree from the newly founded Leland Stanford Junior University, attending the institution at the time that ex-President Herbert Hoover was there. He took a doctorate at the University of the Pacific, published a small volume of poetry, and accepted a position at the San Jose State Normal School, later to become the California State College at San Jose. During this period there were born to the Blands three children—Harold, who died in infancy, Morton, who was to plague

many of Bland's later days, and Mildred, who married Joaquin Miller's grandson and who is the sole survivor of Bland's immediate family. For many years Mildred was her father's amanuensis.

In this decade he became intimately acquainted with Joaquin Miller, Jack London, Charles Warren Stoddard, George Wharton James, and Edwin Markham. In this period, or slightly later, he formed somewhat more than casual acquaintanceships with George Sterling, John Muir, Luther Burbank, David Starr Jordan, President Sproul of the University of California, and Jacob Riis. All of these men knew Bland, were interested in his aspirations, and developed an affection for him that manifests itself in the letters that they wrote to him and in the records of their contacts with him. For over half a year he and his family lived at Joaquin Miller's rugged estate, The Hights. He spent many long hours with Stoddard in "the old Stevenson town," Pacific Beach. For many months, at his home on Hedding Street, he was host to the venerable poet, Edwin Markham. And, on many carefree Saturdays, with Jack London, Meade Bland roamed the foothills east of San Jose.

Bland's friendships with the literati were deliberately sought. "My constant desire," he confessed frankly, "was to know how the trick was done."

Jack London's first sweetheart lived next door to the Blands in San Jose, and it was through her that the poet made the acquaintance of the turbulent author of *Martin Eden*. They were soon taking long hikes together in the vicinity of "Starland," a small estate that Bland had purchased in the Hamilton hills. Their talk as they rambled through the woods and among the hills was of writing and philosophy. Jack London professed to be a thoroughgoing agnostic at this time, and Bland, always a devout Methodist, sought, for doubtless it was in his blood, to bring him, if not to the fold, at least to a sunny spot within sight of it. Although Jack London was never convinced—indeed, he worked hard to persuade Bland to his own deep pessimism—he took an almost riotous delight—this according to May Bland Parker—in opening up the topic with the assumption that on this day he would be "washed in the Blood of the Lamb."

Meade Blande was an ardent admirer of London, frequently reviewed his books for an Oakland paper, and defended him

against any and all calumniators. There were many of them, apparently, among Bland's associates. His zeal in defense carried him on one occasion rather beyond the bounds of fact. "Jack London does not drink," he stated firmly and with absolute conviction. The author of *John Barleycorn* would himself have raised his eyebrows at that one. Yet, Bland was utterly sincere.

Early in his married life, Bland experienced two painful misfortunes. His beautiful young wife began to suffer from a malady that was eventually to bring her to invalidism. At sometime in her youth she had suffered a head injury, an injury that gradually undermined her health and made her increasingly querulous as the years passed. The second misfortune, amounting to a tragedy because of the almost extreme affection lavished upon him, was the death of an infant son, Harold. Although Bland went about his teaching duties, his poetizing, his editing of the *Pacific Short Story Magazine*, with no outward show of grief, the following elegiac verse gives a hint of his heavy feelings at this time. The poem is dedicated to Harold:

Where lupines bloom and poppies blow
And poplars tower to the sky
And long green lines of new-sown wheat
Slope down to where the marshes lie,

'Tis there beneath the poplar shade,
Watched by a thousand lupine eyes,
Asleep and alone in a dim, dim night—
My own, my matchless Harold, lies.

O cruel plover, cry no more
Like moaning tide or sullen wind;
For all unmeet it is to grieve
Except for those who fare behind.²

During the years between 1900 and 1906, Bland turned his attention more and more frequently to contemporary California literature. He did reviews of the works of Californians for *Town and Country* and for the Sunday editions of the metropolitan papers. Furthermore, he began making the acquaintance of California authors. Edwin Markham and Joaquin Miller he knew already, the former as a frequent visitor to the San Jose campus and to his home (where he stayed for a period of six months on one visit) and the latter as the sage and soothsayer to whom he

² From a version used by Edwin Markham in his preface to Bland's *Sierran Pan and Other Poems*.

had shepherded his Pacific Short Story Club on several occasions.

In 1905 he formed a friendship with two interesting Californians—George Sterling and Charles Warren Stoddard. He met George Sterling, probably through Jack London, at the Ruskin Club in Oakland. Both London and Sterling participated in the energetic debates on socialism that took place there, but Bland felt that neither was a particularly able speaker. After the meeting they retired to a cafe to drink coffee, which Sterling drank black, saying as he did so, "Who would ruin the divine drug by putting in mere flesh and a chemical?" Sterling visited Bland several times at the college and spoke on two of these visits before Bland's class in poetics. He was, Bland reports, very shy and fled from the room before the approach of a bevy of college girls bent on making his acquaintance. Sterling and Bland were together on other occasions, notably at Monterey, where Charles Warren Stoddard had taken up residence.

Stoddard was well along toward seventy when Bland and he first met. The meeting took place at O'Connor's Sanatorium in San Jose in September, 1905. Stoddard was not an invalid, but he liked the looks of the sanatorium the first time he saw it and with characteristic resolution unpacked his bags and "settled." The author of *In the Footsteps of the Padres* and *South Sea Idylls*, who had retired from active life to enjoy the afterglow of a distinguished literary career, liked Bland from the start. Almost everyone did.

When, tiring of O'Connor's, and also of Santa Barbara where he tried living for a while, Stoddard domiciled himself in Monterey, Bland made regular pilgrimages to visit him there. Stoddard had established himself at Mike Noon's, in a spacious studio with a large bay window overlooking the town, the bay, and a corner of the blue Pacific. Here, for Bland's benefit, he awakened memories of the old *Overland* days when with Bret Harte and Ina Coolbrith he helped establish and maintain the first of the regional magazines. He told Bland how he now worked—at his desk at an appointed hour, there to remain until he had done a stint of seven hundred words. After he had achieved his seven hundred words he would turn his chair to the bay window, relax, and gaze contentedly out over the blue bay and beyond to the ocean. With this routine duly established, he felt completely at peace with himself and content to live out his years in the melancholy twilight of a bachelor's old age.

