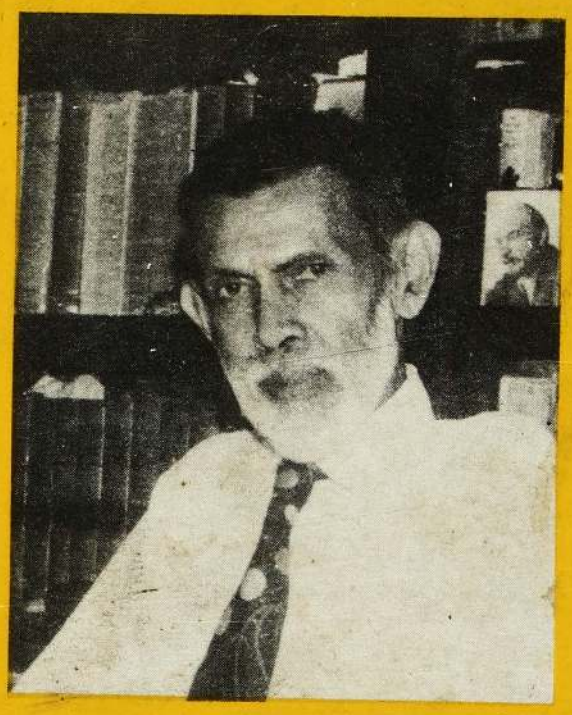

Rhyme and Reason

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Rhyme and Reason

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
OF MY DEAR PARENTS

COVER — ALBERT DHARMASIRI

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PREFACE

Over the last 50 years or more I have been writing verse on various subjects of local and international interest, some of a topical and controversial nature ranging from the perennial problems of life and death, war and peace, sex and society religion and rationalism, crime and punishment, science and superstition, politics and economic policies, race and apartheid, personalities and events. Many of these poems appeared in the local press, in Magazines, journals and other periodicals and attracted appreciative response. I was encouraged to publish a collection of poems in consequence and about ten years ago, I actually had a typescript of about 250 poems reviewed by Prof. Ediriwira Sarachchandra, then at the East-West Center, Hawaii and by Doric de Souza, no longer with us. Fortified by their favourable reviews, both being friends and kindly disposed to me, I obtained estimates and discussed the marketing prospects with several printers and publishers. The cost of printing was prohibitive and the market for local English poetry bleak. Recognising the realities of the situation I decided to postpone sine die the publication. The late Gate Mudaliyar A.C. G.S. Amarasekera, also a friend of mine, despite the disparity in years, had kindly prepared an elaborate design in colour for the cover page to suit the contents and title then in mind "Men, Matters and Politics". Here I must acknowledge my debt to another friend, Mr.H.E.R. Abayasekera, former Editor of the Times of Ceylon who had laboriously corrected the errors in the typescript and prepared foot notes, where necessary, for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the events or personalities. He has also prepared the material for the rear page of the cover. I am also indebted to his brother Mr. Earle E.C. Abayasekera for freely giving me of his time and expertise and active assistance in the printing and publication of this volume. In order to meet the rising cost of paper and printing I have reduced the number of poems in the typescript. I have included a few more recent poems to heighten the interest of the reader. Mr. Albert Dharmasiri, another friend has very kindly designed a simple

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but effective cover to keep down the cost. The title of the book has also been altered by me to "Rhyme and Reason" to concisely convey the nature and purpose of the publication; the object of most of my poems being to pinpoint the evils and deficiencies through humour and sarcasm and help build a better society.

I also thank Miss. I.C.S. Rodrigo, Attorney-at-law and my son Yohesan Casie Chetty for assisting with some of the clerical work involved. Yohesan for helping in other ways also. I thank Messrs Samuha Printers for their co-operation. If this volume is well received I can assure my readers that there is already enough material for a second volume. With the stimulus given to the English Medium by the Government, reflected in the press and media, the prospects seem favourable. Finally I wish to thank the press viz :- The Island, The Sun, The Ceylon Daily News and the Christian Worker for the hospitality of their columns. The Sunday Edition of the Island gave generous publicity to my poems in two successive issues of the paper recently. I thank the Editor and Mr. Amita Abeyesekera in particular for this wide and welcome coverage. I am happy to record that Prof. Sarachchandra has just been declared the winner of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award.

May I conclude in the words of Hilaire Belloc "On his Books".

"When I am dead, I hope it may be said;
"His sins were scarlet, but his books were read".

MERVYN St. S. CASIE CHETTY

26th July, '88

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FOREWORD

Mervyn Casie Chetty's name has become a household word that resounds throughout Sri Lanka. For a period of almost thirty years he has been commenting, in verse that sometimes has a sting and sometimes provokes a smile, on events in the world around him, ranging from the shooting of Kandasamy in Sri Lanka to the strange case of Karen Quinlan of the United States. Readers of the newspapers after going through the news, will always turn the pages until they come to the place where Casie Chetty makes his comment, without reading which they would feel that they have had a meal without dessert. Casie Chetty rounds it off for everyone giving people an angle on the news which is original and stimulating.

