



flint and feather

THE COMPLETE POEMS

OF

C. Pauline Johnson
(TEKAHIONWAKE)

WITH INTRODUCTION BY
THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON
AND A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF THE AUTHOR.

ILLUSTRATED BY



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OJISTOH

I AM Ojistoh, I am she, the wife
Of him whose name breathes bravery and life
And courage to the tribe that calls him chief.
I am Ojistoh, his white star, and he
Is land, and lake, and sky—and soul to me.

Ah ! but they hated him, those Huron braves,
Him who had flung their warriors into graves,
Him who had crushed them underneath his heel,
Whose arm was iron, and whose heart was steel
To all—save me, Ojistoh, chosen wife
Of my great Mohawk, white star of his life.

Ah ! but they hated him, and counselled long
With subtle witchcraft how to work him wrong ;
How to avenge their dead, and strike him where
His pride was highest, and his fame most fair.
Their hearts grew weak as women at his name :
They dared no war-path since my Mohawk came
With ashen bow, and flinten arrow-head
To pierce their craven bodies ; but their dead
Must be avenged. Avenged ? They dared not walk
In day and meet his deadly tomahawk ;
They dared not face his fearless scalping knife ;
So—Niyoh ! *—then they thought of me, his wife.

* God, in the Mohawk language.

O ! evil, evil face of them they sent
With evil Huron speech : " Would I consent
To take of wealth ? be queen of all their tribe ?
Have wampum ermine ? " Back I flung the bribe
Into their teeth, and said, " While I have life
Know this—Ojistoh is the Mohawk's wife."

Wah ! how we struggled ! But their arms were strong.
They flung me on their pony's back, with thong
Round ankle, wrist, and shoulder. Then upleapt
The one I hated most : his eye he swept
Over my misery, and sneering said,
" Thus, fair Ojistoh, we avenge our dead."

And we two rode, rode as a sea wind-chased,
I, bound with buckskin to his hated waist,
He, sneering, laughing, jeering, while he lashed
The horse to foam, as on and on we dashed.
Plunging through creek and river, bush and trail,
On, on we galloped like a northern gale.
At last, his distant Huron fires aflame
We saw, and nearer, nearer still we came.

I, bound behind him in the captive's place,
Scarcely could see the outline of his face.
I smiled, and laid my cheek against his back :
" Loose thou my hands," I said. " This pace let
slack.

Forget we now that thou and I are foes.
I like thee well, and wish to clasp thee close ;
I like the courage of thine eye and brow ;
I like thee better than my Mohawk now.'

He cut the cords ; we ceased our maddened haste
I wound my arms about his tawny waist ;
My hand crept up the buckskin of his belt ;
His knife hilt in my burning palm I felt ;
One hand caressed his cheek, the other drew
The weapon softly—" I love you, love you,"
I whispered, " love you as my life."
And—buried in his back his scalping knife.

Ha ! how I rode, rode as a sea wind-chased,
Mad with sudden freedom, mad with haste,
Back to my Mohawk and my home. I lashed
That horse to foam, as on and on I dashed.
Plunging thro' creek and river, bush and trail,
On, on I galloped like a northern gale.
And then my distant Mohawk's fires aflame
I saw, as nearer, nearer still I came,
My hands all wet, stained with a life's red dye,
But pure my soul, pure as those stars on high—
" My Mohawk's pure white star, Ojistoh, still am I."

THE PILOT OF THE PLAINS

"FALSE," they said, "thy Pale-face lover, from the
land of waking morn ;
Rise and wed thy Redskin wooer, nobler warrior
ne'er was born ;
Cease thy watching, cease thy dreaming,
Show the white thine Indian scorn."

Thus they taunted her, declaring, "He remembers
naught of thee :
Likely some white maid he wooeth, far beyond the
inland sea."
But she answered ever kindly,
"He will come again to me,"

Till the dusk of Indian summer crept athwart the
western skies ;
But a deeper dusk was burning in her dark and
dreaming eyes,
As she scanned the rolling prairie,
Where the foothills fall, and rise.