Now and then Bland would arrive early enough to breakfast with Stoddard at the Eagle Restaurant. It was a bountiful meal and after it, probably without Bland's approval, he would order a bottle of wine. At this point, by prearrangement, a music dealer across the street would put on phonograph records—everything from ragtime to classical pieces—and Stoddard, hands folded across a well-nourished torso, would retire to ecstasy.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of these visits to Stoddard at Monterey was the acquaintanceship Bland struck up with Jules Simoneau—the proprietor of the cafe where R.L.S. used to have his frugal meals. Stevenson would come to the cafe in the evenings, Simoneau recalled, after a day of writing, and there ordering a small dinner with wine he would talk with Simoneau and whoever else happened to be in the restaurant until a late hour. At midnight or later Stevenson would leave, in high spirits, and take his way home through the town, singing melodiously.

From Simoneau, also, Bland heard the story of Stevenson's "forest fire." Long streamers of dry moss hung from some of the trees in the woods near Monterey. Out of curiosity, one day, Stevenson struck a match to one of them. A sudden flare and in a matter of seconds the woods were on fire. With miraculous speed it spread, but, fortunately, some townspeople at the edge of the woods saw it, gave the alarm, and after working feverishly all day and into the night, managed to get it under control. Stevenson, very penitent about the affair, did not reveal himself as the culprit, but in a letter to a friend he reported shamefacedly, but perhaps a little gleefully, too, that when the fire got under way "he ran like hell away from there." The townspeople were angry for days about the affair, as well they might be considering their scorched hands and desperate toil, but in Monterey no one except Simoneau, to whom R.L.S., much later, made a contrite confession, ever knew the author of their woes.

Bland collected other Stevenson stories—one about a placard called "Two-bits" that Stevenson wrote and posted to shame a local padre who contributed that meager sum to the cause of returning a shipwrecked Norwegian sailor to Norway. The attack was on the niggardliness of the padre's gift, but like the adventure of the forest fire, R.L.S. came to regret his action for, as it turned out, the padre was in reality very poor and had given, as he invariably had done, throughout his ministry, in all charitable

causes, every penny that he could spare. That placard, which apparently was collected and destroyed by the parishioners of the old padre, was the object of Stoddard's and Bland's search for many years. It would be, of course, priceless.

Bland followed Stevenson's trail in Monterey with the sentimental delight of one completely devoted to the lords of *belles lettres*. He walked through the woods where R.L.S. strolled, to the spot once occupied by the home of the Van Der Grifts, where R.L.S. had his rooms, to the goat ranch in the hills south of Monterey, where Stevenson spent three weeks recuperating from the effects of the dampness suffered in the bay region, and he visited for long hours with Jules Simoneau. The result of these visits to the "old Stevenson town" was a substantial essay on Stevenson's days in and near Monterey. Bland's interest in Stoddard and Monterey lasted until Stoddard's death and he always looked back upon the town and his associations there with the nostalgia of one who had lived, by proxy at least, in the beautiful bay-side town when it sheltered that brave but unfortunate spirit, Robert Louis Stevenson.

All during this period, as a matter of course, he was carrying on his teaching duties at the college. He was what is often called, for want of a better name, an "inspirational teacher." His enthusiasm for creative writing was so infectious that he kept the most unlikely students, and as far as that is concerned, townspeople, busy writing verse.

One of the interesting aspects of the life of this gentle character that we are examining is the response that came from these, his former students, whom, continually throughout his life, he kept urging to *write, write, write*. Letters from them came to him from all parts of California and from elsewhere—letters containing such complaints, entreaties, and triumphs as the following, gleaned at random from literally scores of letters in the poet's personal file of correspondence:

Like every other human being I want to get into print and be as much of a somebody as possible. I shall greatly appreciate any efforts of yours in that regard in my behalf.

What I wondered was, if you could tell me if I had any soul or gift of a poet that would pay me to cultivate? . . . It seems at times that I must write something.

Prior to beginning my story (the narrative of a poem) I practiced as you told me with Spenserian stanzas in description, snapshots of scenes and moods I wished to preserve as souvenirs of a certain summer. This is one of the justifications of the amateur verse writer.

I am just wondering if you kept the verses I sent you. If you did, I wish you would correct one so the meter is all right, and write me a letter about it so I can show it to them, that is, the Shakespeare Club. I will be grateful to you if you will. I feel discouraged. To tell the truth, there are very few people in Placerville who know much about poetry.

The gnawing pain experienced by writers jilted by the authors' markets, or just unappreciated, is hinted at in the following excerpts taken from letters postmarked all the way from San Francisco to Athens, Georgia:

You have no doubt read most of my verses in *M.H.* and may be surprised that except from a few others and *yourself*, I have received no thanks for what I have been doing the last year, free, gratis, and for nothing.

My mind overflows with creative energy but nothing that I can do satisfies, so your kindly helpful spirit was the most satisfying thing that I have experienced in a long, long time. I have written a great deal, but I never seem able to find a market for my wares. I lack something, I know that.

I do not know what is the matter with my writing; I have an idea it is too mechanical. I am told that I have all the machinery, but it may be that I lack oil—I don't know.

Since I left San Jose I have done as you said and made a few efforts at verse. But nothing has come.

I want to devote myself more steadily to a novel I am writing but it is hard to find the time. I know one thing—if I had had this present husband years back, I could have arrived as a writer. He is so enthusiastic.

