

## Diligence is to Magic as Progress is to Flight

With an elephant to ride upon—"with rings on her fingers and bells  
on her toes,"

she shall outdistance calamity anywhere she goes.

Speed is not in her mind inseparable from carpets. Locomotion arose  
in the shape of an elephant; she clambered up and chose  
to travel laboriously. So far as magic carpets are concerned, she  
knows

that although the semblance of speed may attach to scarecrows  
of aesthetic procedure, the substance of it is embodied in such of  
those

tough-grained animals as have outstripped man's whim to suppose  
them ephemera, and have earned that fruit of their ability to endure  
blows,  
which dubs them prosaic necessities—not curios.

## To a Snail

If "compression is the first grace of style,"  
you have it. Contractility is a virtue  
as modesty is a virtue.

It is not the acquisition of any one thing  
that is able to adorn,  
or the incidental quality that occurs  
as a concomitant of something well said,  
that we value in style,  
but the principle that is hid:  
in the absence of feet, "a method of conclusions";  
"a knowledge of principles,"  
in the curious phenomenon of your occipital horn.

## The Monkey Puzzler

A kind of monkey or pine-lemur  
not of interest to the monkey,  
but to the animal higher up which resembles it,  
in a kind of Flaubert's Carthage, it defies one—  
this "Paduan cat with lizard," this "tiger in a bamboo thicket."  
"An interwoven somewhat," it will not come out.  
Ignore the Foo dog and it is forthwith more than a dog,  
its tail superimposed upon itself in a complacent half spiral,  
incidentally so witty;  
but this pine-tree—this pine-tiger, is a tiger, not a dog.  
It knows that if a nomad may have dignity,  
Gibraltar has had more—  
that "it is better to be lonely than unhappy."  
A conifer contrived in imitation of the glyptic work of jade and  
hard stone cutters,  
a true curio in this bypath of curio collecting,  
it is worth its weight in gold but no one takes it  
from these woods in which society's not knowing is colossal,  
the lion's ferocious chrysanthemum head seeming kind in  
comparison.  
This porcupine-quilled, infinitely complicated starkness—  
this is beauty—"a certain proportion in the skeleton which gives  
the best results."  
One is at a loss, however, to know why it should be here,  
in this morose part of the earth—  
to account for its origin at all;  
but we prove, we do not explain our birth.

## Poetry

I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this  
fiddle.  
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers  
that there is in  
it after all, a place for the genuine.  
Hands that can grasp, eyes  
that can dilate, hair that can rise  
if it must, these things are important not because a  
high sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because  
they are  
useful; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,  
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we  
do not admire what  
we cannot understand: the bat,  
holding on upside down or in quest of something to  
eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf  
under  
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels  
a flea, the base-  
ball fan, the statistician—  
nor is it valid  
to discriminate against "business documents and  
school-books"; all these phenomena are important. One must make  
a distinction  
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result  
is not poetry,  
nor till the poets among us can be  
"literalists of  
the imagination"—above  
insolence and triviality and can present  
for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall  
we have  
it. In the meantime, if you demand on one hand,  
the raw material of poetry in  
all its rawness and

that which is on the other hand  
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

## The Past is the Present

If external action is effete  
and rhyme is outmoded,  
I shall revert to you,  
Habakkuk, as on a recent occasion I was goaded  
into doing, by XY, who was speaking of unrhymed verse.  
This man said—I think that I repeat  
his identical words:  
“Hebrew poetry is  
prose with a sort of heightened consciousness. ‘Ecstasy affords  
the occasion and expediency determines the form.’”

## My Apish Cousins

winked too much and were afraid of snakes. The zebras, supreme in their abnormality; the elephants with their fog-colored skin and strictly practical appendages  
were there, the small cats; and the parakeet—  
trivial and humdrum on examination, destroying bark and portions of the food it could not eat.

