

POETRY IN THE PRISONER'S DOCK

Ecclesiastes to the contrary there are many new things under the sun. Atom bombs that can over-kill many times the world's total population, space-ships that can land upon the moon and return safely to earth, these are but two of the modern phenomena which were not dreamt of in the philosophy of the ancient Hebrew prophets. One quite recent innovation, on a much lower level, is the writing of found verse — a harmless enough pursuit, if not taken too seriously.

Found verse might be characterized as verse with the nerve of inspiration missing. It is verse written without a creative fiat. It is produced as a "mere mechanic art," by cutting up someone else's prose (in the words of John Robert Colombo, one of its most enthusiastic practitioners) "into rhythmic line-length units." Certain rules, of course, must be followed. The main rule has been expressed by Professor Frank Scott, who has written found poems which strike a firm note of social protest, thus: "In the strict manner no words should be added or subtracted; the original should be reprinted with only a change from the prose to a free verse form."

Found poems may be found anywhere. I have often been impressed with the great amount of poetry which has been spoken from the prisoner's dock — poetry which relies upon its substance, and not upon its form, for its magic qualities and its power to move the hearts of men.

Comforted by Kipling's words:

"There are six and sixty ways
Of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right!"

I have set myself the task of manufacturing found poems from five of the many eloquent statements that have been made from the prisoner's dock. With an unpractised hand, I have attempted to turn into free verse the dramatic words of four men and one woman.

First on my list is Socrates.

Socrates was the greatest public nuisance in ancient Athens. He considered himself "a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God." "The state," he said, "is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size and requires to be stirred into life." In acting his self-appointed role of gadfly, he punctured the pretensions of too many smug and self-satisfied Athenians to make himself universally popular in his community.

When he was over 70, three Athenians, who had felt his sting, laid a charge against Socrates.

The wonder is that he had escaped prosecution for so long. The indictment against him read: "Socrates does evil. He does not believe in the gods whom the city believes in, but introduces other new deities. He corrupts the youth. Punishment — death."

Socrates was brought to trial before a court of 501 Athenian citizens. He was required, by Athenian law, to conduct his own defence. He explained to the court what he conceived his mission in life to be. He went about, he said, in search of a man wiser than himself. When he came upon a likely candidate, he put him through a rigorous examination.

"When I began to talk with him," he told his judges, "I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me."

Socrates refused to make a plea for mercy, for, as he said, "there seems to be something wrong in asking a favor of a judge . . . for his duty is, not to make a present of justice, but to give judgment."

Of his 501 judges, 281 voted against Socrates. Had 31 votes gone the other way, he would have been acquitted. This result was closer than he could have reasonably expected.

His prosecutors had proposed a sentence of death. In accordance with Greek law, Socrates had the right to put forward an alternative sentence. Had he proposed a sentence of exile, his judges would have been delighted. But he did no such thing. He told them that as he had neglected his worldly concerns for the benefit of the state, the state should vote him a pension for life. When he would not temporize, the judges were given no easy way out. They had no alternative but to impose the death penalty. He was sentenced to drink hemlock.

After sentence had been passed, he addressed the court, speaking in a calm unhurried voice. He spoke earnestly, carefully weighing each word; and, as he faced death, he reaffirmed the values by which he had guided himself in life. These are the words with which he concluded his address:

So, my judges, face death
with a good hope,
and know for certain
that no evil can happen
to a good man,
either in life or after death.
He and his are not neglected
by the gods;
nor has my own approaching end
happened by mere chance.

I see clearly that the time
 had arrived
 when it was better for me to die
 and be released from trouble;
 and so the oracle gave no sign.
 For this reason, also,
 I am not angry with my condemners,
 or with my accusers;
 they have done me no harm,
 although they did not mean
 to do me any good:
 and for this I may gently blame them.
 Still I have a favour
 to ask of them.
 When my sons are grown up,
 I would ask you,
 my friends,
 to punish them,
 And I would have you trouble them,
 as I have troubled you,
 if they seem to care about riches,
 or anything,
 more than about "virtue";
 or if they pretend to be something
 when they are really nothing —
 then reprove them,
 as I have reprov'd you,
 for not caring about that
 for which they ought to care,
 and think they are something
 when they are really nothing.
 And if you do this,
 both I and my sons
 will have received justice
 at your hands.
 The hour of departure has arrived,
 and we go our ways —
 I to die, and you to live.
 Which is better is known
 to God and only to him.