It is evident that most of the writers of these letters to Bland found solace and encouragement in the poet's letters to them. The woman who wrote the letter from which the last excerpt is taken apparently had at least two admirers, Bland, always encouraging, and her "present husband." Not many were so fortunate, one would judge, and it is an interesting sidelight on the tremendous creative urge engendered by Professor Bland. The market for poetry in our century is virtually *nil*, and yet this host of

amateurs kept patiently at it, many of them throughout life. Meade Bland was an apostle, and a very effective one apparently, of the philosophy that until one has expressed himself *in poetry* he cannot purge himself of the unhappiness of life. The irony does not escape one that for the more passionately-devoted worshippers of the muse, their failures at poetry only added a new and, one would judge, more poignant sorrow. But it is obvious that as a teacher of poetry Bland was inspirational. Several of his students became poets of some standing, and one and all they knew the poets and they knew poetic technique. Few would be uncharitable enough to deny that there are subject matters less worthy of acquisition. Perhaps a final excerpt will attest one of the values of Bland's teaching and inspiration. It reads:

I think I never appreciated so much what you taught us about poetry until this summer. My work has been so mechanical and so uninteresting, and poetry has come to mean a release from what at times seems a world too sapient and too selfishly practical. However, even in my contacts with the business world I am finding some grist for the literary mill.

It is obvious that the men and women of the West, from earliest times, were eager to get into print. Often there was more energy in them than literary talent, and yet more than one of the literarily-inclined, working in literary groups as neophytes, finally "arrived." They were perpetually eager to learn. Bland himself attached himself to Joaquin Miller's "academy in the grove;" that is, he went to The Hights to sit at the feet of that strange seer and poet of the Sierras, Joaquin Miller, in lieu of taking a year of graduate work in English at an Eastern college.

After the death of Stoddard, Bland turned for literary companionship, as has just been indicated, to Joaquin Miller. Shortly before the close of the college year, in June, 1911, Bland received a letter from Miss Juanita Miller, the individualistic daughter of the aging bard, inquiring whether or not he would be interested in a lot on The Hights. The letter appears to be a continuation of a conversation, held earlier at The Hights, with respect to the establishment of an art colony and academy of letters there. The nucleus of the colony was to be "Waterhouse, newspaper man, Herbert Bashford, playwright, Gertrude Boyle, sculptress, Meade Bland, poet, Juanita Miller, composer," and, as patron of the group and its preceptor, Joaquin Miller. Bland, who at the time

had obtained a leave of absence from the college, replied that he was intending to do a year's work at some college in the East. Miss Miller immediately wrote back and offered him her studio in New York—on the first floor of Carnegie Hall—which she had decided to relinquish. The rental, she wrote, was fifteen dollars a month, its only inconvenience the fact that the "toilet was about fifty feet away in the Green Room behind the scenes of The Hall." The letter urges him to reconsider and purchase a lot on The Hights, however, and she suggests a small deposit.

Bland no doubt would have gone East (and amiably, as usual, to Juanita Miller's studio) for he was much interested in Columbia University as the site for his studies, but just at the time he was preparing his plans, his son Morton, now in his late teens, entangled himself in a pool-room brawl which resulted in a fine. The expense involved in paying the fine and costs in the case cut into Bland's small store of cash. Perhaps this could have been surmounted, but Morton, having fallen in love with a girl who worked for the Blands, had precipitated a marriage which used up most of what remained. Bland took these affairs with his usual calm and uttered his familiar apology, "Morton is a good boy at heart. He just hasn't found himself." Shortly thereafter he accepted the invitation to The Hights and as a fellow in Joaquin Miller's academy spent the next six months of his life. It was, at least, inexpensive.

The Hights, Joaquin Miller's eerie above Oakland, where at a cottage named "The Willows" the Blands domiciled themselves, was originally an almost barren stretch of ground upon which a brilliant sun beat unmercifully during the summer season. It was, to use Miller's favorite phrase, a "tawny hill" before the rains came, a somewhat ragged green hill in the damp season. But Joaquin Miller had transformed the hill during the years and in 1911, some twenty-five years after he had first moved in, it was covered with beautiful trees and shrubs. His little houses, scattered with poetic nonchalance over the slopes, seemed fitting habitations for poets and artists. Mrs. Bland, rather better this year than most, could be taken care of easily, and she was even able on occasion to participate in the housework and house chores that were never too arduous, nor too exacting, in this bohemian environment. She was as comfortable, perhaps, as at San Jose.

That Bland enjoyed the life on The Hights seems certain. There

was a routine amount of rough work to be done—cutting and hauling wood, a little landscaping, and food to be brought up from Dimond, the near-by village, in Miller's light carriage. There was ample time for composition and for conversation. How much "instruction" there was from Miller does not appear. But that Bland had an opportunity to give rein to his desire to write poetry goes without saying and that he composed much while at The Hights is also evident. In addition, he wrote articles for the Oakland and other papers of the bay region and probably there accrued to him from these latter sources a modest income.

What was Joaquin Miller like in these years? Bland, who had chosen Miller as a biographical subject, was well able to answer this question.

The rugged poet of the Sierras still wore his flannel shirt, his high-topped boots, and his red cap. The years were beginning to tell upon him, however, and he was wont to lean against his stalwart trees for support after periods of short exertion. For extended walks he usually relied upon the supporting arm of Juanita who was his constant attendant in his last years.

His temper was unholy and on an uncertain leash. Bland remembers that his companions at the "school of poetry"—his classmates, as it were—were constantly reminding him that one day he would be the victim of Joaquin's blistering wrath and that it would be because of some infringement of the strict code of behavior that Joaquin had set up for his disciples in poetry. Each of them had been seared by the scorching anger of the sage of The Hights, but Bland had for some reason or another been missed, and they were eager to have this gentle poet and professor share the experience.

One day, Bland tells us, he was busy at an appointed task—chopping wood for the company woodpile. One block flew up from the ax stroke and landed squarely in the path leading down from the cottages. That in itself would have been a trivial matter except for the fact that when Bland looked up from the log that he was engaged in hewing to pieces, whom should he see but the patriarchal Joaquin, leaning on the arm of Juanita, and heading straight for the stick of wood in the path. Bland felt that his turn had come, for Joaquin had laid down the law on this point—no wood could be allowed to lie in the path. Joaquin had suffered a bad fall shortly before, and he dreaded any threat of another.

