

SUNDAY

Untermeyer, Louis, 1885-1977

It was Sunday—
Eleven in the morning; people were at church—
Prayers were in the making; God was near at hand—
Down the cramped and narrow streets of quiet Lawrence
Came the tramp of workers marching in their hundreds;
Marching in the morning, marching to the grave-yard,
Where, no longer fiery, underneath the grasses,
Callous and uncaring, lay their friend and sister.
In their hands they carried wreaths and drooping flowers,
Overhead their banners dipped and soared like eagles—
Aye, but eagles bleeding, stained with their own heart's-blood—
Red, but not for glory—red, with wounds and travail,
Red, the buoyant symbol of the blood of all the world. . .
So they bore their banners, singing toward the grave-yard,
So they marched and chanted, mingling tears and tributes,
So, with flowers, the dying went to deck the dead.

Within the churches people heard
The sound, and much concern was theirs—
God might not hear the Sacred Word—
God might not hear their prayers!

Should such things be allowed these slaves —
To vex the Sabbath peace with Song,
To come with chants, like marching leaves,
That proudly swept along...

Suppose God turned to these — and heard!
Suppose He listened unawares —
God might forget the Sacred Word,
God might forget their prayers!

And so (oh, tragic irony)
The blue-clad Guardians of the Peace
Were sent to sweep them back—to see
The ribald song should cease;

To scatter those who came and vexed
God with their troubled cries and cares.
Quiet—so God might hear the text;
The sleek and unctuous prayers!

Up the rapt and singing streets of little Lawrence,
Came the stolid soldiers; and, behind the bluecoats,
Grinning and invisible, bearing unseen torches,
Rode red hordes of anger, sweeping all before them.
Lust and Evil joined them—Terror rode among them;
Fury fired its pistols; Madness stabbed and yelled...
Through the wild and bleeding streets of shuddering Lawrence,
Raged the heedless panic, hour-long and bitter.
Passion tore and trampled; men once mild and peaceful.
Fought with savage hatred in the name of Law and Order.
And, below the outcry, like the sea beneath the breakers,
Mingling with the anguish, rolled the solemn organ...
Eleven in the morning—people were at church—
Prayers were in the making—God was near at hand
It was Sunday!