

The White Cockade

Catholic Poetry and Verse

By

Charles A. Coulombe

“So up with shout and out with blade,
We’ll stand or fall with the White Cockade!”

- Irish Ballad

T**MBLAR** **H****OSE**
‘Bona Tempora Volvant’

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MMIX**

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PREFACE:

TWENTY YEARS AFTER

Poetry is a young man's game. That is not to say that older people (and women) can't write fine poetry. They can and do. But there is something about a man's youth --- his late teens and early twenties that lends itself to poetry. As my friend Richard Cowden-Guido puts it, "It is easy to be interesting when you are young; you'll spend the rest of your life struggling against being a bore!" It is obvious that most of us are not equal to the struggle. Dr. Johnson preferred the sins of youth to those of age, because they are not coupled with sanctimony.

It is not merely that one is physically stronger or more attractive in one's youth than he will likely become; it is that everything is new --- romance, politics, even war. The blush is not yet off the apple. Ideas are important, as are art, conversation, wine and moonlight. Who has not had an all-night bull session in college, at the end of which the world's problems are solved? When you are young you believe that, given the right chance, you can conquer the world!

And what a world it is --- filled with joy and horror, with wrongs to be righted and avenged, with glorious causes to be fought for! "To be young was very Heaven!" Shelley said of the age of Revolution in the 18th century, and so, in some aspects, it always is for the young. Their ardor and passion can lead them on the High Crusade --- or into the Red Guards.

But the flip side is one of fear and doubt. What is my place in the world? Will I ever find it? Will I grow old without success? Will my life be a waste? Does she really love me? Is she the one? Will I ever find love? --- and on and on. Middle Age may be duller and less fiery, but generally, for good or ill, those questions have been answered.

So it is that the poems in *The White Cockade* were all written in my youth; some when I was a cadet at New Mexico Military Institute, others when I was struggling as a comic in Hollywood, still others when I was a novice writer looking for my voice. In earlier days, the great shadow was the Mordor-like Soviet Union; in the later poems, the joy and anticipation launched by the fall of that “Evil Empire” was uppermost, and for very different reasons I felt like Shelley.

All of that has changed, since, and both of the political sources of fear and elation have passed away, taking my youth with them. This writer has generated oceans of print since he penned the lines you are about to read, and his contents and discontents are those of Middle Age. Yet, when reading the afterword, he finds his views in art, religion, and politics have not changed. As the Russian song says, “oh my friend, we’re older, but no wiser, for in our hearts our dreams are still the same.”

Indeed they are. I’ve not written poetry in two decades, but the impulses that inspired these remain, and I still enjoy reading these. More importantly, many of those who were infants when these words written are young men now, and quite a few profess to have been inspired by them. A higher compliment cannot be paid to a poet.

Every book of poetry is an adventure shared by the reader and the writer; and so we begin. But I will send you off a bit from one of my favorite anonymous ballads “Tom O’ Bedlam’s Song,” that epitomizes to me the quest that all of us who live must undertake:

With a host of furious fancies
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear and a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander.
By a knight of ghostes and shadowes
I summon'd am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond the wild world's end.
Methinks it is no journey.

Charles A. Coulombe
Arcadia, California
24 September 2009
Our Lady of Ransom

Aspirations

The March-Warden's Song

I ride the King's highway, wherever I go,
Relentless, regardless of friend or of foe.
Ye ghoulish horrors that prowl by night,
Beware or be tasted by sword-blade so bright

Though wild, deserted, this province I sing,
Belongs yet by right to my master the King.
Further yet from His Majesty's siege
Is granted in fief by Imperial Liege.

The whole thing witnessed with ineffable hope
By their master and mine, our sovereign Lord Pope.
But far are those who hold it in fee,
This forested border is watched over by me.

The wild wood-woses who dwell in the land
Though looking like men, cannot understand.
Living like cattle born without souls
Drag out their existence like tormented trolls.

Once all this province was lovely and fair,
Its people contented, its knights without care.
Neglect and treachery smothered its good,
Over green farmland grew up this wood.

Over the border the evil things came,
Ogres, bogles, things without name.
The stones of roads the King had laid
Grew over with bushes, became unmade.

Taliessin and Dante found their way out,
Most though were caught, lacking a scout.
Their witless descendants, the woses are here,
Too witless and feckless to even know fear

Of the demon creatures that restlessly prow
When all are asleep, save the night owl.
My father's house was filled with song,
There fires were bright and joy was long.

But summons came from His Majesty's Court
Asking for aid where his long arm was short.
He sent me here to maintain good order,
Alone without aid to warden the border.