It galled him terribly to be "laid up." Joaquin and Juanita moved slowly toward the stick of wood. Bland stood transfixed.

When the two arrived at the fateful spot, Joaquin stopped, lifted his cane, and thrust the stick aside. His brow tightened into a terrible frown. He looked fiercely at Bland. Then, says Bland, he slowly shook a long and bony finger at the culprit, a terrible warning against his carelessness, and passed on. The full flood of the powerful anger that Joaquin could raise never came to the surface, and Bland was spared the fate of his comrades.

Occasionally, when Joaquin was in the mood, and Bland had a sixth sense for discovering these times, he went to visit Joaquin in "the chapel" which served him as a study and living quarters, a chapel, it may as well be said, not always given over to pious meditation.³ Joaquin, reclining at ease in the brass bed, covered with the hide of a wild and wooly horse which had been shot "on the prairies that border the Platte," was usually busy at the task of revising his poetry. During the last years of his life he had decided to overhaul all of his poetry and put it into final and, he hoped, imperishable form. It was here that he related to Bland the adventures of his unconventional life. Bland took no notes but listened raptly.

It is evident from the preliminary chapters published in the Short Story Club magazine and later in book proof (never completed) that Bland accepted what came from Joaquin as authentic. It is not difficult to see how this could come about. Miller was a past master at the art of weaving a plausible pattern from the threads of fact and the yarns of fancy. Only the ultra-conservative scholar can at this day discern where the threads of fact help bind in the yarns of fancy, and even he can be lost in the mazy patterns. But in Joaquin's study, Bland took what fell from Joaquin's lips as in great measure true. Perhaps he had doubts, but he was not inclined to let his doubts obscure the value of Joaquin's word pictures that in essential outline reflected the brave days of the old West. He followed the story of the overland trip—perhaps the least adulterated of the episodes of Miller's life—with complete faith. He recounted the romance that Joaquin made of his days in the Shasta country—many of which, according to the California and Oregon guide books, were spent not in Shasta, but in Eugene, Oregon. He did have, it would seem, some doubts con-

³ A portion of the story of Joaquin Miller's carnality is told in the late Harr Wagner's *Joaquin Miller's Other Self*.

cerning Joaquin's attendance at Columbia College in Eugene and he once wrote to a woman who knew Joaquin in those days to learn if possible the dates of his attendance there. She wrote back a note⁴ to inform him that in her remembrance, obscured by the years, he attended from 1858-1860. This fact did not quite coincide with Miller's own stories, but Bland let the contradiction stand in Joaquin's favor. The story of Miller's English triumph Bland relates rather superficially; and he follows here again, a bit too piously, the story that Miller himself told. But the account as far as it was carried is readable, and though it does not change the story that Miller himself told, very materially, it is interesting. It is quite possible that Bland's account reflects the spirit of Miller and his day better than any later account can. He was in direct contact with the subject, and Bland could be a good mirror because of his ability to efface himself when it served an end.

While Meade Bland was writing poetry, delving into Joaquin Miller's past, and performing the work prescribed to hold body and spirit together, a romance was developing between Mildred Bland and Joaquin Miller's grandson, Aloysius MacCormick. MacCormick was a handsome youth, the son of Miller's daughter, Maude MacCormick, an actress of considerable fame on the Pacific Coast. The romance developed into an engagement and some time after the Blands had returned to San Jose, the two were married.⁵

Once again at San Jose State College, after his sojourn with Joaquin Miller, Bland turned his attention to poetry and to the affairs of teaching. A few months before Miller's death in February, 1913, he made a pilgrimage to The Hights. While visiting Joaquin he had the poet of the Sierras autograph a set of Whitaker and Ray's edition of Miller's works.

The death of Joaquin Miller left Bland disconsolate for a time. He had developed a great affection for the rugged, unpredictable Joaquin.

But shortly thereafter Edwin Markham appeared on the scene and for the next several years they had intermittent associations that appeased Bland's constant desire to be "among the bards." Bland was one of the leading spirits in the movement to set aside

⁴ This note is now in the possession of the writer.

⁵ After a short period of happiness together, Aloysius developed tuberculosis and eventually died. Two sons and a gifted daughter were born to the MacCormicks and it is of interest that their inheritance includes that of two Western poets of note.

the old Markham home in San Jose as a literary landmark and shrine, and this occupied much of his leisure. During these years, roughly those from 1914 to 1920, he was invited to and visited the Jack Londons,⁶ he formed an acquaintanceship with Luther Burbank, and paid a visit to John Muir—to mention only a few of his pilgrimages to the homes and haunts of the literary.

When America entered the war, Bland was an ardent patriot and wrote several poems, of no great merit, it must be confessed, on war topics. His interest in the League of Nations after the war was over was for a time high, but in the early twenties he appears, along with many other Americans, to have lost his interest or his enthusiasm for the plan. Possibly, his interest was entirely absorbed by a new personality who had come on the scene—Senator Phelan of Montalvo, San Francisco, and Washington. Senator Phelan offered a literary idealism as sweeping in its way as Woodrow Wilson's political idealism and it was obvious that Bland, who had so earnestly dedicated himself to Western literature, would be swept away by it. It was Senator Phelan's desire, and a desire which he implemented in many ways, to bring to California "a golden age of art and letters." At his home, Montalvo, a beautiful Italianesque villa in the Saratoga Hills, he arranged for Bland and his students of poetry to hold contests—the prize poems to be included in a volume to be published at Senator Phelan's expense. To these gatherings Senator Phelan invited all the literary notables he could find, and the assemblages had something of the spirit of the classic festivals. Bland thoroughly enjoyed these events and so presumably did his students. Dynamic, dapper Senator Phelan was, however, the happiest and busiest person present.