Till the autumn came and vanished, till the season
of the rains,
Till the western world lay fettered in midwinter's
crystal chains,
Still she listened for his coming,
Still she watched the distant plains.

Then a night with nor'land tempest, nor'land snows
a-swirling fast,
Out upon the pathless prairie came the Pale-face
through the blast,
Calling, calling, "Yakonwita,
I am coming, love, at last."

Hovered night above, about him, dark its wings and
cold and dread ;
Never unto trail or tepee were his straying foot-
steps led ;
Till benumbed, he sank, and pillowed
On the drifting snows his head,

Saying, "O ! my Yakonwita call me, call me, be
my guide
To the lodge beyond the prairie—for I vowed ere
winter died
I would come again, beloved ;
I would claim my Indian bride."

"Yakonwita, Yakonwita ! " Oh, the dreariness that
strains
Through the voice that calling, quivers, till a whis-
per but remains,
"Yakonwita, Yakonwita,
I am lost upon the plains."

But the Silent Spirit hushed him, lulled him as he
cried anew,
"Save me, save me ! O ! beloved, I am Pale but I
am true.
Yakonwita, Yakonwita,
I am dying, love, for you."

Leagues afar, across the prairie, she had risen from
her bed,
Roused her kinsmen from their slumber : " He has
come to-night," she said.
" I can hear him calling, calling ;
But his voice is as the dead.

" Listen ! " and they sate all silent, while the tem-
pest louder grew,
And a spirit-voice called faintly, " I am dying, love,
for you."
Then they wailed, " O ! Yakonwita.
He was Pale, but he was true."

Wrapped she then her ermine round her, stepped
without the tepee door,
Saying, " I must follow, follow, though he call for
evermore,
Yakonwita, Yakonwita ; "
And they never saw her more.

Late at night, say Indian hunters, when the star-
light clouds or wanes,
Far away they see a maiden, misty as the autumn
rains,
Guiding with her lamp of moonlight
Hunters lost upon the plains.

THE CATTLE THIEF

THEY were coming across the prairie, they were
galloping hard and fast ;
For the eyes of those desperate riders had sighted
their man at last—
Sighted him off to Eastward, where the Cree en-
campment lay,
Where the cotton woods fringed the river, miles and
miles away.
Mistake him ? Never ! Mistake him ? the famous
Eagle Chief !
That terror to all the settlers, that desperate Cattle
Thief—
That monstrous, fearless Indian, who lorded it over
the plain,
Who thieved and raided, and scouted, who rode like
a hurricane !
But they've tracked him across the prairie ; they've
followed him hard and fast ;
For those desperate English settlers have sighted
their man at last.

Up they wheeled to the tepees, all their British
blood aflame,
Bent on bullets and bloodshed, bent on bringing
down their game ;

But they searched in vain for the Cattle Thief : that
lion had left his lair,
And they cursed like a troop of demons—for the
women alone were there.

“ The sneaking Indian coward,” they hissed ; “ he
hides while yet he can ;
He’ll come in the night for cattle, but he’s scared
to face a *man*.”

“ Never ! ” and up from the cotton woods rang the
voice of Eagle Chief ;
And right out into the open stepped, unarmed, the
Cattle Thief.

Was that the game they had coveted ? Scarce fifty
years had rolled

Over that fleshless, hungry frame, starved to the
bone and old ;

Over that wrinkled, tawny skin, unfed by the
warmth of blood.

Over those hungry, hollow eyes that glared for the
sight of food.

He turned, like a hunted lion : “ I know not fear,”
said he ;

And the words outleapt from his shrunken lips in
the language of the Cree.

“ I’ll fight you, white-skins, one by one, till I kill
you *all*,” he said ;

But the threat was scarcely uttered, ere a dozen
balls of lead

Whizzed through the air about him like a shower
of metal rain,

And the gaunt old Indian Cattle Thief dropped
dead on the open plain.

And that band of cursing settlers gave one trium-
phant yell,

And rushed like a pack of demons on the body that
writhed and fell.

"Cut the fiend up into inches, throw his carcass on
the plain ;

Let the wolves eat the cursed Indian, he'd have
treated us the same."

