



Sharp
Ink

LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY



A BOOK OF VERSES

A ROADSIDE HARP

Louise Imogen Guiney

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Peter Rugg the Bostonian

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I

THE mare is pawing by the oak,
The chaise is cool and wide
For Peter Rugg the Bostonian
With his little son beside;
The women loiter at the wheels
In the pleasant summer-tide.
“And when wilt thou be home, Father?”
“And when, good husband, say:
The cloud hangs heavy on the house
What time thou art away.”
He answers straight, he answers short,
“At noon of the seventh day.”
“Fail not to come, if God so will,
And the weather be kind and clear.”
“Farewell, farewell! But who am I
A blockhead vain to fear?
God willing or God unwilling,
I have said it, I will be here.”
He gathers up the sunburnt boy
And from the gate is sped;
He shakes the spark from the stones below,
The bloom from overhead,

Till the last roofs of his own town
Pass in the morning-red.
Upon a homely mission
North unto York he goes,
Through the long highway broidered thick
With elder-blow and rose;
And sleeps in sound of breakers
At every twilight's close.
Intense upon his heedless head
Frowns Agamenticus,
Knowing of Heaven's challenger
The answer: even thus
The Patience that is hid on high
Doth stoop to master us.

II

Full light are all his parting dreams;
Desire is in his brain;
He tightens at the tavern-post
The fiery creature's rein:
"Now eat thine apple, six years' child!
We face for home again."
They had not gone a many mile
With nimble heart and tongue,
When the lone thrush grew silent
The walnut woods among;
And on the lulled horizon
A premonition hung.
The babes at Hampton schoolhouse,
The wife with lads at sea,

Search with a level-lifted hand
The distance bodingly;
And farmer folk bid pilgrims in
Under a safe roof-tree.
The mowers mark by Newbury
How low the swallows fly,
They glance across the southern roads
All white and fever-dry,
And the river, anxious at the bend,
Beneath a thinking sky.
But there is one abroad was born
To disbelieve and dare:
Along the highway furiously
He cuts the purple air.
The wind leaps on the startled world
As hounds upon a hare;
With brawl and glare and shudder ope
The sluices of the storm;
The woods break down, the sand upblows
In blinding volleys warm;
The yellow floods in frantic surge
Familiar fields deform.
From evening until morning
His skill will not avail,
And as he cheers his youngest born,
His cheek is spectre-pale;
For the bonnie mare from courses known
Has drifted like a sail!

On some wild crag he sees the dawn
Unsheathe her scimitar.
“Oh, if it be my mother-earth,
And not a foreign star,
Tell me the way to Boston,
And is it near or far?”
One watchman lifts his lamp and laughs:
“Ye’ve many a league to wend.”
The next doth bless the sleeping boy
From his mad father’s end;
A third upon a drawbridge growls:
“Bear ye to larboard, friend.”
Forward and backward, like a stone
The tides have in their hold,
He dashes east, and then distraught
Darts west as he is told,
(Peter Rugg the Bostonian,
That knew the land of old!)
And journeying, and resting scarce
A melancholy space,
Turns to and fro, and round and round,
The frenzy in his face,
And ends alway in angrier mood,
And in a stranger place,
Lost! lost in bayberry thickets
Where Plymouth plovers run,
And where the masts of Salem
Look lordly in the sun;
Lost in the Concord vale, and lost
By rocky Wollaston!