Next on my list is Charles I.

King Charles I of England was beheaded on January 30, 1649. He died a hero's death. Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. As Andrew Marvell has written:

"He nothing common did, or mean,
 Upon that memorable scene,
 But with his keener eye
 The axe's edge did try."

Charles was not entirely to blame for his failure as a king. He suffered from an intellectual virus — a virus which he inherited from his father — James I. He believed in the Divine Right of Kings. His belief was sincere — so sincere, indeed, that it ruled out all argument, or possibility of compromise. It precluded him from grasping even the most fundamental concepts of constitutional government. Conditioned by his early training, his mind had no hinge. It could not bend,

or be bent. He once said that he would make a poor lawyer for he could not "defend a bad no yield in a good cause." It was inevitable that such a king should come to grips with the Parliamentary party.

This party was dominated by Puritans who had a belief almost as firm as the king's. They believed that they were "a people with a stamp set upon them by God."

Why were they so disagreeable? They had right on their side; or, at least a preponderance of it. Why did they have to be so self-righteous? They praised the Lord but kept their ammunition dry; and when, with dry ammunition and bigger and better trained battalions, they won their battles, they knew that the Lord was on their side. An essential ingredient of a complete human being was lacking in them. They had no sense of humor. They could not see themselves as they truly were and thus had no reason to strive to amend themselves. Stiff-necked fanatics, at whose touch the good things of earth turned to dust and ashes, they were well satisfied with themselves as they were. For the most part, they belonged to the middle class. As Matthew Arnold said, this class "entered the prison of Puritanism and had the key turned on its spirit for two hundred years."

Charles I was crowned King in 1625. Soon after his accession, when he tried to raise money by forced loans, he came into conflict with Parliament. In 1628, he was forced to sign the Petition of Right, but he had no intention of abiding by his signature. Dissolving Parliament, he ruled for eleven years without it. He raised money by various devices such as a "ship money" tax — the tax that John Hampden sturdily refused to pay.

In 1640, lack of funds obliged him to summon Parliament. There had been no shift in his ground. With a small army at his back, he entered the House of Commons to arrest Pym, Hampden and three other leaders of the Parliamentary party. But they had been forewarned and had flown.

This high-handed action was the final step which led to civil war. Roundheads and Cavaliers faced each other on the field of battle. As Colin Rhys Lowell points out in his *English Constitutional and Legal History*, "both sides . . . assumed that a monarchy of one sort or another would survive; only at the very last did a small, desperate minority turn against it."

In the early stages of the civil war, things went well for the king. Then Oliver Cromwell, a plain russet-coated captain, who knew what he was fighting for and loved what he knew, took command of the Roundheads.

The tide of battle turned. The king was beaten at Marston Moor, in 1644, and at Naseby, in the following year. Charles threw himself upon the mercy of the Scots. When he offered them religious concessions, they took to the field in his cause but they were overwhelmed by Cromwell at Preston.

The Army then marched on London. Parliament was purged of all its moderate members. In December, 1648, a Rump Parliament passed an act which set up a High Court of Justice for the purpose of trying the king for High Treason and other High Crimes against the Realm of England.

Forty-six members voted on this measure which was passed by a majority of 26 to 20. There was no popular demand for the trial and execution of the king. Indeed, there was strong opposition. To the many who opposed the handful who thirsted for Charles' blood, Cromwell replied, "I tell you, we will cut off his head with the crown upon it."

Only 52 of the 135 commissioners who were appointed as judges sat in judgment at the king's trial. Cromwell overreached himself. He made a martyr of the king — "a martyr for the people" as Charles himself said. Had he been content to kill the kingly office and not the king, there may have been no return to the monarchy in England.

At his trial, Charles took on the stature of a true king. "There was about him, says Keith Feiling, "a fixity of principle which, when a prisoner and unaided, he wielded like a weapon of steel." He refused steadfastly to recognize the jurisdiction of the court which had been created especially to try him, or to enter a plea to the charges against him.