I recall their magnificence, now not more magnificent than it is dim. It is difficult to recall the ornament, speech, and precise manner of what one might call the minor acquaintances twenty years back; but I shall not forget him—that Gilgamesh among the hairy carnivora—that cat with the

wedge-shaped, slate-gray marks on its forelegs and the resolute tail, astringently remarking: “They have imposed on us with their pale half fledged protestations, trembling about in inarticulate frenzy, saying  
it is not for us to understand art; finding it all so difficult, examining the thing

as if it were inconceivably arcanic, as symmetrically frigid as if it had been carved out of chrysoprase or marble—strict with tension, malignant in its power over us and deeper than the sea when it proffers flattery in exchange for hemp, rye, flax, horses, platinum, timber, and fur.”

## Roses Only

You do not seem to realise that beauty is a liability rather than an asset—that in view of the fact that spirit creates form we are justified in supposing  
that you must have brains. For you, a symbol of the unit, stiff and sharp,  
conscious of surpassing by dint of native superiority and liking for everything  
self-dependent, anything an  
ambitious civilization might produce: for you, unaided to attempt through sheer  
reserve, to confute presumptions resulting from observation, is idle. You cannot make us  
think you a delightful happen-so. But rose, if you are brilliant, it is not because your petals are the without-which-nothing of pre-eminence. You would, minus thorns,  
look like a what-is-this, a mere  
peculiarity. They are not proof against a worm, the elements, or mildew  
but what about the predatory hand? What is brilliance without co-ordination? Guarding the  
infinitesimal pieces of your mind, compelling audience to the remark that it is better to be forgotten than to be remembered too violently,  
your thorns are the best part of you.

described by my  
trunk; nevertheless, I  
perceive feats of strength to be inexplicable after  
all; and I am on my guard; external poise, it  
has its center  
well nurtured—we know  
where—in pride, but spiritual poise, it has its center where?  
My ears are sensitized to more than the sound of  
the wind. I see  
and I hear, unlike the  
wandlike body of which one hears so much, which was made  
to see and not to see; to hear and not to hear;  
that tree trunk without  
roots, accustomed to shout  
its own thoughts to itself like a shell, maintained intact  
by one who knows what strange pressure of the atmosphere; that  
spiritual  
brother to the coral  
plant, absorbed into which, the equable sapphire light  
becomes a nebulous green. The I of each is to  
the I of each,  
a kind of fretful speech  
which sets a limit on itself; the elephant is?  
Black earth preceded by a tendril? It is to that  
phenomenon  
the above formation,  
translucent like the atmosphere—a cortex merely—  
that on which darts cannot strike decisively the first  
time, a substance  
needful as an instance  
of the indestructibility of matter; it  
has looked at the electricity and at the earth-  
quake and is still  
here; the name means thick. Will  
depth be depth, thick skin be thick, to one who can see no  
beautiful element of unreason under it?

## Radical

Tapering  
to a point, conserving everything,  
this carrot is predestined to be thick.  
The world is  
but a circumstance, a mis-  
erable corn-patch for its feet. With ambition, imagination,  
outgrowth,  
nutriment,  
with everything crammed belligerent-  
ly inside itself, its fibers breed mon-  
opoly—  
a tail-like, wedge-shaped engine with the  
secret of expansion, fused with intensive heat to color  
of the set-  
ting sun and  
stiff. For the man in the straw hat, stand-  
ing still and turning to look back at it,  
as much as  
to say my happiest moment has  
been funereal in comparison with this, the conditions  
of life pre-  
determined  
slavery to be easy and freedom hard. For  
it? Dismiss  
agrarian lore; it tells him this:  
that which it is impossible to force, it is impossible  
to hinder.

Pedantic Literalist 30  
 "He Wrote The History Book" 31  
 Critics and Connoisseurs 32  
 To be Liked by You Would be a Calamity 33  
 Like a Bulrush 34  
 Sojourn in the Whale 35  
 My Apish Cousins 36  
 Roses Only 37  
 Reinforcements 38  
 The Fish 39  
 Black Earth 41  
 Radical 43  
 In the Days of Prismatic Color 44  
 Peter 45  
 Dock Rats 47  
 Picking And Choosing 48  
 England 49  
 When I Buy Pictures 51  
 A Grave 52  
 Those Various Scalpels 53  
 The Labors of Hercules 54  
 New York 55  
 People's Surroundings 56  
 Snakes, Mongooses, Snake-Charmers, and the Like 59  
 Bowls 60  
 Novices 61  
 Marriage 63  
 Silence 71  
 An Octopus 72  
 Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns 78  
 Index 81