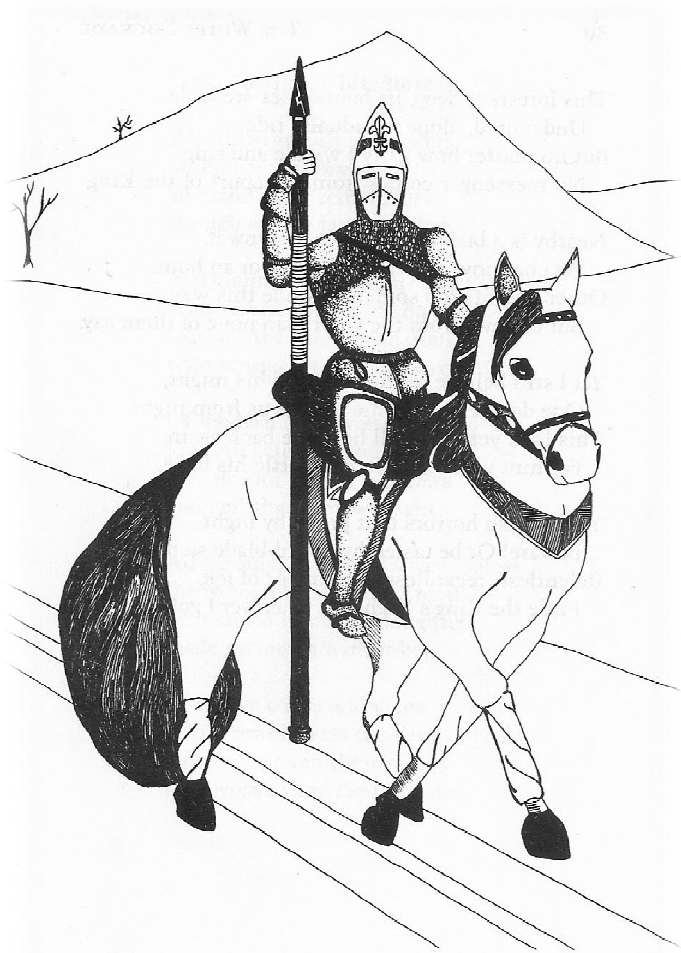
Now, when a wose learns how to think
Or a traveler lost in a bog starts to sink,
I help them out of this terrible waste
Back to the road to leave in great haste.

This forest is deep, its boundaries are wide.
Undaunted, alone I gradually ride.
But no matter how gaily I warble and sing,
No messenger comes from the court of the King.

Nearby is a bishop who lives in a tower.
We chat now and then for a day or an hour.
Other knights too sometimes ride this way,
But of news from the Court can none of them say.

Yet I still believe in the King and his might,
One day he shall come to save us from night.
This land yet is his till he comes back again,
For him will I hold it, and battle his bane.

Ye ghoulish horrors that prowl by night,
 Beware! Or be tasted by sword-blade so bright.
Relentless, regardless of friend or of foe,
 I ride the King's Highway, wherever I go!



For the White Rose

All Kings and all pretenders,
wherever you may be,
the land itself remembers
though we are far from thee.

You Counts and Knights and Barons
who served your God and King,
fear not the modern charons
who scorn their honor, sing

Of modern age's wonders
joys our science brought,
care not for bloody blunders
and evil that they wrought

All through the world's vast waters
the Monarchs sent their men
who ended Heathen slaughters
made salvation within ken

Of savage tribes and races.
To our South-west the King of Spain
sent Friars from their places
who worked and died in pain.

His Majesty of France indeed
the rivers took in fief,
Blackrobe, trapper, with great speed
converted brave and Chief.

Even Britain's Sovereign cold
displayed his Royal worth,
dispatched minions sure and bold
to found our land of birth.

He who reigned in Sweden's north
sent all that he could spare,
brave Swedes for him sallied forth
and settled Delaware.

But facing revolution's frown,
the Monarch's call so loud,
for brave swords to help the crown
against the maddening crowd.

The Jacobites for Royal James
and Bonnie Charles as well,
the Carlists fought with Spanish names
while Chouans tasted Hell.

The brave emerged from old Vendee
and died at Quiberon
or fought with great old Duc Condé
or fell at bold Toulon.

And Hofer up in High Tyrol
fought his Emperor's foe
feared not to pay the awful toll
before they laid him low.

In Russia's far off blinding snows
the Whites fought for their Tsar,
and though the Country's lost in woe,
their glory none can mar.

Ethiopia, Laos, Iran
all had their Paladins
Vietnam, Afghanistan,
remind us of our sins.

I beg the King who reigns above
that to me may be shown
how to fight with savage love
for altar, and for throne.