A dozen hands responded, a dozen knives gleamed
high,

But the first stroke was arrested by a woman's
strange, wild cry.

And out into the open, with a courage past be-
lief,

She dashed, and spread her blanket o'er the corpse
of the Cattle Thief ;

And the words outleapt from her shrunken lips in
the language of the Cree,

"If you mean to touch that body, you must cut
your way through *me*."

And that band of cursing settlers dropped back-
ward one by one,

For they knew that an Indian woman roused, was
a woman to let alone.

And then she raved in a frenzy that they scarcely
understood,

Raved of the wrongs she had suffered since her
earliest babyhood :

"Stand back, stand back, you white-skins, touch
that dead man to your shame ;

You have stolen my father's spirit, but his body I only claim.

You have killed him, but you shall not dare to touch him now he's dead.

You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed him first of bread—

Robbed him and robbed my people—look there, at that shrunken face,

Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your race.

What have you left to us of land, what have you left of game,

What have you brought but evil, and curses since you came?

How have you paid us for our game? how paid us for our land?

By a *book*, to save our souls from the sins *you* brought in your other hand.

Go back with your new religion, we never have understood

Your robbing an Indian's *body*, and mocking his *soul* with food.

Go back with your new religion, and find—if find you can—

The *honest* man you have ever made from out a *starving* man.

You say your cattle are not ours, your meat is not our meat;

When *you* pay for the land you live in, *we'll* pay for the meat we eat.

Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game;

Give back the furs and the forests that were ours
before you came ;
Give back the peace and the plenty. Then come
with your new belief,
And blame, if you dare, the hunger that *drove* him to
be a thief."

A CRY FROM AN INDIAN WIFE

My Forest Brave, my Red-skin love, farewell ;
We may not meet to-morrow ; who can tell
What mighty ills befall our little band,
Or what you'll suffer from the white man's hand ?
Here is your knife ! I thought 'twas sheathed for
aye.

No roaming bison calls for it to-day ;
No hide of prairie cattle will it maim ;
The plains are bare, it seeks a nobler game :
'Twill drink the life-blood of a soldier host.
Go ; rise and strike, no matter what the cost.
Yet stay. Revolt not at the Union Jack,
Nor raise Thy hand against this stripling pack
Of white-faced warriors, marching West to quell
Our fallen tribe that rises to rebel.
They all are young and beautiful and good ;
Curse to the war that drinks their harmless blood.
Curse to the fate that brought them from the East
To be our chiefs—to make our nation least
That breathes the air of this vast continent.
Still their new rule and council is well meant.
They but forget we Indians owned the land
From ocean unto ocean ; that they stand
Upon a soil that centuries ago
Was our sole kingdom and our right alone.
They never think how they would feel to-day,
If some great nation came from far away,

Wresting their country from their hapless braves,
Giving what they gave us—but wars and graves.
Then go and strike for liberty and life,
And bring back honour to your Indian wife.
Your wife? Ah, what of that, who cares for me?
Who pities my poor love and agony?
What white-robed priest prays for your safety
here,
As prayer is said for every volunteer
That swells the ranks that Canada sends out?
Who prays for vict'ry for the Indian scout?
Who prays for our poor nation lying low?
None—therefore take your tomahawk and go.
My heart may break and burn into its core,
But I am strong to bid you go to war.
Yet stay, my heart is not the only one
That grieves the loss of husband and of son;
Think of the mothers o'er the inland seas;
Think of the pale-faced maiden on her knees;
One pleads her God to guard some sweet-faced
child
That marches on toward the North-West wild.
The other prays to shield her love from harm,
To strengthen his young, proud uplifted arm.
Ah, how her white face quivers thus to think,
Your tomahawk his life's best blood will drink.
She never thinks of my wild aching breast,
Nor prays for your dark face and eagle crest
Endangered by a thousand rifle balls,
My heart the target if my warrior falls.
O! coward self I hesitate no more;
Go forth, and win the glories of the war.

A CRY FROM AN INDIAN WIFE 19

Go forth, nor bend to greed of white men's hands,
By right, by birth we Indians own these lands,
Though starved, crushed, plundered, lies our nation
low . . .