#### POEMS 1932-1936

Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play  
   The Steeple-Jack 93  
   The Student 95  
   The Hero 97  
 No Swan So Fine 99  
 The Jerboa 100  
 Camellia Sabina 105  
 The Plumet Basilisk 107  
 The Frigate Pelican 112

The Buffalo 115  
 Nine Nectarines and Other Porcelain 117  
 Pigeons 120  
 See in the Midst of Fair Leaves 123  
 Walking-Sticks and Paperweights and Watermarks 124

#### THE PANGOLIN AND OTHER VERSE (1936)

The Old Dominion  
   Virginia Britannia 131  
   Bird-Witted 136  
   Half Deity 137  
   Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle 139  
 The Pangolin 141

#### from WHAT ARE YEARS (1941)

What are Years? 147  
 Rigorists 148  
 Light is Speech 149  
 He "Digesteth Harde Yron" 151  
 Spenser's Ireland 154  
 Four Quartz Crystal Clocks 156  
 The Paper Nautilus 158

#### NEVERTHELESS (1944)

Nevertheless 161  
 The Wood-Weasel 163  
 Elephants 164  
 A Carriage from Sweden 167  
 The Mind is an Enchanting Thing 169  
 In Distrust of Merits 171

#### POEMS 1944-1951

"Keeping Their World Large" 177  
 His Shield 179  
 Propriety 180  
 Voracities and Verities Sometimes are Interacting 182  
 A Face 183  
 By Disposition of Angels 184  
 Efforts of Affection 185  
 The Icosasphere 186  
 Pretiolae 187  
 Armor's Undermining Modesty 188

forms as closely as is now possible to the author's final  
 five of the poems written after the first printing of  
 have been included. Late authorized corrections, and  
 ctions authorized but not made, have been incorpo-  
 tuation, hyphens, and line arrangements silently  
 editor, proofreader, or typesetter have been restored.  
 ditorial amplifications of the notes have been removed.

Clive Driver

# Contents

<i>Author's Note</i>	vii
<i>A Note on the Text</i>	viii

## I. COLLECTED POEMS (1951)

### SELECTED POEMS (1935)

• The Steeple-Jack	5
The Hero	8
• The Jerboa	10
Camellia Sabina	16
No Swan So Fine	19
The Plumet Basilisk	20
The Frigate Pelican	25
The Buffalo	27
Nine Nectarines	29
To a Prize Bird	31
The Fish	32
In This Age of Hard Trying, Nonchalance Is Good and	34
To Statecraft Embalmed	35
Poetry	36
Pedantic Literalist	37
• Critics and Connoisseurs	38
The Monkeys	40
• In the Days of Prismatic Color	41
• Peter	43
• Picking and Choosing	45
• England	46
• When I Buy Pictures	48

A Grave	49
Those Various Scalpels	51
The Labors of Hercules	53
New York	54
People's Surroundings	55
Snakes, Mongooses, Snake-Charmers, and the Like	58
• Bowls	59
• Novices	60
• Marriage	62
• An Octopus	71
Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns	77
The Monkey Puzzle	80
Injudicious Gardening	81
To Military Progress	82
An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish	83
To a Steam Roller	84
To a Snail	85
"Nothing Will Cure the Sick Lion but to Eat an Ape"	86
To the Peacock of France	87
The Past Is the Present	88
"He Wrote the History Book"	89
Sojourn in the Whale	90
Silence	91
WHAT ARE YEARS (1941)	
What Are Years?	95
Rigorists	96
Light Is Speech	97
He "Digesteth Harde Yron"	99
The Student	101
Smooth Gnarled Crape Myrtle	103

x )

Bird-Witted	105
Virginia Britannia	107
Spenser's Ireland	112
Four Quartz Crystal Clocks	115
The Pangolin	117
The Paper Nautilus	121

#### NEVERTHELESS (1944)

Nevertheless	125
The Wood-Weasel	127
Elephants	128
A Carriage from Sweden	131
The Mind Is an Enchanting Thing	134
In Distrust of Merits	136