After one of these visits to Montalvo, Bland wrote a poem called "At Montalvo," commemorating the bright May sunshine, the soft summery clouds, and the fair groves, lilac-bordered roadways, "the linnets in the arbor" and "the quail upon the hill" that had provided the background for the festival day. Senator Phelan, much touched, wrote to Bland immediately on receiving and reading the poem:

⁶ One interesting note from Mrs. Jack London reads: "This water life is the life we love you know—never so happy as when we take two of our Japanese boys, and our work, and our books, and hit the water-trail as it were. We did many sloughs and cuts. The Delta region is wonderfully fascinating to Jack. We shall be happy to have you drop in any time."

Your appreciation of Montalvo is eloquent and appeals to me. I little expected that you bore away so vivid a picture.

But to anyone who knew Meade Bland and the keen pleasure he took in the Montalvo festivals it does not come as a surprise that he could become eloquent in singing its beauties. He felt it to be, as it was and is, the perfect setting for such affairs. That Senator Phelan himself recognized Montalvo's value in this respect is indicated in the fact that his will made provision for its use as a cultural center for all the years to come. Montalvo's summer concerts, plays, and lectures on modern art and literature memorialize each year the benefaction of that Californian Maecenas, the late Senator James Phelan.

In the decade between 1921 and 1931, many things happened to Bland. He was invited to teach at the state college located at San Diego in 1921, accepted, and spent the college year of 1921-1922 in that semitropical environment. He returned to San Jose in 1922 to continue his work there and to pick up the daily round where he had left it the year before.

What was the nature of Bland's daily round? After college hours he usually dropped in for a chat with his friend, Claude Simson, who lived across the way from the campus. During these visits the topic was invariably poetry and the poets, Claude Simson being as enthusiastic as Bland over the work of Markham, Miller, Sterling, and the others.

At noon he visited the restaurant of Stanley Matthews, another friend of long standing. He ate a frugal lunch, usually coffee and doughnuts, and spent the time remaining writing poetry or talking poetry with the proprietor. On one occasion he pressed Matthews to try his hand at a poem. Matthews had just suffered a bereavement in his family and Bland had suggested his standard panacea for mental depression—the composition of a poem. The resulting poem, turned in a few days later, Bland pronounced excellent.

In the afternoons, during his free time, he dropped in to chat with the city librarian, Mrs. Edith Daley, who was a talented poet in her own right and a friend of long standing. Mrs. Daley knew both the virtues and the shortcomings of her fellow-poet and had a great affection for him on both counts. During the last years of the poet's life, he was always somewhat dusty-looking—with his spirit in the midst of the clouds of poetic thought he had little

regard for the mundane and grimy fogs through which he passed in the flesh—and it was Mrs. Daley, probably alone among his friends of those years, who brought the realities to his attention. Despite this, they remained friends to the end.

In the evenings he returned to his home, Arden, a little acreage that he had bought, a few miles out of San Jose. At Arden he worked in his garden, did much of the housework—for Annie Mabel was completely confined to her bed by now—and after a short session of reading or poetizing, retired. Each evening at sunset, it is said, he lifted his invalid wife to the window that she might see the sun setting behind the Santa Cruz Mountains to the west.

Such was his life, and he might have ended his days tranquilly had it not been that after 1926, Annie Mabel began to fail rapidly and, after a severe stroke, died. Even though the death of his wife was not unexpected, the loss hit him with brutal force. He was stricken to the depths, and the letters of condolence that came to him from far and wide did little to alleviate his pain. He realized how empty his life would be without Annie Mabel and how lonely the home which for so many years had been the retreat to which he could retire, relax, and shut out the world. Of all the letters that came to him expressing sympathy, the one from Senator Phelan, perhaps, struck the finest note. It read:

I was deeply pained to hear of your bereavement, and I desire sincerely to offer my condolence.

Your studious habits and congenial work will soften your grief, I hope, and you may find some consolation in the good will kindled in your students and friends.

In the end, no doubt, it was the good will of his friends and the affection of his students that brought him around to something like his cheerful self once more. There was nothing in his treatment of Annie Mabel that could have caused him regret. He had, during the many years of her invalidism, cared for her with all the resources at his command.

New duties and new calls upon his talents brought him along further toward reconciliation to his loss, but it was noted by many of his friends, particularly perhaps by Roland Eberhart, who was very close to Bland during the last years of his life, that much of his old spirit and energy had slipped away from him. His cheerfulness was genuine, his interest in poetry heightened, if anything,

but he had lost the youthfulness that had survived in him even unto late middle age.

A trip back to the Sacramento valley helped to renew somewhat his health and spirit. The land had changed; the marshes were mostly drained now and given over to the raising of vegetables. But there were a few spots that remained much the same, and at one or two points, along the river itself, no changes at all.

In 1928, back in San Jose again, after his visit to the Sacramento valley, Bland was more lonely than ever. He began seeking out his former friends, he spent more and more time at his sister May's home near Mills College, and finally, perhaps in a particularly desperate mood of loneliness, he looked up the sweet-heart of his college days, Josie Stone.

She had married, but was now a widow. It is apparent in the correspondence exchanged between them that she was very ardently interested in renewing the acquaintance. Bland visited her, and the acquaintance ripened into one of those late-winter-of-life romances that often seem, in the light of youthful, natural romance, rather grotesque. It is apparent in this particular late-blooming affair that the loneliness of both, rather than any very deep affection, drew them together.

While Bland was carrying on this courtship, another event was shaping that for Bland was the crowning achievement of his life. A committee of his friends, with the aid and sympathy of State Senator Herbert Jones of San Jose, was promoting Henry Meade Bland for the poet laureateship of California, an office last held by Ina Coolbrith of *Overland* fame. He was nominated, and by unanimous vote of the California legislature elected to the office. That Bland was elated is to state it mildly. Having celebrated throughout his life the scenes, the people, the life of California, he was as happy in this honor as if the laureateship had been that of England.

He was called to Sacramento to receive the laureateship, and so, together with his sister May he set out, in a shiny new Ford, one day, to make the journey there. As it happened, Josie Stone was visiting relatives in Sacramento, and noting in the papers that Bland would be there she invited him to have dinner and spend the night with them.

After the brief ceremonies in the legislative halls were over, Bland and his sister set forth to have dinner with Josie Stone.