Here is a found poem which utilizes his own words, words which he spoke, with the slight stammer from which he suffered, in dignified rebuke of the judges who were presuming to try him:

For the Charge,
 I value it not a rush.
 It is the liberty of the People of England I stand for.
 For me to acknowledge a new Court,
 that I never heard of before,
 I that am your King,
 that should be an example
 to all the people of England,
 to uphold justice,
 to maintain the old laws,
 indeed I do not know how to do it.
 You spoke very well the first day
 that I came here of the obligations
 that I had laid upon me by God,
 to the maintenance of the liberties
 of my people,
 the same obligations you spoke of,

I do acknowledge to God
that I owe to him,
and to my people,
to defend as much as in me lies
the ancient laws of the Kingdom.
Therefore,
until that I may know
that this is not against
the fundamental Laws of the Kingdom,
by your favour,
I can put in no particular answer.

C. V. Wedgwood offers this comment on the trial of King Charles: "Every effort was made to make this trial appear legal, and every effort was in vain. The House of Commons had no legal right to set up a Court to try anyone, as Charles was quick to point out." The Court had no other validity, but "the power of the sword." After his conviction, Charles wanted to make a statement but he was not permitted to do so. "I am not suffered for to speak expect what justice other people may have" . . . these were his last scornful words to his judges.

Next comes Robert Emmet, the Irish patriot.

Robert Emmet's brief career gives evidence of the complete and absolute futility of violence for its own sake. He was the seventeenth child of an Irish doctor. At an early age, he became obsessed with the unfortunate plight of his country and yearned, above all else, to strike a blow for its liberation from its English oppressors. One day when he was a student at Trinity College, the poet Tom Moore, a fellow student, sat down at the piano and played the stirring melody "Let Erin Remember." As he listened to his friend's playing, Emmet cried, "O that I were at the head of twenty thousand men marching to that air!"

After the Irish uprising of 1798, he was expelled from University. He went to France, where he discussed the invasion of Ireland by the French with both Napoleon and Talleyrand. In 1803, he returned to Ireland, bent upon organizing an armed rebellion. But he was the sort of youthful romantic who never makes a successful rebel. He got more satisfaction from displaying a fancy uniform than he did from gaining recruits to his cause. Daniel O'Connell characterized his folly in these words: "Here was Robert Emmet having got together £1200 and seventy-five men, making war against George III . . . with the wealth of three Kingdoms at his command."

On a Saturday night in July, 1803, Emmet led his small force into Thomas Street, Dublin. Lord Chief Justice Kilwarden, who was returning to the city from his country seat, and several others, were brutally

murdered. Troops were summoned and the rebels were routed by a single volley.

Emmet was arrested. John Philpot Curran and Leonard MacNally were briefed to defend him. While he was awaiting trial, he sent a letter to Curran's daughter Sarah, with whom he was in love. This letter was intercepted, and Curran, with great reluctance, returned his brief.

Emmet was brought to trial on September 19, 1803. He was defended by MacNally, who was, in plain fact, a spy in the pay of the Crown, who, before the trial opened, sold the contents of his brief to the prosecuting attorneys for two hundred pounds sterling.

On the undisputed facts only one verdict was possible. When the jury returned that verdict, Emmet was asked if he had anything to say. Rising in the prisoner's dock, he made a dignified and impassioned address.

"Why the sentence of the law should not be passed on me I have nothing to say," he began. "Why the sentence, which, in the public mind, is usually attached to that of the law ought to be reversed, I have much to say."

"Were I to suffer only death after being judged guilty, I should bow in silence to the fate which awaits me," he continued, speaking with manly fortitude. "But the sentence of the law which delivers over my body to the executioner consigns my character to obloquy. A man in my situation has not only to encounter the difficulties of fortune, but also the difficulties of prejudice. Whilst the man dies his memory lives; and that mine may not forfeit all claim to the respect of my countrymen, I seize upon this opportunity to vindicate myself from some of the charges alleged against me."

As he continued with his attempt to vindicate himself in the eyes of his countrymen, he was repeatedly interrupted by the presiding judge.

Finally, he brought his address to a close with these magnificent words; which, if any words do, though it may give them no greater validity, demand to be turned into a found poem.

My Lord,
 You are impatient for the sacrifice.
 The blood which you seek
 is not congealed
 by the artificial terrors
 which surround your victim;
 it circulates warmly
 and unruffled through its channels,
 and in a little time it will cry to Heaven.
 Be yet patient!