Casie Chetty is the concerned poet. He is always on the side of the down-trodden, those the ruthless march of history passes by. He is a man who would think of the turkey's point of view in the midst of Christmas festivities. And this is symbolic of Casie Chetty's philosophy. He wants social justice and an egalitarian society as a means of achieving this. In this sense he is wedded to a particular ideology and he makes no secret of it. But the purpose with which he writes is not always to expound this ideology. He writes freely on anything that evokes an immediate reaction in him and spurs him to reflection whether it be a political event of wide significance or an experience personal to him. And he puts things in a way that never fails to strike us and stir our imagination.

Mervyn is a modest person. He does not pretend that he is writing poetry "of profound meaning" (to use his own phrase) and does not expect to be rated with "the bards sublime." Perhaps it would be appropriate to quote here (with his permission) from a letter he writes to me to Honolulu, in which he expresses with characteristic humility and understatement, his aims as a poet: "I have attempted to convey a message in most of my writings, they are purposeful and directed to chastise the wrong-doer & ridicule & pour scorn on the despicable. If I have

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succeeded in this, I would be content, I could then say with Pope,

"Yes, I am proud, I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me,
Safe from the bar, the pulpit and the throne
Yet touched and shamed by ridicule alone."

Casie Chetty expresses his philosophy not only in his poems but in his life as well. It can be said that he truly lives his philosophy. He likes the simple life, the life without ostentation, and he values the few friends he has, whose loyalty he has tested, and he "binds them to his heart with hoops of steel." His wants are few. He knows that to be content with what one has, brings with it the greatest happiness. He believes in the words of the Buddha, that "contentment is man's most valued possession." And he is one of those rare people in the world of today, with all its deceitful ways, its ruthless self-interest, its intrigue and cunning, who upholds, in his practical relationships with people, the highest of moral principles. It is also comforting to see that one need not be religious in a conventional sense to be good. Casie Chetty is, if not an atheist or confirmed materialist, at least an agnostic (See "An Agnostic's Wish.)

Apart from the didactic intent of most of his work, where, I must say, the moralising is sometimes trite, I enjoy his verses in lighter vein as well. When Casie Chetty turns out a little rhyme such as "An Exquisite Thing", "On Sex Appeal", "The Dental Queen" or "The Fickle Crowd", he has his tongue in his cheek. And hasn't even a poem like "Keep it Clean" which looks, from the outside, like a Municipal Council slogan in verse, another hidden meaning which keeps on tickling the reader ?

I am glad Casie Chetty has decided to put out this collection of his verse, composed over the years, in book form so that those who have been reading them can now possess them as a memory of landmarks of the events of our times as well as the poet's way of looking at them.

EDIRIWIRA SARACHCHANDRA

East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii
March 1979

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INTRODUCTION

For more than thirty years now, newspaper readers have been amused from time to time by Mervyn Casie Chetty's light verse on all sorts of topical issues. I say amused because that was usually the first reaction. But in the case of many of his jingles, there was a seriousness beneath the surface. This became obvious to me when I read through the whole collection he is due to publish. They were light sallies on a wide variety of subjects, but the mind behind them was essentially sincere and grave.

To classify these verses would only serve to reveal the whole train of varied interests in Casie Chetty's life. Some of these interests - such as his love and concern for S. Thomas' College - would be shared only by other alumni. But in at least one poem about the College, he has a wider canvass - he is pleading that the identity of the better private schools taken over by the Government should not be erased, or their standards and traditions altered.

There are other verses which are tokens of friendship. A whole series of birthday verses for Sir John Kotalawela - a fellow member of the Airport Club at Ratmalana stands out among these. There are also some obituary tributes, some for personal friends, and others for notables like Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. All these personal tributes are composed with charm, and would have pleased very much those to whom they were addressed.

Some of the verses are connected with his agnostic and rationalistic views. I did not find these the most interesting, because the light touch does not suit the content very well.

A large number of poems are topical. The art of occasional

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verse often produces perishable commodities, but when one reads through this collection - if one has a memory of the matters referred to - recollection is stirred and the successive events of thirty years are 'placed'.

Casie Chetty's interest in political questions, both national and international is shown in a large number of compositions. Here, I think, he will get the widest response, partly because many of these issues are not merely topical but of abiding interest. His political views are peculiarly his own. He never, so far as I know, engaged in active politics. He had sympathies for the Left Parties, but tolerant liberalism is combined with these, and gives his work wider appeal.

In one of his earliest compositions, he comments on the limitations of the Independence gained in 1948, by noting the absence of the Left Parties at the celebration of Independence

"What means this crude display
Of gartered knights and clowns in fine array?" he asks, and underlines the upper class character of the celebration.

His sympathies were wide, and he could defend the Queen from a savage satirical attack:

"A scion of an ancient stock
Thought he would give the world a shock
And squirted all his bitter spleen
Upon her Majesty the Queen."

Casie Chetty shows himself a good citizen in many verses on such matters as keeping Colombo clean, eliminating privilege and corruption, hypocrisy and unction from our public life. Despite his light touch, some, of his satiric thrusts can be quite biting.

It would be a great mistake to treat Mervyn Casie Chetty's work as doggerel, though he is never afraid of jingle. The underlying seriousness of the mind that comes through the light verse is one important thing. The other is the neat artistry of many of the verses. This is difficult to illustrate in a short quotation, but evident on reading whole poems, like BUILD MORE SCHOOLS

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in which occurs the plea about private schools referred to above.

