

# Charles Lummis

## Selected Poems



# Charles Fletcher Lummis

March 1, 1859 [Lynn, Massachusetts] –

November 25, 1928 [Los Angeles, California]

Born in Lynn, Massachusetts , a classmate of Theodore Roosevelt's at Harvard College (from from he dropped out in his senior year), Lummis published himself his first book of poems, *Birch Bark Poems*, which he printed on paper-thin sheets of birch bark. Lummis was offered the job of City Editor at the *Los Angeles Times* in 1884; he chose to make the 3,507-mile journey on foot. For many years, he lived in New Mexico where he tangled with the Federal Government over the rights of Native Americans. Returning to Los Angeles, he became publisher and editor of *Out West* which published work by Jack London and John Muir among other notable Californians.

# My Cigarette

My Cigarette! Can I forget  
How Kate and I, in sunny weather,  
Sat in the shade the elm-tree made,  
And rolled the fragrant weed together?  
I, at her side, beatified  
To hold and guide her fingers willing:  
She, rolling slow the paper's snow,  
Putting my heart in with the filling!

My cigarette! I see her yet,  
The white smoke from her lips curling,  
Her dreaming eyes, her soft replies,  
Her gentle sighs, her laughter purling!  
Ah, dainty roll, whose parting soul  
Ebbs out in many a snowy billow,  
I too would burn, if I might earn  
Upon her lips so sweet a pillow!

Ah, cigarette, the gay coquette  
Has long forgot the flame she lighted;  
And you and I, unthinking by  
Alike are thrown, alike are slighted.  
The darkness gathers fast without,  
A raindrop on my window plashes;  
My cigarette and heart are out,  
And naught is left me but their ashes!

## 5.59

Aha! There whistles Number One!  
And down the tingling grade she grows,  
Tossing her cloud of tresses dun  
Back on the twilight's fading rose.

A mile-a moment—and my Kate,  
From years and half a world apart!  
But now we'll smile at cheated Fate,  
And keep our Kingdom of the Heart.

And—But the world is drowned in steam—  
A volleying, billowing, deafening cloud—  
And—men there run, as in a dream,  
And through the thunderous fog they crowd.

“An open switch,” I heard one say;  
An op—But that's a wreck! And she  
A half-a-hundred yards away!  
Ah, God! How ill from Fate we flee I

How cursèd leaden drag my feet—  
And yet the rest are far behind—  
On, through that misty winding-sheet,  
My—Heaven! I know not what—to find.

H-h! That I tripped on moved and cried!  
Ah! There she is! My Kate! my Kate!  
Unscratched! And not a soul beside  
Is lost, of all that living freight.

But while the grumbling travellers hie  
To crowd the station with their fret,  
Here, sweetheart, , step a little by,  
To thank the saviour they forget.

Nay, not in words—that dull ear strains

Not even to your music, Sweet!  
For that poor clay in greasy jeans  
There come the stretcher and the sheet.

But of your pure heart's purest give  
To him the hungry Death that spied  
Betimes himself to leap and live—  
But stayed, and stopped the train and died!

And yon dumb clinger to the dead—  
Ay, weep for her who cannot! She  
Upon the morrow should have wed  
With him that brought you safe to me!

# The Old Brooch

Written first in Spanish and then Englished

“ENSUEÑO,” osito osado,  
Dime, ¿que vayas pensando,  
Negrito bendito y feliz,  
Alli donde estás reposando,  
Tu con la Emperatriz?  
Dime, (que ya me deliro)—  
¿Que está tu Almohada soñando?  
¿A tí una lágrima dando—  
Y al Oso Mayor un suspiro?

Little jet bear on a bed of snow,  
What are you thinking? As I would think  
If I were trembling on that dear brink?  
Or are you dizzy as I would be there?  
What do you wonder? What do you know?  
Are you too happy to know or wonder—  
Her throat above you, her bosom under?  
Tell, me, what is your Pillow dreaming?  
Catch you ever a tear to drink?  
Ever a sigh or a flutter, seeming  
Maybe a Memory stirred for me there?

## from Man-Who-Yawns

The Desert's mighty Silence;  
no fuss of man can spill  
A hundred Indians whoop and sing,  
And still the Land is still;  
But on the city drunk with sound  
the whisper is a shout—  
'Apaches on the war-path!  
Geronimo is out!'

Brave rode our wiry troopers—  
they rode without avail;  
Their chase he tweaked it by the nose,  
and twisted by the tail;  
Around them and around he rode—  
A pack-train putters slow,  
And 'horse and man of ours must eat'—  
'Ahh!' said Geronimo.

They never say a hair of him,  
but ever and oft they felt—  
Each rock and cactus spitting lead  
from an Apache belt,  
Where never sign of man there was,  
nor flicker of a gun—  
You cannot fight an empty hill;  
you run—if left to run!

A prophet of his people, he,  
no War-Chief, but their Priest,  
And strong he made his Medicine,  
and deep the mark he creased—  
The most consummate Warrior  
since warfare first began,  
The deadliest Fighting Handful  
in the calendar of Man.

The Desert Empire that he rode  
his trail of blood and fire,  
Is pythoned, springs and valleys, with  
the strangle-snake of wire.  
The Fence has killed the Range and all  
for which its freedom stood—  
Though countless footsore cowboys mill  
in mimic Hollywood.

A Tragedy? What wholesale words  
we use in petty ways—  
For murder, broken hearts of banks,  
and disappointed days!  
But here an Epoch petered out,  
An Era ended flat;  
The Apache was the Last Frontier—  
The Tragedy is that!























































































































































































