

Strict Care, Strict Joy
by James Stephens (1882-1950)

To-day i felt as poor O'Brien did
When, turning from all else that was not his,
He took himself to that which was his own
- He took him to his verse-for other all he had not,
And (tho' man will crave and seek)
Another all than this he did not need

So, pen in hand he tried to tell the whole tale of his woe
In rhyming; lodge the full weight of his grief in versing: and so did:
Then-when his poem had been connd and cared,
And all put in that should not be left out-did he not find and with
astonishment,

That grief had been translated, or was come
Other and better than it first looked to be:
And that this happened, because all things transfer
From what they seem to what they truly are
When they are innocently brooded on
- And, so, The poet makes grief beauti-ful

"Behold me now, with my back to the wall,
Playing music to empty pockets !"
So, Raferty, tuning a blind mans plight,
Could sing the cark of misery away:
And know, in blindness and in poverty,
That woe was not of him, nor kin to him.

And Egan Rahilly begins a verse-
"My heart is broken, and my mind is sad. . ."
'Twas surely true when he began his song,
And was less true when he had finished it:
- Be sure, his heart was buoyant, and his grief
Drummed and trumpeted as grief was sung!

For, as he meditated misery
And cared it into song-Strict Care, Strict Joy!
Caring for grief he cared his grief away:
And those sad songs, tho' woe be all the theme,
Do not make us grieve who read them now-
Because the poet makes grief beautiful.

And I, myself, conning a lonely heart
– Full lonely 'twas, and 'tis as lonely now
Turned me, by proper, to my natural,
And, now too long her vagrant, wooed my muse:
Then to her—let us look more close to these,
And, seeing, know; and, knowing, be at ease.

Seeing the sky o'ercast, and that the rain had
Plashed the window, and would plash again:
Seeing the summer lost, and the winter nigh:
Seeing inapt, and sad, and fallen from good:
Seeing how will was weak, and wish o'erbearing:
Seeing inconstant, seeing timidity:
Seeing too small, too poor in this and yon:
Seeing life, daily, grow more difficult:
Seeing all that moves away—moving away
. . . And that all seeing is a blind—mans treat,
And that all getting is a beggars dole,
And that all having is bankruptcy. . .

All these, sad all! I told to my good friend,
Told Raferty, O'Brien, Rahilly,
Told rain, and frosted blossom, and the summer gone,
Told poets dead, and captains dead, and kings!
– And we cared naught that these were mournful things,
For, caring them, we made them beautiful.

James Stephens 1882 – 1950