The verses can be approached more sadly as documents of an age gone by. Mervyn Casie Chetty was a typical product of the excellent 'English Education' we used to have. But he combines the liberal broad-mindedness he was probably taught in school with new ideas - both nationalist and socialist - and a concern for the people's welfare.

Some of the compositions relate to international politics, he is critical of the United States actions in Vietnam, of racism in the States, and despite his basic sympathy for the Soviet Union, he hits out at the attack on Czechoslovakia.

Some of his poems are very individual - A Savage Sentence defends a proposal to allow a hopelessly ill and mentally inert patient to die, instead of keeping her 'a living corpse'. The verses were very interesting reading; amusing, charming and expressing a decided and impressive attitude to life.

DORIC DE SOUZA

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SECTION - I

Internationalism & Peace

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WIN THE PEACE

When the Allies are victorious and this global war is won,
And nations liberated from the thraldom of the Hun,
When the Nazi power lies humbled and the manhood of her race
Lies rotting and forgotten in distant clime and place;

When the loot has been retaken from the clutches of Japan
And every trace deleted of that proud Imperial plan;
When the freedom that was China's is once again restored
And trucks no longer rumble along the Burma Road.

When the soldier's task is over and the Allied statesmen meet
With the once ambitious Axis now prostrate at their feet,
When the freed and lesser nations will surely have their word
And the subject Eastern peoples will clamour to be heard;

Then in the hour of triumph, will surely be the test
Of war aims great and noble, of high souled claims expressed
How vain has been the carnage and brief the world's release
If politicians falter and fail to win the peace !

This poem, first published in the "City News" of July 7, 1948, issues a warning that has no less relevance today when the maintenance of world peace has often seemed to quiver in the balance.

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FOREVER FREEDOM

Is there not some universal
Law accepted and in force,
Over-riding laws of nations
And enshrined in common source?

Wherefore did United Nations
Pledge themselves to Human Rights,
If they will not move to action
When they see the warning lights?

When resurgent Afric nations
Flaunt their freedom dearly won,
In the darkest South the White Man
Does not think his task is done.

Still he bears his precious burden,
Holds the best and richest land,
Robs the native of his birthright,
Rules him with an iron hand.

Now the war drums have been sounded,
Coloured hosts in battle dress,
For their country and their freedom
Cry for justice and redress.

But the tyrants drunk with power,
Blinded by their hate and greed,
Launch anew a reign of terror
'gainst the Black Man and his breed.

And the gallant freedom fighters
Recking not for limb or life,
From the dank and dreary dungeons
Carry on the bitter strife.

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Brave Mandela and his octet
Rescued from the jaws of death,
Mini and his condemned quartet
Fight on with their dying breath.

To the rescue freedom lovers
From the corners of the world,
Storm the pinnacles of power
Till the tyrants have been hurled!

Written and published in August, 1964, in response to a printed appeal "Save Those Men" by Suriya Wickremasinghe, Asst.-Secretary Afro-Asian Solidarity Association of Ceylon.

In the Rivona Trial, in S. Africa (Oct. 1963-June 1964) eight people (including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisula, former Secy-General of the African National Congress, non-White political organisation banned in 1960 after the Sharpeville Massacre) were accused of sabotage and charged under the "Suppression of Communism Act" and the "General Law Amendment Act". Mandela and six others were sentenced to life imprisonment. Defence counsel claimed that 156 of the alleged 199 acts of sabotage occurred while Mandela was in prison. Mandela is confined in Rebbon Island Prison, off Cape Town, and his wife Winnie was confined and not permitted to leave the small Orange Free State town of Brandfort under a 5 year banning order issued by the S. African Government in 1976.

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RESTORE THE PEACE

Land of the Pharaohs and the Sphinx,
Where peaceful flows the lordly Nile,
What savage dare unleash the force
That will erase that mystic smile.

The war-planes roar, the sirens screech
The cannons boom and bombs explode,
The twin exploiters of the East
Are sweeping down the bloody road.

The road Imperial troops have trod,
In Europe's dark Colonial days,
With corpses littered in the trail
Of plundered lands and waterways.

Free Asia will not longer brook
The foreign tyrant's lust for power;
The tocsin sounds, the war drums roll,
To arms, to arms, now is the hour!

Down with aggression and with force,
Restore the moral power of men,
And rest not till the weaker States
Are free to breathe and live again.

Written in November, 1956
Israel had invaded Egypt's Sinai Peninsula on Oct. 29, 1956 and France and Britain, when Egypt rejected their demand for a cease-fire, bombed Egypt by air on Oct. 31 and landed forces on Nov. 5-6. The US condemned this attack and supported the UN's cease-fire demand which Egypt accepted. Britain and France followed Egypt's example and fighting ceased on Nov. 7.

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RESTORE THE PEACE

When the weary giant China
Did rear its mighty head,
O'er years of exploitation
And wars and famine dread ;

When the Revolution triumphed
Thro' a sea of blood and gloom,
We joined with joy the chorus 'may
A thousand flowers bloom'.

When the Workers' State rose proudly
On the ruins of the past
The East felt that the Golden Age
Had dawned for us at last.

Ignorance, greed, corruption
And nepotism fled,
Progress and planned production
Rose in their place instead.