Bland had not, apparently, informed his hosts of May's being along and, as a consequence, although the dinner invitation was fulfilled, no mention was made of lodging for the night. At a late hour Bland and his sister took their leave. To complicate matters further, the hotels of Sacramento were all filled and a complete canvass of them netted no room for the night.

Finally, in desperation, Bland and his sister drove to one of the parks, and with May curled up on the back seat and California's newly-crowned laureate stretched out on the front one, they spent the night. Bland himself was unruffled by the adventure, but May, although she saw the irony of it, was less inclined to be charitable at least not toward Josie Stone, the cause, in a sense, of their discomfort. "The worst of it was," she said in relating the experience, "it drizzled *all night long*."

Returning to San Jose, Bland appears to have kept up a correspondence with Josie Stone for some little time. Then, the ardor of one or the other cooled, the correspondence ceased, and for a second time Josie Stone floats out of the life of Henry Meade Bland.⁷

The sands of that life were by now running out. During 1930 the poet was busy putting the finishing touches to a sonnet series that he had begun shortly before the honor of the laureateship had come to him. Busy, happy, constantly feted, he was so inspired and elated that often in these sunset years he lived beyond his physical means. He was definitely beginning to slow down now, and his work at the college was pressing rather heavily upon him. He still had his friends, Roland Eberhart, Clara Kuck, Claude Simson, Gwendolen Penniman, Stanley Matthews, Alma Williams, to name but a few of those in San Jose; he still maintained his correspondence with friends, both illustrious and non-illustrious, in California and beyond; and he still, right to the end, wrote

⁷ One of the last of the series of letters exchanged between the two contains the following couplet by the hand of Josie Stone:

You'll soon be waking
To find your heart is aching.

It would be facetious to suggest that these lines may have hurried the romance to its conclusion, and one need not pause to emphasize their lack of merit. Josie Stone, it seems safe to say, was considerably below the level of Bland mentally and it is doubtful that their marriage would have been a happy one.

poetry. He died in 1931 in a hospital room in San Jose—a lonely death, for few of his friends knew that he had come to the end of the road. A quatrain that he wrote in the mid-twenties is appropriate as an epitaph to the life of this gentle soul. It reads:

*I choose the rugged boulder-planted road
And day by day take on new wounds and scars;
My feet are torn by thorns, my head is bowed,
And, yet, a Hand points onward—to the stars!*

Sixteen Specimen Poems from the Poetical Works of Henry Meade Bland with a Critical Introduction

I

THE editor of the *London Poetry Review*, who had accepted and published several specimens of Henry Meade Bland's poetry, once said of him: "Mr. Bland is steeped in poetry, with an instinctive love and wise understanding of humanity and nature, which he is able to express in beautiful, tender verse." The opening assertion, that Bland was "steeped in poetry," conforms so nicely to the truth of the matter that it may well become the first of the three qualifications that make Bland a significant Western poet. The other two are: his scholarly appreciation of and his mastery, within the generous limits that he set himself, of the great variety of expression susceptible to the techniques of English prosody; his adherence to the American pastoral tradition in poetry. But as a natural sequence to this biographical study the fact of Bland's being infused with poetry is worthy of first consideration in the discussion to follow.

Much point has been made in recent years of what has been called "the literature of escape," literature, that is, which frees us by its careful exclusions and selections from the hard discipline of the daily round. The question often arises—if this escape-literature frees us, the readers, from the harsh realities, what is it doing for the author? Is it freeing him, also, from certain obstinate facts of his daily existence?

In the case of Bland, who turned to poetry during almost every leisure moment, it seems safe to say that he was, if not escaping, at least retiring, from a difficult environment. He penned verses on the streetcars of San Jose, as he strolled in the city park, as he sat on a bench at the city hall as he waited to pay his taxes, and with Edwin Markham, he wrote poetry on more than one occasion from dusk until dawn. It has already been stated that he sought in poetry solace for bereavements. It was poetry, also, that alleviated the brief periods of discouragement that came to him in his sometimes unhappy life. Assuredly, poetry for Bland was a means of escape.

But to assign to poetry, insofar as Bland is concerned, the function of a sedative and nothing more is to miss one of the major urges of his makeup. Fundamentally Bland wrote poetry, and urged others to write poetry, in order that he might know himself to the very soul. Among certain tribes of American Indians it was once the custom for each individual to have an identifying song, his song, a song to express his deep affinity with nature. He had, also, his death song, his psalm of *départure* from this world and its uncertainties and hazards. Bland's poetry was written from somewhat similar motives—to heighten the sense of his own individuality and to express his deep faith in the curative and restorative powers of nature. Many of his poems are consecrations of himself to the highest that is in him. "Infinite aspiration" was his lucky motto, and he had a symbol, a cross within concentric circles, which he used to draw on the paper intended for one of his poems. Bland was steeped in poetry, and wrote poetry, because it satisfied the deep mysticism that animated his quiet life.

Bland's technical felicity and his mastery of a wide variety of prosodical forms are features of his work best understood by fellow-prosodists. In such a line as his opening one in the sonnet, "Not in Sappho"—*No not in Sappho, love-lorn and beautiful*—the casual reader will probably not pause to notice the skillful use of assonance. But notice the range of *o* sounds that vanish into the long *u* and the short *u* of the word *beautiful*. Such lines are not happy accidents. Bland knew prosody and when he had once written a poem, he revised it with prosodical skill. His revisions are almost always for the benefit of prosody.

Bland made frequent use of the rarer forms of verse. He wrote rondeaux, triolets, and other of the old French forms. He wrote a long poem (*California*, 1925) in chant royal. He topped this achievement—one does not need to ask to what practical end—by writing another (*The Search*, 1928) in double chant royal, the only example of its kind in literature. One does not need to inquire, as has been just said, concerning the usefulness of this and other of Bland's experiments in verse. It is sufficient justification that it interested him to write in the complex prosodical forms and that his product is skillful. His poetry in the main, of course, depends for its interest on the harmony of content with form, and it should be pointed out here that his success lies in the sonnet and in several pastoral pieces, lyric in spirit, devoted to the California scene.

