

THE PRAISE OF LIFE

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The Praise of Life by Laurence Binyon

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LAURENCE BINYON

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BY

LAURENCE BINYON

LONDON

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THE PRAISE OF LIFE

I

MONTENEGRO

COILED in shadow, the serpent seas
Engirdle perilous hills sublime :
By tortuous, steep degrees
Toward the morn I climb.

Before me the mountain soaring vast
Secludes the bright east; cold the air
Descends from ridges, massed
In peaks, snowily fair.

But pale in the northern distance blushes
On sparkling ranges a light austere ;
Tingeing the shade, it flushes
Edge and barrier sheer.

Cattaro roofs and Cattaro quay
Grow faint and delicate; ships that ride
On the dense blue slumbering sea
Dwindle; on either side

From mirroring gulfs the mountains bare
Are mapped to the heaven, strange as a dream
The Adriatic afar
Trembles, a molten gleam:

Till the sun salutes me, met with him
On the naked summit; closed behind,
That vision of countries dim
Pales and fades from the mind.

Now drinking the eager lofty air,
The spirit leaps, as the eyes behold
Valleys severely fair,
Freedom's fortress of old.

Young, stern soldiers in rich attire,
Haughtily moving with silent pace
And eyes of a tranquil fire;
Sons of a tameless race;

Aged mothers, bowed with toil,
Old men, bearded and gray, are here;
Plants of a stubborn soil
That knows not the seed of fear.

O Mountain, mother of men, that bearest
Heroes; foster-mother of fame!

I hail thee; well thou wearest
Thy dark, invincible name.

Thou plantest the footstep firm, and the heart
In the breast strengthenest, hardy to try

Peril, and play its part
With full, unwavering eye.

At mighty breasts of the ancient hills
Nourished, thy sons in their veins yet keep

The force that feeds and fills
Torrents, to dance and leap.

Trees that with clenched root possess
Their rocky beds, oak and pine,

Alone thou endurest; nor less
Permittest in children of thine.

O small and remote the loud affairs
Of cities appear: the dusty strife,

Choking with envious care
The caged glory of life,

Recedes: from the market of wrangling cries,
Like a falcon, the spirit expands her wings;

For the mountains, the mountains rise,
And the heart, answering, sings.

And clearer, with each step climbing higher,
The wide horizon dilates within;
Keener the keen desire
Freedom complete to win:

Till now with imperious joy I taste
The eternal fountain: Life supreme,
That of old in order placed
The spheres of her starry dream;

That moulded this blanching sea of stone,
In silence raging, motionless hurled,
Thrills me, myself to own,
And cast the cloak of the world.

For now no longer a slave, yoked ill
With marching Destiny, marches here,
His hours alert to fill,
Man, of the mountain a peer.

As the tamer of horses matches his stride
To his vehement, proudly pacing steed,
He goes, strong Fate beside,
Fearless, a master, freed,