Perhaps the white man's God has willed it so.

THE SONG MY PADDLE SINGS

WEST wind, blow from your prairie nest,
Blow from the mountains, blow from the west.
The sail is idle, the sailor too ;
O ! wind of the west, we wait for you.
Blow, blow !
I have wooed you so,
But never a favour you bestow.
You rock your cradle the hills between,
But scorn to notice my white lateen.

I stow the sail, unship the mast :
I wooed you long but my wooing's past ;
My paddle will lull you into rest.
O ! drowsy wind of the drowsy west,
Sleep, sleep,
By your mountain steep,
Or down where the prairie grasses sweep !
Now fold in slumber your laggard wings,
For soft is the song my paddle sings.

August is laughing across the sky,
Laughing while paddle, canoe and I,
Drift, drift,
Where the hills uplift
On either side of the current swift.

The river rolls in its rocky bed ;
My paddle is plying its way ahead ;

Dip, dip,
While the waters flip
In foam as over their breast we slip.

And oh, the river runs swifter now ;
The eddies circle about my bow.
Swirl, swirl !
How the ripples curl
In many a dangerous pool awhirl !

And forward far the rapids roar,
Fretting their margin for evermore.
Dash, dash,
With a mighty crash,
They seethe, and boil, and bound, and splash.

Be strong, O paddle ! be brave, canoe !
The reckless waves you must plunge into.
Reel, reel.
On your trembling keel,
But never a fear my craft will feel.

We've raced the rapid, we're far ahead !
The river slips through its silent bed.
Sway, sway,
As the bubbles spray
And fall in tinkling tunes away.

And up on the hills against the sky,
A fir tree rocking its lullaby,
Swings, swings,
Its emerald wings,
Swelling the song that my paddle sings.



THE SONG MY PADDLE SINGS.

THE IDLERS

THE sun's red pulses beat,
Full prodigal of heat,
Full lavish of its lustre unrepressed ;
But we have drifted far
From where his kisses are,
And in this landward-lying shade we let our paddles
rest.

The river, deep and still,
The maple-mantled hill,
The little yellow beach whereon we lie,
The puffs of heated breeze,
All sweetly whisper—These
Are days that only come in a Canadian July.

So, silently we two
Lounge in our still canoe,
Nor fate, nor fortune matters to us now :
So long as we alone
May call this dream our own,
The breeze may die, the sail may droop. We care
not when or how.

Against the thwart, near by,
Inactively you lie,

And all too near my arm your temple bends.
Your indolently crude,
Abandoned attitude,
Is one of ease and art, in which a perfect languor
 blends.

Your costume, loose and light,
Leaves unconcealed your might
Of muscle, half suspected, half defined ;
And falling well aside,
Your vesture opens wide,
Above your splendid sunburnt throat that pulses
 unconfined.

With easy unreserve,
Across the gunwale's curve,
Your arm superb is lying, brown and bare ;
Your hand just touches mine
With import firm and fine,
(I kiss the very wind that blows about your
 tumbled hair).

Ah ! Dear, I am unwise
In echoing your eyes
Whene'er they leave their far-off gaze, and turn
To melt and blur my sight ;
For every other light
Is servile to your cloud-grey eyes, wherein cloud
 shadows burn.

But once the silence breaks,
But once your ardour wakes

To words that humanize this lotus-land ;
So perfect and complete
Those burning words and sweet,
So perfect is the single kiss your lips lay on my
hand.

The paddles lie disused,
The fitful breeze abused,
Has dropped to slumber, with no after-blow ;
And hearts will pay the cost,
For you and I have lost
More than the homeward blowing wind that died
an hour ago.

AT SUNSET

TO-NIGHT the west o'er-brims with warmest dyes ;
Its chalice overflows
With pools of purple colouring the skies,
Aflood with gold and rose ;
And some hot soul seems throbbing close to mine,
As sinks the sun within that world of wine.

I seem to hear a bar of music float
And swoon into the west ;
My ear can scarcely catch the whispered note,
But something in my breast
Blends with that strain, till both accord in one,
As cloud and colour blend at set of sun.