While Bharat our big brother
To power blocs non-aligned,
Was building a progressive State
With friendship to mankind.

With hope and expectation
We hailed the Red regime,
And Pancha Seela guaranteed
The Co-existence dream.

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But fear, mistrust, suspicion
Have China's mind possessed,
For Dollars, Sterling and the Mark
Have India's Planning blessed.

The mounting border tension o'er
Macmahon's musty Line,
In Sino-Indian feelings now
Have caused a sharp decline.

They are fighting on the border,
The shells burst overhead,
And reinforcements are rushed to
Increase the toll of dead.

The conflagration's spreading fast
And some will fan the flame,
But men of vision and goodwill
The dogs of war must tame.

Cry halt to all aggression,
Intransigence must cease.
Let Afro-Asians intervene,
And so restore the peace.

Written in December, 1962, following China's invasion, in October, of Indian territory in the north-east to fortify her claims in a border dispute with India.

This poem appeared on 2.12.62 in the "Sunday Times", Colombo.

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TO THE MOTHERLAND OF TERESHKOVA

Valentina Tereshkova,
You have won the world's acclaim,
Yet unrivalled in achievement
And undying in your fame.

In a field of man's endeavour,
You have proved what few have thought,
That frail woman is not second
Even as a Cosmonant.

Yet you are so unassuming,
Pretty, dignified and calm,
And your smiling friendly presence
Radiates a quiet charm.

As you move about among us
Showing what we can achieve,
Joining in our great endeavour,
What a fillip we receive!

You inspire us with your presence
And advance the noble cause,
As we draft the resolutions
Weighing every word and clause.

Congress of so many peoples
From all corners of the earth;
Praise the peace plans of your country,
Russia, which gave you birth,

Leads the fight to end the arms race,
Nuclear tests and weapons ban,
Spreads detente and co-existence,
Makes this planet safe for man.

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HANDS OFF CUBA

Though war clouds threaten Cuba and
That little isle seems doomed,
The courage of her people is
For life with honour groomed.

A proud imperial mighty power
Has thrown a ring of steel,
Around her little neighbour bold,
But she will never squeal.

The fearless peasants in the fields,
The workers black and white,
Against the massive threat of arms
Will carry on the fight.

Beneath the crushing power of force,
Brave Cuba shall not fall,
For other freedom loving men
Have answered to her call.

Soviet ships are steaming fast
With all the vital aid,
To help the gallant islanders
To beat the big blockade.

A headlong clash which may have spelt
The death-knell of the race,
Has been averted by good sense
But only for a space.

Abjure destructive nuclear power,
Let sanity prevail;
The human race will stand condemned
If mediators fail.

Written on November 10, 1962, on the Cuban missile crisis.

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HOPE FOR HUMANITY ;
WORLD CONGRESS OF PEACE

We flew in on one Autumn eve, midst falling flakes of snow,
Into that vast historic land, whose heart is in Moscow.
The warmth of our welcome there, cold Nature's blasts expelled
As sturdy champions of World Peace our hands in friendship held.
We thought of Borodino and Napoleon's troops laid low
Before this mighty city which has humbled every foe ;
Of the Great October triumph and the proud heroic stand
Of the workers and the peasants of this then exploited land ;
Of the still more recent epic over Hitler's Nazi hordes.
Who felt the force and fury of the brave defenders' swords ;
Of Lenin's works immortal, which paved the path of peace.
And the Soviet State's commitment to a policy to ease
Cold wars and bitter tensions, and the frantic nuclear race,
With the fear of self-destruction which humanity must face.

But on this dark horizon, shone forth a bright Red Star,
The Congress of Peace Forces, which drew men from near and far.
From Europe and great Asia, Africa and the States,
They thronged inthousands and converged upon the Palace gates,
Inside that large luxurious Hall, all creeds and races met,
In diverse tongues to speak of peace and find agreement yet.
A total ban on Nuclear arms, Disarmament, Progress,
A guarantee of Human Rights, Security, Redress,
Freedom from all oppressive yokes, Aggression, Genocide,
Detente and Co-existence must 'twixt nations long abide.
Dread tensions, deep frustrations, and threats of war must pale,
Co-operation, Dialogue and Goodwill must prevail.
For disputes and differences, twixt nations states or race,
By frank and full discussion, just solutions they must trace.

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And vile disruptors of the peace, who threaten and blackmail,
With Brezhnev's reassuring pledge will in their purpose fail,
In heroic Indo-China, interference must cease,
Whilst the Middle-East is moving towards a stable peace.
The Congress had played well its role, its heavy task is done,
And all who shared in its success are ready everyone,
Each in his country to press on to implement the plan,
Which will advance the cause of peace and bring new hope
to man.

Written in October, 1974.
The author was a member of the Sri Lanka delegation to the Steering Committee of the World Peace Council held in Helsinki, in Finland, in 1973 and also the sole delegate from Sri Lanka to the World Congress of Peace Forces in Moscow in 1974.

