

THE
BEST LOVED
POEMS
OF THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE

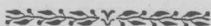
Selected by
HAZEL FELLEMAN

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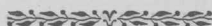
PREFACE

IN THE COMPILATION of this book I have drawn on my experience as editor of the Queries and Answers page of THE NEW YORK TIMES Book Review over a period of fifteen years. The majority of inquiries that I receive are for favorite poems, and since not a day passes that does not bring to my desk a large sheaf of letters from all parts of the country, it is only natural that I have learned something of the poetry preferences of the American people. I have used this knowledge rather than my own personal liking in the selection of these poems; but I feel free to say that there are few of the poems that I would not have included myself.

My first acknowledgments are due to Lewis Copeland, whose able help in the organization of the work greatly simplified its production, and to Edward Frank Allen who contributed the introduction and lent his valuable editorial counsel. Without their interested assistance, I should have had a much more onerous task. There are literally hundreds of people whom, collectively, I wish to thank for their replies to inquiries about poems. After all, they are the ones who have made the book possible. And, although elsewhere I make formal specific acknowledgment to authors and publishers, I wish again to express my gratefulness for the privilege of reprinting their poems.

HAZEL FELLEMAN

New York City



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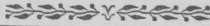
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INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK began in the heart of a little newsboy in Knoxville, Tennessee. He loved poetry.

To him poetry meant music—and ideas. It sang to him and it spoke to him.

It inspired him.

Particularly did it inspire him.

The boy grew up. He continued selling newspapers—all his life.

He was Adolph S. Ochs, publisher of THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Throughout his life Mr. Ochs loved poetry. He was keenly interested in the number of inquiries regarding it that came to the editorial rooms of THE NEW YORK TIMES Book Review, and he started the *Queries and Answers* page to handle them.

The selection of verses that are here collected under the title *Best Loved Poems of the American People* is based on the most frequently requested items that have cleared through these columns over a period of three decades.

During a large part of this time, Hazel Felleman has been the editor of *Queries and Answers*. From every state in the Union, and even beyond its borders, have come countless letters asking for this poem or that, or for the complete poem whose theme is such-and-such, or the song whose refrain is thus-and-so.

Miss Felleman has long had her finger on the poetry pulse of the nation. Its heartbeats are truly registered in this, her book.

One day, Mr. Ochs appeared at Miss Felleman's desk and said:

INTRODUCTION

"There's a line that has been running through my head lately, and I wish I could get the whole poem. I read it when I was a boy, and I don't remember the author's name. It begins:

"I am a stranger in the land where my forefathers trod."*

See if you can find it through your *Queries and Answers* page."

So a search was begun.

Weeks passed, and no one had answered the query. But the publisher was not satisfied. He said:

"Offer five dollars to anyone who will send a copy of the complete poem. If that doesn't produce results, offer ten dollars. And if necessary offer as high as twenty-five. I simply must have that poem—it haunts me."

For various reasons, most of them obvious, Adolph Ochs's name did not appear in connection with these offers. As in most undertakings, however, he was successful in his quest. After several months a copy of the poem, found by a reader in an old magazine in the Yale University library, was sent to Miss Felleman, who turned it over to her chief.

Today poetry is an absolute necessity. The world needs it for its vitalizing strength. Poetry came into being because of this need, and it is perpetuated for the same reason.

Poetry has nearly everything that music can give—melody, rhythm, sentiment—but it has this advantage: it can come closer to the heart. Therefore it can have a more personal and a more lasting appeal.

It satisfies a hunger for beauty that is a part of nearly every normal person's make-up.

It recaptures vanished moments and recreates scenes that have grown dim through passing years.

It stirs wholesome emotions and gives glimpses across the border that, vague as they may be, are a preview of eternal things.

It entertains, it inspires, and, in time of need, it comforts.

These, then, are the poems that America loves.

Here is a magic carpet on which one may ride back to childhood days, into the realm of fancy, through eerie castles, across uncharted seas and in spiritual places.

*The poem may be found on page 323.

INTRODUCTION

For company, there are mothers, wives, sweethearts; there are men of God and worshippers; there are heroes, heroines, martyrs, laborers, schoolmasters, and a goodly company of folk who laugh.

The critic tells you what you *ought* to read. Miss Felleman, out of a knowledge of and sympathy with your likes and dislikes, has provided the poems you *want* to read.

How else have certain poems become classic except through the fact that they struck a responsive chord in the breast of the average man or woman? Some of Bobbie Burns's poems—notably the one in which he says,

*Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us—*

are not kept alive and in print by the supercritical. Nor will it be such who will some day make classics of various poems by Edgar A. Guest, Margaret E. Sangster, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and many a lesser known poet. It is the preference of the people, after all, that gives permanency to poetry.

In a sense, this book has been edited by the American people who love poetry. Miss Felleman is the liaison officer who has co-ordinated the poetry preferences of the nation. She has assembled the results in orderly fashion and given them back in an enduring and friendly form.

EDWARD FRANK ALLEN

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