And twilight comes with grey and restful eyes,
As ashes follow flame.
But O ! I heard a voice from those rich skies
Call tenderly my name ;
It was as if some priestly fingers stole
In benedictions o'er my lonely soul.

I know not why, but all my being longed
And leapt at that sweet call ;
My heart outreached its arms, all passion thronged
And beat against Fate's wall,
Crying in utter homesickness to be
Near to a heart that loves and leans to me.

PENSEROSO

SOULLESS is all humanity to me
To-night. My keenest longing is to be
Alone, alone with God's grey earth that seems
Pulse of my pulse and consort of my dreams.

To-night my soul desires no fellowship,
Or fellow-being ; crave I but to slip
Thro' space on space, till flesh no more can bind,
And I may quit for aye my fellow kind.

Let me but feel athwart my cheek the lash
Of whipping wind, but hear the torrent dash
Adown the mountain steep, 'twere more my choice
Than touch of human hand, than human voice.

Let me but wander on the shore night-stilled,
Drinking its darkness till my soul is filled ;
The breathing of the salt sea on my hair,
My outstretched hands but grasping empty air.

Let me but feel the pulse of Nature's soul
Athrob on mine, let seas and thunders roll
O'er night and me ; sands whirl ; winds, waters
beat ;
For God's grey earth has no cheap counterfeit.

WAVE-WON

To-NIGHT I hunger so,
Belovéd one, to know
If you recall and crave again the dream
That haunted our canoe,
And wove its witchcraft through
Our hearts as 'neath the northern night we sailed
the northern stream.

Ah ! dear, if only we
As yesternight could be
Afloat within that light and lonely shell,
To drift in silence till
Heart-hushed, and lulled and still
The moonlight through the melting air flung forth
its fatal spell.

The dusky summer night,
The path of gold and white
The moon had cast across the river's breast,
The shores in shadows clad,
The far-away, half-sad
Sweet singing of the whip-poor-will, all soothed our
souls to rest.

You trusted I could feel
My arm as strong as steel,
So still your upturned face, so calm your breath,
While circling eddies curled,
While laughing rapids whirled
From boulder unto boulder, till they dashed themselves to death.

Your splendid eyes aflame
Put heaven's stars to shame,
Your god-like head so near my lap was laid—
My hand is burning where
It touched your wind-blown hair,
As sweeping to the rapids verge, I changed my
paddle blade.

The boat obeyed my hand,
Till wearied with its grand
Wild anger, all the river lay aswoon,
And as my paddle dipped,
Thro' pools of pearl it slipped
And swept beneath a shore of shade, beneath a
velvet moon.

To-night, again dream you
Our spirit-winged canoe
Is listening to the rapids purling past?
Where, in delirium reeled
Our maddened hearts that kneeled
To idolize the perfect world, to taste of love at
last.



THISTLE-DOWN.

THISTLE-DOWN

BEYOND a ridge of pine with russet tips
The west lifts to the sun her longing lips,

Her blushes stain with gold and garnet dye
The shore, the river and the wide far sky;

Like floods of wine the waters filter through
The reeds that brush our indolent canoe.

I beach the bow where sands in shadows lie;
You hold my hand a space, then speak good-bye.

Upwinds your pathway through the yellow plumes
Of goldenrod, profuse in August blooms

And o'er its tossing sprays you toss a kiss;
A moment more, and I see only this—

The idle paddle you so lately held,
The empty bow your pliant wrist propelled,

Some thistles purpling into violet,
Their blossoms with a thousand thorns afret,

And like a cobweb, shadowy and grey,
Far floats their down—far drifts my dream away.

THE ART OF ALMA-TADEMA

THERE is no song his colours cannot sing,
For all his art breathes melody, and tunes
The fine, keen beauty that his brushes bring
To murmuring marbles and to golden Junes.

The music of those marbles you can hear
In every crevice, where the deep green stains
Have sunken when the grey days of the year
Spilled leisurely their warm, incessant rains

That, lingering, forget to leave the ledge,
But drenched into the seams, amid the hush
Of ages, leaving but the silent pledge
To waken to the wonder of his brush.