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VEN SARANANKARA THERA APOSTLE OF PEACE

Weep not for him who lieth now at ease
The monk who strove untiringly for peace,
His sandalled feet and saffron robe were known
Where'er the worker struggled for his own.
In prison cell he suffered for the crime
Of fighting freedom's cause in British time,
For seven years he languished in the gaol
Till Independence turned the heavy scale.
But still his restless spirit sought relief
From poverty, from hunger and from grief
And in the works of Marx and Lenin found
New hope, in a philosophy profound.
And in his quest he wandered far and wide
An honoured guest where Workers' States preside,
And in the hallowed cause of peace his name,
In Councils of the World, will live in fame.
To outlaw war and nuclear weapons, he
Had spent his life, - now Death has set him free.

The monk was founder member of the Ceylon Peace Council. He was also closely associated with India's freedom struggle and was imprisoned in Indian jails. He won the Lenin Peace Prize.

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SALUTE THE SAGE

A century in quest of love,
Deep learning and of truth,
For peace and justice in the world
He spent his ageless youth.

With steadfast courage and resolve,
He smashed the household gods
Of jingoism and of war
And bared the nuclear odds,

He scourged the tyrants who unleashed
The bloody hounds of war,
Destruction of the human race
In nuclear arms he saw.

With science now enthroned in power,
Great nations must decide,
In peace to build a fairer world
Or fatally collide.

A tribute published in 1970 to Lord (Bertrand) Russell, the distinguished and tireless campaigner for peace and disarmament. He died in 1970, aged 98. This poem was published in the "Sunday Times", Colombo, in Feb. 1970, as well as in the Indian Rationalist Association's Birth Centenary Souvenir publication in honour of Lord Russell and in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1970. It was reprinted in the "Rationalist News" of May-June 1974, journal of the Rationa list Association of N.S.W.

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SHRI NEHRU ZINDABAD

A mighty tree has fallen,
A tree that gave us shade
And nourished with its vital sap
The country that it made.

A little sheltered acorn
Became the mighty oak
That grew to free its country from
The bondage of its yoke.

From foreign domination,
From ignorance and fear,
With Bapuji, his leader
To whom he was so near.

He led his people's struggle
And wrested liberty,
Armed only with the justice of
Man's birthright to be free.

The voiceless crores of India
Of varied caste and creed,
Merged 'neath his lofty banner
Their prejudice and greed.

Inspired by this leader
Who symbolized their cause,
They battled on to freedom
And won the world's applause.

491 C.C

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This noble son of India
Was not content to rest,
With freedom for his country from
The thraldom of the West.

For in the world's great councils
His honoured voice rang clear,
Demanding for the subject world
That heritage so dear.

With courage and with vision
He espoused the cause of peace,
Adopting Pancha Sila that
The holocausts may cease.

Now freedom's voice is silent,
The beacon light is out,
And through the gloom and sadness
Arise both fear and doubt,

Will we keep his high ideals
And pledge ourselves anew,
Or will they swiftly vanish like
The freshly fallen dew?

His spirit will inspire us,
His life-work will endure,
This noblest Asian of us all
Whose heart was with the poor.

Written on June 20, 1964, on the death of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The author first met Pandit Nehru when he attended a session of the Indian Congress held in Jaipur in 1948 along with the late Proctor S. Somasundaram and a few others. On their return they were entertained to breakfast by Pandit Nehru at his official residence of the Prime Minister and a group photograph was taken on the occasion.

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PEACE AND THE POPE

We welcome, Holy Father, your urgent call to peace,
However late the summons, may all wanton carnage cease,
The nations which united in declaring Human Rights
A quarter century ago, are still engaged in fights.
The lion lies not with the lamb, but will upon him pounce,
The rich and strong exploit the weak and few their crimes denounce.
There is no limit to their greed, their power knows no bounds,
They measure human worth and weal in dollars or in pounds.
They rain destruction, death, disease six thousand miles from home,
Ignoring all the world's protests and pious pleas of Rome.
Worse bondage of another sort obtains in other clime,
Where colour is enough excuse to justify all crime.
The Negro in White Africa or in America,
Despoiled, disrupted and despised, cries vengeance is not far.
Rich oil wells in the Middle East will continue to brew
Sufficient trouble to suppress the Arabs and the Jew.
And who so blind that cannot see the rank absurdity
Of keeping China from her seat in right and equity ?
While some enjoy surfeit of wealth and others die of want,
While millionaires bestride the earth which starving spectres haunt.
While race and colour, class and creed, are things in which we pride,
And ignorance and knowledge do the human race divide,
So long will exploitation and violence not cease,
Despite glib talk of Human Rights and pious pleas for Peace.

Written in Jan., 1969. Appeared in the "Observer" of 10.1.69 and in the "Forward" of 16.1.69.

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OUTLAW WAR

When atom power was harnessed
To serve the God of War,
It was in proud defiance
Of every rule of law.

No more to armed combatants
And battlefields confined,
The forces of destruction
Conceived in human mind.

The housewife in her homestead,
The infant at her breast,
The school-child in the classroom,
The aged and oppressed;

The toiler in the city,
The peasant in the field,
The unsuspecting children
Knew not their doom was sealed.

When in a blinding second
The fateful bomb did crash,
Destroying every trace of life
With deadly active ash.

Now death and desolation
And terror stalk the land,
Where once a smiling city
Did flourish, fair and grand.

Is this the high ideal,
Is this the noble aim,
Of freedom and of culture,
Of science and of fame?

Mobilise world opinion,
Nuclear bombs outlaw,
And tear from his pedestal
The cruel God of War.