#### COLLECTED LATER (1951)

A Face	141
By Disposition of Angels	142
The Icosasphere	143
His Shield	144
"Keeping Their World Large"	145
Efforts of Affection	147
Voracities and Verities Sometimes Are Interacting	148
Propriety	149
Armor's Undermining Modesty	151

#### II. LATER POEMS

##### LIKE A BULWARK (1956)

Like a Bulwark	157
----------------	-----

( xi )

the yellow and the crab-claw blue ones with green bracts—  
toad-plant,  
petunias, ferns; pink lilies, blue  
ones, tigers; poppies; black sweet-peas.  
The climate

is not right for the banyan, frangipani, the  
jack-fruit tree; nor for exotic serpent  
life. Ring lizard and snake-skin for the foot if you see fit,  
but here they've cats not cobras to  
keep down the rats. The diffident  
little newt

with white pin-dots on black horizontal spaced  
out bands lives here; yet there is nothing that  
ambition can buy or take away. The college student  
named Ambrose sits on the hill-side  
with his not-native books and hat  
and sees boats

at sea progress white and rigid as if in  
a groove. Liking an elegance of which  
the source is not bravado, he knows by heart the antique  
sugar-bowl shaped summer-house of  
interlacing slats, and the pitch  
of the church

spire, not true, from which a man in scarlet lets  
down a rope as a spider spins a thread;  
he might be part of a novel, but on the sidewalk a  
sign says C. J. Poole, Steeple-jack,  
in black and white; and one in red  
and white says

Danger. The church portico has four fluted  
columns, each a single piece of stone, made  
modester by white-wash. This would be a fit haven for  
waifs, children, animals, prisoners,  
and presidents who have repaid  
sin-driven

senators by not thinking about them. There  
are a school-house, a post-office in a

store, fish-houses, hen-houses, a three-masted schooner on  
the stocks. The hero, the student,  
the steeple-jack, each in his way,  
is at home.

It could not be dangerous to be living  
in a town like this, of simple people,  
who have a steeple-jack placing danger signs by the church  
while he is gilding the solid-  
pointed star, which on a steeple  
stands for hope.

### The Student

"In America everybody must have a degree," the French man  
says, "but the French do not think that all can have it; they don't  
say everyone must go to college." We  
may feel as he says we do; five kinds of superiority

might be unattainable by all, but one degree is not too much.  
In each school there is a pair of fruit-trees like that twin tree  
in every other school: tree-of-knowledge—  
tree-of-life—each with a label like that of the other college:

*lux*, or *lux et veritas*, *Christo et ecclesiae*, *sapient*  
*felici*, and if science confers immortality,  
these apple-trees should be for everyone.  
Oriental arbor vitae we say lightly. Yet you pardon

it as when one thinking of the navy does not know not to infer  
dishonorable discharge from a D. D. It is a  
thoughtful pupil has two thoughts for the word  
valet; or for bachelor, child, damsel; though no one having heard

them used as terms of chivalry would make the medieval use of  
them. Secluded from domestic strife, Jack Bookworm led a  
college life says Goldsmith. He might not say  
it of the student who shows interest in the stranger's resumé

by asking "when will your experiment be finished, Doctor Einstein?"  
and is pleased when Doctor Einstein smiles and says politely  
"science is never finished." But we're not  
hypocrites, we're rustics. The football huddle in the vacant lot

is impersonating calculus and physics and military  
books; and is gathering the data for genetics. If  
scholarship would profit by it, sixteen-  
foot men should be grown; it's for the football men to say.  
We must lean

on their experience. There is vitality in the world of sport.  
If it is not the tree of knowledge, it's the tree of life.  
When Audubon adopted us he taught  
us how to dance. It was the great crab-flounder of Montana caught

and changed from that which creeps to that which is angelic.  
He taught us how  
to turn as the airport wind-sock turns without an error;  
like Alligator, Downpour, Dynamite,  
and Wotan, gliding round the course in a fast neat school,  
with the white

of the eye showing; or as sea-lions keep going round and round the  
pool. But there is more to learn—the difference between cow  
and zebu; lion, tiger; barred and brown  
owls; horned owls have one ear that opens up and one that opens  
down.