In addition to ballads, odes, poems based metrically on variations of the Spenserian stanza, and poems employing the couplet, Henry Meade Bland wrote sonnets. A catalogue of the sonnet forms used will suffice to indicate the facility and range of the poet in the creation of the most difficult of all the poetic forms. He used the Petrarchan, the Shakespearean, the Spenserian, the Miltonian, and the Shelleian. Double sestets and even triple sestets he uses effectively, and he experimented with unconventional rhyme sequences, as did Shelley. The sonnets that result from his careful study and his experimentation (always restrained) are polished, vigorous, and full of literary color.

Bland adhered throughout his career as poet to the pastoral vein. He wrote of the California scene as Longfellow and Whittier might have written about it. His poems are filled with Hebraic and classical allusions and the moral tone is always strong and clear. Those who look for the robustness of Whitman, the philosophical pessimism of Jeffers, the massive puritanism of John Milton will look in vain through the poetry of Bland for such qualities or interests. One finds in Bland perspicuous poetry dedicated to the region in which he was born, in which he lived without ever traversing its borders, and in which he died. There is a place in American literature for such voices. Our nation, stretching from Atlantic to Pacific, from Canadian woods to Mexican mesquite lands, is diverse enough to cherish those of its regional singers possessed of merit and a full realization of the aesthetic and spiritual resources of their native soil. On these grounds, it becomes a privilege to present Henry Meade Bland, who, in the specimens soon to follow, makes a belated bid for recognition.

II

The deliberations upon content and mood in Bland's poetry which have led me to choose the sixteen specimen poems that follow have resulted in selections that echo the poet's life. It will be apparent, however, that there is an additional motive—to illustrate the variety of verse forms the poet was proficient in and practiced so assiduously. To illustrate the affiliation of the poems with the various periods of the poet's life, captions are provided for each of the four groups that comprise the sixteen.

A final word on the variety of verse forms used by Bland will conclude this brief critique.

The sonnet that opens the collection is an example of Bland's use of the Italian, or Petrarchan, form. The octave which rimes *abbaabba* is followed by a sestet which rimes *cdcdcd*. Since the sestet in the Italian form has always allowed latitude in the rime scheme, Bland is not varying the form here. The *cdcdcd* form is one which John Keats favored.

The second poem is basically anapestic in meter and if it were written in a different line form it would have internal rime as an added attribute. Its form, of course, bears some resemblance to Shelley's "The Cloud." The last poem in the first group is likewise anapestic, and it has in addition to great technical merit a felicitous reproduction of a mood.

The first poem in the second group is a triolet, somewhat more tranquil in subject matter than is usual in that most sprightly of the old French forms. Bland's courses in poetics emphasized these forms and among his poems are to be found rondels and at least one example of the villanelle.

The last poem in the third group is an interesting example of onomatopoeic verse, and, incidentally, a very successful example. The thought of the poem is skillfully blended with the sound, and the resulting tone-color is such as to make this a distinguished achievement, to speak conservatively, in onomatopoeia. Bland penned this poem at his sister's home above Mills College as he was awaiting her announcement of dinner. The poem could be used as an exemplification of Joaquin Miller's favorite sentiment regarding poetry "that it be written *on the spot*."

The first poem in the fourth group is selected because of the mood, one typical of the patient, persevering Bland. Like many of Bland's poems, it draws its inspiration from the California scene.

The last four poems are sonnets. "Content Am I," "In the Friendly Door," and "Beauty Supreme" are in the Petrarchan tradition, the sestets varying in rime scheme as is the privilege of the poet writing in the Italian pattern. The last sonnet is Shakespearean.

The ensuing sixteen specimen poems, which the reader will now have an opportunity to examine, show the scope of Bland as a poet, in mood, in content, and in technical mastery. They are not modern in tone; they represent, in fact, the lingering muse of Victorian poetry naturalized on the shores of—in Joaquin Miller's phrase—the sundown seas.

Sixteen Specimen Poems

from the

Poetry of Henry Meade Bland

I. RECOLLECTIONS OF YOUTH

SUNRISE OVER THE SIERRAS
THE NORTH WIND
THE WIND AROUND THE EAVES

II. COLLEGE YEARS; ILLUSTRIOUS FRIENDS

AFTERNOON IN THE QUAD
THE RESTLESS SEA AT MONTEREY
TO JOAQUIN MILLER
JOHN MUIR

III. ANNIE MABEL BLAND

LOVE'S PURPOSE
TO ANNIE MABEL
RESURGENCE
BELLS AT MILLS COLLEGE

IV. LAST YEARS

I KEEP A-CLIMBING
CONTENT AM I
IN THE FRIENDLY DOOR
BEAUTY SUPREME
BENEDICTION

I

Sunrise over the Sierras

I mind me how one day-break, long ago,
I heard the wild swan play his magic horn;
Heard the cold north wind blow his pipe forlorn;
Heard the sweet stream purl gently to and fro
In oaten meadows, while the lyric flow
Of field-lark hymn called to the splendid morn
Until the sun, a light divine, new-born,
Lifted—a wild flash over the virgin snow.

Then was I like the holy orient priest,
Who gave unto the fire a sacred name,
And ever burned his altar in the East;
Or like the rapturous poet-king who came
At morn, as to a pentacostal feast—
And saw Jehovah in the Rising Flame!

**The North Wind**

I come from far,
By the northern star,
Where the cold white silence lies;
Where the wild waves war
On the Yukon bar,
And the drear, cold icebergs rise.

To the ocean caves
I roll great waves,
As I wheel down the rock-bound coast;
And the weird cliff raves
As the seaman braves
The angry scream of my host.

On the pulsing tide
I ride, I ride,
Till the mad waves leap and run
Nor is staid my stride
Till my legions abide
Mid the isles of the tropic sun.

I moan and wail
In the tattered sail
 Of the helmless sea-worn bark,
And my wild fierce gale
Leaves never a trail
Of the keel I swirl in the dark.