Written in Nov. 1970.

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WORLD PEACE THRO' UNITY

Bharat, the motherland of peace,
To friends of peace sends out the call;
From war-mongers she will release
The world - she summons great and small.

From all the varied States of Ind
They flock into the Congress Hall,
From Afro-Asia blows the wind
E'en Europe answers to the call.

Four days in serious sessions sat
Four thousand delegates of peace,
Condemning all aggression that
The scourge of cruel war may cease.

In Vietnam, in Palestine,
Where death rains daily from the sky,
And precious blood like wasted wine
Flows in the trail of bombers high.

Heroic fighters in these lands
With courage great their foes resist,
They die with weapons in their hands
And foil the foul Imperialist.

The world pays homage to these men
Who fight undaunted by the odds,
Not Nixon's stooges nor Yemen
Can make them bow to dollar gods,

The World Peace Movement will assure
That peace and justice shall prevail,
And action to this end ensure
That naked force and might shall fail.

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We'll hound destroyers of the peace
And fight aggressors in their course,
Until all nations find release
From foul aggression and from force.

Written on the occasion of the All-India Congress of Peace & Solidarity which held its sessions from Sept. 19 to 24, 1972 in Calcutta. Over 5,000 delegates from various States of India and countries of that sub-Continent and from other parts of Asia and Europe were present. The author was the sole representative of the Peace Council of Sri Lanka.

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SALUTE THE VICTORY - SECURE THE PEACE

Full decades three ago this year
The Fascist powers were crushed,
And monsters who bestrode the world
In death's embrace were hushed.

Herr Hitler, Mussolini and
Their partner in Japan,
Saw shattered like a house of cards,
Their paranoic plan.

The first to stem the Nazi hordes
And put the foe to flight,
Were those stout hearts that overthrew
The Tsarist tyrant's might.

With blood and sweat upon their soil
They built a Workers' State,
Encircled by imperial powers
That foster war and hate.

By quirk of chance they were allied
With British, French and Yanks,
Who blasted Nazi planes and ships,
Their submarines and tanks.

The final chapter which was writ,
The devastating blow,
Pearl Harbour, did beget the bombs
Whose blast and blight we knew.

Let's celebrate the victory,
But vigilant remain,
For Fascists rear their ugly heads
And bid to ride again.

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In peaceful co-existence lies
Dialogue and detente,
Respect for States and peoples' rights,
Assistance and entente.

Press on for ban on nuclear arms,
Aggressive pacts expose,
With peace forces in strength unite
War mongers to depose.

Written in 1975 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Allied victory in Europe (V-E Day). The German armies began surrendering on May 5, 1945, and unconditional surrender was signed on May 7, in Rheims H.Q.

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THE NEW STOCKHOLM APPEAL

I am convinced and strongly feel,
We launch the New Stockholm Appeal
With faith and hope that others still
Outside the fold must join, and will
The fight to work and plan for peace,
That threats and tensions soon may cease,
That foul aggression, nuclear war
From this fair planet we outlaw,
Defend detente and end the race
For deadlier arms, and in its place
Pursue the road to mankind's goal
That stable peace may play its role
For freedom, justice and progress
Sans hunger, poverty and stress.
Together let us place a ban
On war and weapons threatening man.

Written in September, 1976, in Finland when the author was a delegate to the World Peace Conference held there. The Conference was to end the arms race, for disarmament and detente and was held in Helsinki from Sept.23 to 26. The Conference was to be continued in Stockholm, Sweden, where the New Stockholm Appeal was launched, but the venue was unavoidably changed to Helsinki.

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A TRIBUTE TO KRISHNA MENON

This architect of freedom bestrode the Indian scene
Twixt global wars, upheavals and conflicts great and keen.
With penetrating vision he saw the issues clear
And fought the mighty British Raj without a pause or fear.
With Bapuji and Nehru and legendary Bhose
And other giants of that age the rugged path he chose
To make his Mother India from prince and pauper free,
An independent classless State, a firm economy.
With unremitting ardour he battled fiercely then
And swayed the Councils of the World and dominated men.
As India's roving envoy he shaped her history
And later stepped behind the scene, a man of mystery.
This reservoir of knowledge, this human dynamo
This doughty fighter for world peace, alas, is now no more!

Mr. V.K. Krishna Menon was India's Defence Minister from 1957 until he was dismissed by Pandit Nehru in 1962, following China's invasion of Indian territory. A brilliant, if controversial figure he was reputedly a supporter of Soviet Communist Party policies. In 1953–62 he led India's delegation to the UN.

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EARTHA KITT'S LUNCHEON HIT

Now Eartha Kitt has made a hit,
On Radio Moscow,
She broke the calm with Vietnam.
That Lady Bird may know.

With fierce scream, she broke the dream
Of hostess and her guests
She made them reel and even squeal-
The sanctimonious pests.

At White House door she laid the score
Of human sacrifice,
Of conscript youth kept from the truth,
Of drugs and sex and vice.

Of wasted lives, of slums and dives,
Of youth snatched off to die,
"We have not heard" said Lady Bird,
"Of these-not such as I".

"But let us work and never shirk
Our efforts to win peace,
"We are at war" who e'er foresaw
We could not win with ease ?