I have but a few words more to say —
 my ministry is now ended.
 I am going to my cold and silent grave;
 my lamp of life is nearly extinguished.
 I have parted with everything
 that was dear to me
 in this life
 for my country's sake.
 For the public service
 I have abandoned the worship
 of another idol
 I adored in my heart —
 the object of my affections.
 My race is run —
 the grave opens to receive me,
 and I sink into its bosom.
 I am ready to die —
 I have not been allowed
 to vindicate my character;
 I have but one request to ask
 at my departure from this world —
 it is the charity of its silence.
 Let no man write my epitaph;
 for as no man
 who knows my motives
 dares now vindicate them,
 let not prejudice
 or ignorance asperse them.
 Let them rest
 in obscurity and peace;
 my memory be left in oblivion
 and my tomb remain uninscribed,
 until other times
 and other men
 can do justice to my character.
 When my country takes her place
 among the nations of the earth,
 then, and not till then,
 let my epitaph be written.
 I have done.

Robert Emmet died for his rash folly at the age of 24. He was hanged in Thomas Street, near the scene of his futile crime, on the day following his conviction. Justice let no grass grow under its feet in those days. In his address, he had spoken of the idol whom he adored in his heart — and whom he had renounced for his country's sake. These words gave currency to the legend that the object of his affection — Sarah Curran — died of a broken heart for love of him. Tom Moore aided and abetted this legend with a poem, from which this stanza is quoted:

"She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps
 And lovers around here are sighing,
 But coldly she turns from their gaze and weeps
 For her heart in the grave is lying."

Commenting of this verse, Leslie Hale, in his admirable biography of John Philpot Curran, puts the record straight. "It was Tom Moore who was lying," he writes. "He knew the facts perfectly well. Any

lover who sighed round Sarah risked the anger of her stalwart husband, Major Sturgeon, an officer serving under Wellington, who married her less than two years after Emmet's execution."

Fourth comes Mrs. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence.

"For women the Middle Ages, if not ancient history, lasted far longer than they did for society as a whole, and for them the date which corresponds in importance to that of the discovery of America, the capture of Constantinople, or the Reformation, (is 1792); and the event is the publication of the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*." These eloquent words of John Langdon-Davies, did not overstate the case which he was trying to make in his book *A Short History of Women*. For most of recorded history, women have had the status of chattels, or drudges, or playthings, or, in Lord Chesterfield's words "children of a larger growth." Only recently, have they enjoyed full and equal citizenship with men. Only recently have they risen to the full status of human beings.

"Liberty is the mother of virtue," says Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *The Vindication*, "and if women, be, by their very constitution slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature."

The seed which Miss Wollstonecraft sowed did not fall on fertile ground and it was a long time in germinating.

In 1867, John Stuart Mill introduced an amendment to the second Reform Bill. This amendment, which would have given votes to women was soundly defeated. But Mills' plain speaking on their behalf kindled an idea in women's minds.

Under the leadership of Mrs. Henry Fawcett the National Society for Women's Suffrage came into being. For a generation male politicians treated women who were seeking the suffrage with downright rudeness, or good-natured disdain. In 1904, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst concluded that mild measures would never move the perfidious hearts of men. She organized the Women's Social and Political Union. This organization, which was run on strict military lines, had as its declared aim the achievement of the complete civic and political emancipation of women. Under direction from their leaders, suffragettes chained themselves to mail-boxes, slapped policemen's faces, hurled them from their horses, burnt railway stations and hotels, and smashed shop windows on a gigantic scale. Arrests by the score were made. Many convictions followed the arrests. In prison, the women went on hunger

strikes. Some of them were forcibly fed. This gratuitous brutality raised a storm of protest against the authorities. It brought recruits by the hundreds to the women's cause. It was soon discontinued. But the authorities had not given up the battle. The Home Secretary sponsored a bill which went on the statute books as the Prisoner's Temporary Discharge for Ill Health Act. Under this act female prisoners were released from prison and nursed back to health under police supervision. When they had recovered their health, they were rearrested and sent back to prison. The Act was nicknamed the Cat and Mouse Act and did much to gain sympathy for the cause of the suffragettes.

Women demonstrated that they were prepared to risk injury, even death, for their cause. One woman, Miss Emily Davison, who was sentenced to six months imprisonment for setting fire to a mail-box was released on Derby Day, 1913. From the prison she went to Tattenham Corner with a Suffragette banner in her hand. As the horses galloped by, she threw herself under the King's horse, receiving injuries from which she died. The movement's first martyr, she was given, in D. C. Somerwell's words, "the most spectacular funeral since that of King Edward."