The golden eagle is the one with feathered legs. The penguin wing is  
ancient, not degenerate. Swordfish are different from  
gars, if one may speak of gars when the big  
gamehunters are using the fastidious singular—say pig,

and that they have seen camelsparrow, tigerhorse, rat, mouse,  
butterfly,  
snake, elephant, fruit-bat, et cet'ra. No fact of science—  
theology or biology—might  
not as well be known; one does not care to hold opinions that  
fright

could dislocate. Education augments our natural forces and  
prompts us to extend the machinery of advantage  
to those who are without it. One fitted  
to be a scholar must have the heroic mind, Emerson said.

The student concentrates and does not like to fight;  
“gives his opinion  
firmly and rests on it”—in the manner of the poet;

is reclusive, and reserved; and has such  
ways, not because he has no feeling but because he has so much.

Boasting provokes jibes, and in this country we've no cause to boast;  
we are  
as a nation perhaps, undergraduates not students.  
But anyone who studies will advance.  
Are we to grow up or not? They are not all college boys in France.

## The Hero

Where there is personal liking we go.  
Where the ground is sour; where there are  
weeds of beanstalk height,  
snakes' hypodermic teeth, or  
the wind brings the “scarebabe voice”  
from the neglected yew set with  
the semi-precious cat's eyes of the owl—  
awake, asleep, “raised ears extended to fine points,” and so  
on—love won't grow.

We do not like some things and the hero  
doesn't; deviating head-stones  
and uncertainty;  
going where one does not wish  
to go; suffering and not  
saying so; standing and listening where something  
is hiding. The hero shrinks  
as what it is flies out on muffled wings, with twin yellow  
eyes—to and fro—

with quavering water-whistle note, low,  
high, in basso-falsetto chirps  
until the skin creeps.  
Jacob when a-dying, asked  
Joseph: Who are these? and blessed  
both sons, the younger most, vexing Joseph. And  
Joseph was vexing to some.  
Cincinnatus was; Regulus; and some of our fellow  
men have been, though

devout, like Pilgrim having to go slow  
to find his roll; tired but hopeful—

senators by not thinking about them. One  
sees a school-house, a post-office in a  
store, fish-houses, hen-houses, a three-masted schooner on  
the stocks. The hero, the student,  
the steeple-jack, each in his way,  
is at home.

It scarcely could be dangerous to be living  
in a town like this, of simple people  
who have a steeple-jack placing danger-signs by the church  
when he is gilding the solid-  
pointed star, which on a steeple  
stands for hope.

## The Student

COLLECTED: WAY, *ComP*, in the following version:

### The Student

"In America," began  
the lecturer, "everyone must have a  
degree. The French do not think that  
all can have it, they don't say everyone  
must go to college." We  
do incline to feel  
that although it may be unnecessary  
to know fifteen languages,  
one degree is not too much. With us, a  
school—like the singing tree of which  
the leaves were mouths singing in concert—is  
both a tree of knowledge  
and of liberty,—  
seen in the unanimity of college

mottoes, *lux et veritas*,  
*Christo et ecclesiae, sapient*  
*felici*. It may be that we  
have not knowledge, just opinions, that we  
are undergraduates,  
not students; we know  
we have been told with smiles, by expatriates

of whom we had asked "When will  
your experiment be finished?" "Science  
is never finished." Secluded  
from domestic strife, Jack Bookworm led a  
college life, says Goldsmith;  
and here also as  
in France or Oxford, study is beset with  
dangers,—with bookworms, mildews,  
and complaisancies. But someone in New  
England has known enough to say  
the student is patience personified,  
is a variety  
of hero, "patient  
of neglect and of reproach,"—who can "hold by  
himself." You can't beat hens to  
make them lay. Wolf's wool is the best of wool,  
but it cannot be sheared because  
the wolf will not comply. With knowledge as  
with the wolf's surliness,  
the student studies  
voluntarily, refusing to be less  
than individual. He  
"gives his opinion and then rests on it;"  
he renders service when there is  
no reward, and is too reclusive for  
some things to seem to touch  
him, not because he  
has no feeling but because he has so much.

## The Hero

COLLECTED: SP, *ColP*, *ComP*.