At a White House luncheon on Jan.18, 1968 to women involved in social work, Miss. Kitt, a Black singer of International fame screamed a protest against American boys being forecd to go to the Vietnam front to certain death. Lady Bird was the wife of President Johnson,

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FINLAND - LAND OF PEACE

Land of a thousand shining lakes
Green pastures and tall pine,
It is your love for peace that makes
The midnight sun to shine.

Far from the distant icy North
Your call goes to the world
The hosts of peace have sallied forth
Their banners all unfurled.

From Asia and the Middle East,
From Afric's soothing sands,
Resurgent states both big and least
Flock in from many lands.

From America across the sea,
From Europe East and West,
From oppressed people and the free
They come at your behest.

The doves of peace are on the wing
To Helsinki they fly,
Faith, hope and confidence they bring
That none may needless die.

They'll end the ruthless race for arms
Nuclear tests and war
Extend detente that tension calms
And holocausts outlaw.

Written in September, 1976, in Finland when the author was a delegate to the World Peace Conference held there.

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THE HOLOCAUST AND AFTER

Whose mothers, sisters, daughters, wives
Were raped or set on fire,
Whose fond relations precious lives
Were sacrificed in ire ?

Whose homes were burnt with gasoline
Or sacked by frenzied mobs,
Whose wordly goods in flames were seen
Rise in black smoke 'midst sobs ?

Whose racial passions were inflamed,
Who set the blaze alight,
What evil forces must be blamed
For this horrendous fright ?

Has "judgment fled to brutish beasts,
Have men their reason lost"
To butcher, burn, on loot to feast
And reck not for the cost ?

Is there no trace of decency,
Compassion, pity left,
Or has the crime-wave frequency
Of morals us bereft ?

Let's hang our guilty heads in shame,
Sack-cloth and ashes wear,
Deplore the crimes, accept the blame
And help the wounds repair.

July '83 in Sri Lanka

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"A CATCHER FOR THATCHER"

Tho' I'm strongly opposed to her Party,
She's a Tory by birth and of choice,
Yet I offer this tribute so hearty
To one who has 'wakened my voice.

She has intellect, poise and proportion,
Firm principles, judgment and wit,
Great courage, conviction, devotion,
Experience, ambition and grit.

The first woman chosen as Leader,
Surmounting all bias and sex,
E'en her bitterest critics concede her
Claim the top-hat to annexe.

Some say she has not got an inkling
Of Foreign Affairs and Defence,
But the brows of her rivals are wrinkling
At her talents, sincerity, sense

Let her do what she will with the shirker,
Root up all the tares from the field,
She will honour, reward the hard worker
And give his due share of the yield.

Tho' each contributes what he's able,
Taking each according to his need,
There is never enough on the table
To gratify capital's greed.

So a Tory this task cannot tackle,
Who hunts with the hounds and the sharks,
Free the worker and peasant his shackles
And seek the solution in Marx.

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THATCHER'S TRIUMPHAL TOUR

She flew in on a Viking swift,
Consistent with her name,
The first British woman Premier whom
Her critics would defame.

They maligned her as sex-goddess
Who ruled with boot and whip,
And hurled abuse, invectives at
Her whirlwind Asian trip.

She was welcomed in Malaysia,
In Singapore, Brunei,
And toured Indonesia with
Her pennon flying high.

In our own historic Lanka
Where events, epochs cram,
She loosed the surging waters of
The great Victoria Dam —

Releasing precious water free
To irrigate our fields,
Producing megawatts of power
For rich industrial yields.

With no respite to New Delhi
She bears the palm of peace,
With courage and assurance rare
That violence may cease.

Like oil on troubled waters she
Diffused her charm and grace,
To seek solutions wrought of peace
For tensions that we face.

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En route to Britain back she flew,
Yet made a whistle-stop
In Saudi, on admiring friends
A winning smile to drop.

Though jealous critics may revile
Of envy and despair,
The now triumphant Asian tour
Her prestige will repair.

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HEALEY AND HIS SEX-GODDESS

Bitter critic, Denis Healey,
What frustration you reveal !
You are still the public schoolboy
Slave to Maggie's sex-appeal.

You admit her varied talents,
Beauty, brains and courage rare,
She does crack the whip for Tories,
Leather boots and corset wear.

Iron Lady to the Commies,
She has sunk a battleship,
Broke the miners' year old coal-strike,
Launched on seven nations trip.

We may dub her Bloody Maggie,
She has got the Pershings, Cruise,
She has trimmed the welfare budget,
Yet with Gorbachev trades truce.

Call her macho politician,
Maggie does not give a hoot,
She'll select a better sportsman
To take on a tiger shoot.

Seven Asian nations fete her,
She is Lanka's honoured guest,
Whilst the Healeys and the Scargills
Put her mettle to the test.

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MAGGIE AND THE DONS

Ye Oxford Dons, you must explain
Why you snubbed Maggie Thatcher,
She's got the beauty and the brains,
In truth, you cannot match her.

Your ancient seat of learning boasts
Traditions, great and hoary,
Tho' shoppie-class, she leads the hosts —
Is every inch a Tory.

Read Chemistry at Somerville,
And qualified in law ;
Her charm and rare achievements will
Make stouter hearts to thaw.