Mrs. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence was one of Mrs. Pankhurst's right-hand women. A shock trooper in the movement, she was first arrested for striking a policeman in defence of another woman. In May, 1912, she faced a more serious charge. Following an assault on the plate-glass windows in the big shops on Regent Street and Bond Street in London, she was charged under the Malicious Damage of Property Act. Among those who were also charged was her husband, F. W. Pethick Lawrence, a wealthy man, who had been trained as a barrister. When he was asked how he could, with a training in the law, sanction the malicious destruction of property, he replied that he and his wife "had calmly and deliberately come to the conclusion that the course of action adopted by the militants was the right one, in view of the deception and trickery that had been practised by politicians."

From the dock at London's Old Bailey, Mrs. Pethick Lawrence, in defending, not herself, but her cause, made a stirring speech from which this found poem has been made:

This movement
 cannot be crushed by severity.
 Experience has shown that,
 and history has shown it.
 There have been over a thousand imprisonments
 of women already.
 We sometimes speak
 of the dogged tenacity
 of the men
 who had conquered land and sea
 for our country's glory.

There is an undaunted spirit
 in the mothers of the race also,
 or it would not be made manifest
 in the land;
 there is a bit of the bull-dog breed
 in the women of our country
 as well as in the men.
 We have been bruised and battered
 by Government's spleen;
 we have been pursued
 by the Government's prosecution.
 But the spirit of liberty has grown apace,
 and the women of the country
 will hold on to the idea of liberty
 like grim death . . .
 We feel liberty to be a very precious thing.
 "Oh, Liberty, how glorious art thou!"
 We know it has to be bought
 with a great price.
 My Lord, if you send us to prison,
 we shall go to prison
 with a firm and steadfast faith
 that our imprisonment,
 whether it be long
 or whether it be short,
 will be accepted
 as part of the great price
 that has to be exacted
 for the civic and legal liberty of women,
 which is the safeguard
 of the moral and spiritual liberty
 of the women
 of our country
 and of our race.
 May God defend us,
 as our cause is just.

The Suffragette Movement came to an abrupt halt with the outbreak of the first world war. During that war, women proved that they were capable of answering the heavy demands made upon them. While the men were at the front, they kept the wheels turning at home. Indeed, some of them, and militant suffragettes among them, went into battle zones as ambulance drivers.

When hostilities were over in 1918, the resistance against votes for women had crumbled. The franchise was granted to women over the age of 30. Men still had misgivings that women would vote for women candidates. As many of the young men of Great Britain had laid down their lives on the fields of battle, it was not considered safe to let women between the ages of 21 and 30 vote. Their voting power could have returned more women than men to Parliament. But this fear was soon laid to rest. Events proved that the great majority of women voted for male candidates. In 1928, in Great Britain, the franchise was extended to all women over 21, and the vindication of the rights of British women took a long step forward.

Finally, comes Sir Roger Casement.

Before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, when German military leaders were perfecting their plans to find for Germany a greater place in the sun, one problem gave them serious concern. What position would Great Britain take in the event of a war on the continent of Europe? At the time she was having troubles enough at home. Home Rule was about to be granted to Ireland. Under the leadership of Sir Edward Carson, and his lieutenant Sir F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead), Ulstermen were drilling, armed with German rifles, determined to resist this move. The Germans misread the signs. They came to the conclusion that England had her hands too full at home to be concerned with affairs on the continent. They soon learnt differently. When war came, the Irish, with the exception of a small group of diehard patriots, closed their ranks to face a foreign foe. Three hundred thousand Irishmen saw service in France during World War I.

Among the hard-core Irish patriots was a man who had a distinguished career in the British Consular Service. This man — Roger Casement — took up the Irish cause rather late in life. But when he espoused a cause he did so with his whole heart. After the outbreak of war, he visited Germany in the attempt to raise an Irish Brigade among the Irish prisoners in German prison camps. He met with complete failure. The Germans attempted to use him to their own purposes. In April, 1916, he landed in Ireland from a German submarine. He was arrested almost immediately and charged with treason. He was taken to England for trial. He was indicted under the Treason Act, 1351, an act which was passed in the reign of Edward II, and which was written in Norman-French by an old Chancery scribe a hundred years before the invention of printing. His trial lasted for four days and an appeal which he carried to the Court of Criminal Appeal lasted two. Most of this time was taken up in argument as to what exactly did the words of the old statute mean. Were they wide enough in their scope to include in the offence of treason the giving aid and comfort to the enemies of the King beyond his realm. Because of the uncertain punctuation which the scribe used in writing the Act, Casement is reported to have said that his death turned on a comma.