And at the Master's touch the marbles leap
To life, the creamy onyx and the skins
Of copper-coloured leopards, and the deep,
Cool basins where the whispering water wins

Reflections from the gold and glowing sun,
And tints from warm, sweet human flesh, for
fair
And subtly lithe and beautiful, leans one—
A goddess with a wealth of tawny hair.

AUTUMN'S ORCHESTRA

(INSCRIBED TO ONE BEYOND SEAS)

KNOW by the thread of music woven through
This fragile web of cadences I spin,
That I have only caught these songs since you
Voiced them upon your haunting violin.

THE OVERTURE

October's orchestra plays softly on
The northern forest with its thousand strings,
And Autumn, the conductor wields anon
The Golden-rod— The baton that he swings.

THE FIRS

There is a lonely minor chord that sings
Faintly and far along the forest ways,
When the firs finger faintly on the strings
Of that rare violin the night wind plays,
Just as it whispered once to you and me
Beneath the English pines beyond the sea.

MOSES

The lost wind wandering, forever grieves
Low overhead,
Above grey mosses whispering of leaves
Fallen and dead.

And through the lonely night sweeps their refrain
Like Chopin's prelude, sobbing 'neath the rain.

THE VINE

The wild grape mantling the trail and tree,
Festoons in graceful veils its drapery,
Its tendrils cling, as clings the memory stirred
By some evasive haunting tune, twice heard.

THE MAPLE

I

It is the blood-hued maple straight and strong,
Voicing abroad its patriotic song.

II

Its daring colours bravely flinging forth
The ensign of the Nation of the North.

HARE-BELL

Elfin bell in azure dress,
Chiming all day long,
Ringing through the wilderness
Dulcet notes of song.
Daintiest of forest flowers
Weaving like a spell—
Music through the Autumn hours,
Little Elfin bell.

THE GIANT OAK

And then the sound of marching armies 'woke
Amid the branches of the soldier oak,
And tempests ceased their warring cry, and dumb
The lashing storms that muttered, overcome,
Choked by the heralding of battle smoke,
When these gnarled branches beat their martial
drum.

ASPENS

A sweet high treble threads its silvery song,
Voice of the restless aspen, fine and thin
It trills its pure soprano, light and long—
Like the vibretto of a mandolin.

FINALE

The cedar trees have sung their vesper hymn,
And now the music sleeps—
Its benediction falling where the dim
Dusk of the forest creeps.
Mute grows the great concerto—and the light
Of day is darkening, Good-night, Good-night.
But through the night time I shall hear within
The murmur of these trees,
The calling of your distant violin
Sobbing across the seas,
And waking wind, and star-reflected light
Shall voice my answering. Good-night, Good-night.

THE ARCHERS

I

STRIPPED to the waist, his copper-coloured skin
Red from the smouldering heat of hate within,
Lean as a wolf in winter, fierce of mood—
As all wild things that hunt for foes, or food—
War paint adorning breast and thigh and face,
Armed with the ancient weapons of his race,
A slender ashen bow, deer sinew strung,
And flint-tipped arrow each with poisoned
tongue,—

Thus does the Red man stalk to death his foe,
And sighting him strings silently his bow,
Takes his unerring aim, and straight and true
The arrow cuts in flight the forest through,
A flint which never made for mark and missed,
And finds the heart of his antagonist.
Thus has he warred and won since time began,
Thus does the Indian bring to earth his man.

II

Ungarmented, save for a web that lies
In fleecy folds across his impish eyes,
A tiny archer takes his way intent
On mischief, which is his especial bent.

Across his shoulder lies a quiver, filled
With arrows dipped in honey, thrice distilled
From all the roses brides have ever worn
Since that first wedding out of Eden born.
Beneath a cherub face and dimpled smile
This youthful hunter hides a heart of guile;
His arrows aimed at random fly in quest
Of lodging-place within some blameless breast.
But those he wounds die happily, and so
Blame not young Cupid with his dart and bow:
Thus has he warred and won since time began,
Transporting into Heaven both maid and man.