I was strong and young
When the years first flung
 The groves of Eden in bloom;
And the paeans sung
By my brazen tongue
Shall chant till the hour of doom.



The Wind Around the Eaves

'Tis the deep of autumn twilight
And I sit beside the fire
Watching how, like yearning spirits,
Reddening flames rise high and higher;
Then I catch the first faint singing
That the magic twilight weaves
And sit spell-bound by the music
Of the wind around the eaves.

II

Afternoon in the Quad

The sunlight sleeps upon the lawn
With autumn leaf and clover, white,
A wonder, rivaling the dawn.
The sunlight sleeps upon the lawn
And Time goes sweetly on and on—
A bird that wings in silent flight.
The sunlight sleeps upon the lawn,
Fairer than all the stars of night.

**The Restless Sea at Monterey**

Down where the restless sea is white, and where
The coraled rocks are bare, and where the sail
Of salmon sloops are bright in the high glare,
There will I lonesome watch, in the deep swail,
The troubled seaweed; there in the loved eremy,
Watching the swift waves strike and flee
Back to the boundless surging watery plain.
Your Presence, tarrying on the endless chain
Of those great billowy marchers, may restore
The quiet dream; and I quest, whole and sane,
Until I find you on your coral shore.

To Joaquin Miller

O Singer that Sierran hills
Have nursed in joy and sorrow long;
Whose soul hath drunk from hidden rills
That flow from fancy's sacred wells;
Whose voice from peak to peak hath sung—

Sing, ere the evening bells are rung,
Sing, once again thy pines among,
Sing, in a measure swift and strong,
The music of the olden days,
The story of the golden days.



John Muir

He walked apart with God among the hills;
He loved alike the brook or roaring stream;
He knew the spirit every leaf distills,
He walked with God among His shining hills.

Drinking from every chalice Nature fills,
Resting at eve with many a magic dream,
Communed he with his God among the hills—
And Truth was with him and her starry gleam.

III

Love's Purpose

Love brings the blush into the fair wild rose
And paints the white upon the heron's plume;
And flings into wild dream the prophet's prose;
And points the starry lights in midnight gloom.

Love sends the gleam into the infant's eye;
And makes the rustle in the bladed corn;
Instills the sweetness in the young girl's sigh;
Flashes the red into the whit'ning morn.

And if love did not with her shining wand
Entrance the earth and sea and wondrous sky,
Chaos would break his old restraining bond;
And bee, and bird, and flower, and man would die.

**To Annie Mabel**

Even as a star reflected in the deep
Of some fair marsh lagoon, she was to me.
No winter breath of air breaks on the sleep
Of crystal water, quiet from the sea.
And thus, in the still lake of memory—
As in the reedy pool the mirrored star—
On her I look forever, and, lovingly,
I see her in the glory where the aeons are.

Resurgence

I will arise. My face I will uplift
Even as the gold-hued shining April flowers
Uplift edenic faces to the rift
Of clouds that pour down gentle, freshening showers!

I will exult today even as a bird
That threnodies in wonder over its nest;
I will exalt me in the mystic word
Spoken by stream and tree, and I will rest
In the white sunshine of the rapturous day.

No more will I be overladen with sorrow;
No more be weighted by this heavy clay.
For now I know there is a happy morrow;
Yea, now the light shall lift me from this gloom
And joy shall blow—a lily in full bloom.



Bells at Mills College

Each hour I hear the chime at Mills
Ring gently through the tree-crowned hills:
Two clear, one strong, one sweetly low,
As if a voice from long ago.

Two clear, that sing of strength and life,
One strong, as if with sin at strife,
One strange, as autumn breezes blow
A sigh from long, ah, long ago!

Two clear, as light in sunlit vales,
One strong, a joy that never fails;
One true as wisdom's timeless flow,
That lit my soul, oh, long ago!

Two clear, as Saturn's filmy light,
One swift and sharp, a sea-dove's flight,
One soft as love in summer's glow,
A happy song from long ago!

IV

I Keep A-Climbing

I only keep a-climbing,
I know the stars of God are overhead,
And by yon far-off gleaming spirit-wand,
The meteor's gleam, I know that I am led.
And so, I keep a-climbing.

I only keep a-climbing.
It may be yon blue range will be the last,
It may be many others loom beyond,
And yet I know the summit will be passed,
And so, I keep a-climbing.

**Beauty Supreme**

Yea, evermore I feel myself in love
With elemental things; the reddening rose;
The flowing stream, the wind that gently blows
O'er meadows oaten; the note of mating dove;
The woodland sweet with blossoms interwove;
The field-lark singing in the willow-close;
And every bud that in the garden grows;
The star eternal orb'd in blue above!

And oh, this love for beauty in the field,
This wonder-love for elemental things!
Lo, as I muse on earth, and sky, and sea,
I am as one who stands with soul revealed—
A lyric bard, who, high-exalting, sings,
Unto the World-Heart throbbing deathlessly.

In the Friendly Door

"The beautiful comes flying down the ways
Of shining life"—so to myself I said.
At once the air was all a rosy red
And I was in a radiant amaze.
Even the sun, to watch, delayed his blaze.
The living fields incarnadine in hue
Were filled with birds in merry lilt anew—
"Is this," I cried, "the endless day of days?"

There rushed a thought of yester afternoon:
You were complete, as in a crystal glow.
I smiled, I think, as never I before.
Statued like Psyche in the friendly door,
Low words you spoke until they were a rune
Played on forgotten lyres, long ago!



Content Am I

Content am I within my perfect dream
Like to a planet orbiting the sun
Always attuned unto the course I run
Relying on light to lead—Light the Supreme,
A part of the unending starry scheme!
Ethereal me! Happy as I am whirled
Linked as a moon unto a shining world;
I lose myself where stars and comets stream,
Zealous to hold my purpose to the close
All merry moons were made for; and my theme
Beating with song my heart into repose,
Enticing me with many a glow and leam,
Tells me to wait the coming of the Gleam,
High-writ in reddened symbols of the Rose!