Sir F. E. Smith, as attorney-general, undertook to prosecute Casement. Here is H. G. Wells' comment on this situation: "In August, 1914, the storm of the Great War burst upon the world. In September, 1914, Sir Edward Carson was denouncing the placing of the Home Rule Bill upon the Statute Book. Its operation was suspended until after the war. On the same day Mr. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish majority, the proper representative of Ireland, was calling up the Irish

people to take their equal part in the burden and effort of the war . . . For a time Ireland played her part in the war side by side with England faithfully and well. Until in 1915, the Liberal Government was replaced by a coalition in which, through the moral feebleness of Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, this Sir Edward Carson figured as Attorney-General (with a salary of 7,000 pounds and fees), to be replaced presently by his associate in the Ulster sedition, Sir F. E. Smith. Grosser insult was never offered to a friendly people."

After the jury had found Casement guilty of treason, the King's Coroner asked him if he had anything to say. He rose in the prisoner's dock and read a speech, which he had prepared carefully some twenty days earlier, in anticipation of the jury's verdict.

He began by saying that his words were not addressed to the court but to his own countrymen. He then referred to the statute under which he had been convicted. The emotion with which he spoke raised his words to the level of poetry:

"If true religion rests on love,
It is equally true
that loyalty rests on love.
The law I am charged under
has no parentage in love
and claims the allegiance of today
on the ignorance
and blindness of the past.
I am being tried,
in truth,
not by my peers of the live present,
but by the peers of the dead past;
not by civilization
of the twentieth century,
but by the brutality
of the fourteenth;
not even by a statute
framed in the language
of an enemy land —
so antiquated is the law
that must be sought today
to slay an Irishman,
whose offence is
that he puts Ireland first.
Loyalty is a sentiment,
not a law.
It rests on love,
not on restraint.
The Government of Ireland by England
rests on restraint
and not on love;
and since it demands no love
it can evoke no loyalty.

As he continued with his speech, he made a reference to the leaders of the Ulster volunteers, and as he poured his scorn upon them, Birkenhead left the courtroom.

"The difference between us was
 that Unionist champions
 chose a path
 they felt would lead to the Woolsack;
 while I went a road
 I knew
 must lead to the dock.
 And the event proves we were both right.
 The difference between us was
 that my 'treason'
 was based on a ruthless sincerity
 that forced me to attempt
 in time and season
 to carry out in action
 what I said in word —
 whereas their treason lay in verbal incitements
 that they knew
 need never be made good
 in their bodies.
 And so, I am prouder
 to stand here today
 in the traitor's dock
 to answer this impeachment
 than to fill
 the place of my right honourable accusers.

Casement made no apology for following the lead dictated to him
 by his conscience:

"If it be treason to fight
 against such an unnatural fate as this,
 then I am proud
 to be a rebel,
 and shall cling to my 'rebellion'
 with the last drop of my blood.
 If there be no right of rebellion
 against a state of things
 that no savage tribe would endure
 without resistance,
 then I am sure
 that it is better for men
 to fight and die
 without right
 than to live in such a state
 of right as this.
 Where all your rights
 become only an accumulated wrong;
 where men must beg
 with bated breath
 for leave to subsist in their own land,
 to think their own thoughts,
 to sing their own songs,
 to garner the fruits of their own labours —
 and even while they beg,
 to see things
 inexorably withdrawn from them —
 then surely it is a braver,
 a saner and a truer thing,
 to be a rebel
 in act and deed
 against such circumstances as these
 than tamely to accept it
 as the natural lot of men.

Despite protests which came from many quarters, Casement was hanged. He found the fate which he had deliberately courted. On the day before his execution, he wrote to his cousin:

“Tomorrow, St. Stephen’s Day, I die the death I sought, and may God forgive the mistakes and receive the intent – Ireland’s freedom.”

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