Woo not the Iron Lady's heart,
Her politics of pressure,
But Britain's woman Premier smart
Remains your nation's treasure.

Sri Lanka, whither soon she'll fly,
Will recognize her worth,
Confer the honour you deny
In the country of her birth.

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THE WOUNDED ARCHER

Jeffrey Archer, how distressing
On the eve of victory,
That the World Press should be stressing
Skeletons for history!

Famous writer, chief campaigner
Of the Iron Lady, Meg,
You may quit, but it will stain her,
She must find another leg.

"Foolishly" he paid the ransom
Falling victim to a trap,
Now Monica's paid off handsome
For what he had failed to sap.

Tell, oh tell your sorry story
To the leader whom you serve,
And that understanding Tory
Will put you on the reserve.

Have we not a good precedent
In the Parkinson affair?
Oh, the women will be decent
And with moral lapses bear.

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SECTION - II

Social & Economic

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BITTER BREAD

"Man must not live by bread alone"
Nor by our rice tho' it be grown
As plentifully as of yore
When it was shipped to foreign shore,
Such purchases and gifts of flour
Made at this sorely needed hour
Are not reflected in the bread
Which bakers should turn out instead.
The weary queues extend each day
And prices spiral all the way.

"We ask for bread they give us stone,"
When will they for these crimes atone?
The bread's sold out, why not eat cake
Or buy the pastries that they make?
The cake, the bun, the toasted slice
Jack up the profit and the price.
The restaurant and tasty roll
Defeat the ration and control,
Such artifice and new device
The baker thinks up in a trice.

Who robs the rationed rice and flour
Is what the public must uncover
And hang and quarter on the green
The villains who will pick us clean
Let's grow our yams, our grain our wheat
And all the substitutes we eat,
But weed we must and bring to book
The hoarder, profiteer and crook
Let's hound the human vultures out
Who thrive on hunger, want and doubt.

On the bread shortage in 1973

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SOCIALISM BY STATUTE

Hear me ye folk who have known better days
Our country is seething with strife,
All leisured rich people must alter their ways
To a hard but a fairer new life.

In the past we had surfeit of imported rice
Regardless of reason and health,
Consuming white sugar and candies and ice
With the relish of decadent wealth.

We imbibed foreign liquor and burnt up in smoke
The much needed Foreign Exchange,
And by dissolute living we helped to provoke
Angry youth to a violent change.

A bloody rebellion was quelled with great force
And the loss of much precious young life,
But the cause of the trouble continues its course
And social injustice is rife.

Revolution by statute is hurriedly sought
To blow up the pockets of power,
The tycoon, the laird and landlord are caught
By the bombs which keep blasting each hour.

This Budget will bring drastic change in its wake
To nail the oak casket of Dives,
But till honest and competent men undertake
These schemes, — they'll not better our lives

On the Budget of 1972 in which the Finance Minister, Dr. N.M. Perera appealed for sacrifices in private holdings and consumption in order to bring about a more equitable distribution of property as a necessary prerequisite for advance towards a Socialist State.

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A PLEA FOR THE CAMBOY

We may admire the saree
But who can ever grouse
Against the coloured camboy
And the closely fitting blouse ?

There's nothing more becoming
A pretty village maid,
Than a gaily printed chintz-cloth
And jacket trimmed with braid.

The well supported bosom
The shapely neck and arms,
The waistline shyly peeping
Reveals the woman's charms.

The two-piece is effective
It's simple and sincere,
It sets each line and feature
In accents toned but clear.

Designing dress reformers
Give ear unto this plea,
And leave this simple habit
To rustics and to me.

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TO A HOUSE COAT

Thou fascinating flowing robe
Who did thy form design ?
How artfully thou dost reveal
Each undulating line !

Thou dost adorn the city maid
And grace the village belle,
I see thee trail the dusty streets
And haunt the village well.

The wearer may be rich or poor
Of any size or shape,
The housecoat will with easy charm
Around her figure drape.

The evening bans the morning gown
The Kimono is worn in town,
The housecoat in its friendly way
Will serve throughout the livelong day
But for how long will last thy spell
On fickle woman-housecoat tell !

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THE CROWD & THE CLINIC

The jostling crowd besiege the door,
The porter bars the open half,
There is no room he says, for more,
I hardly can resist a laugh.

For one by one the chosen few
Are let in through the narrow gate,
Oh if the others only knew,
Would they endure an anguished wait?

The worship of the Golden Calf
Prevails unto the present day,
The poor may curse, the rich may chaff,
But one and all must tread the way.

Suffering, disease and pain,
Are but the badges of our tribe,
So long as man does work for gain
The lubricant will be the bribe.

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Written in January, 1955, when long queues were a feature at most public institutions and persons were able to jump the queue by a coin slipped into the palm of a minor official.

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ENGLISH ADIEU

Gone are the days when the lingo
Was the pride of the bourgeois snob,
For the tongue of the old British Jingo
Is now out of gear with the mob.

To hell with the language of Shakespeare,
Bold Bacon can fry in his fat,
For shame on the chorus of rakes here
Who clamour for Wilde and his chat !

For English though commonly spoken
In many a civilized land,
To us is a symbol, a token
Of the weight of a conquering hand.

Written circa Sept. 29, 1950, following a report that Sir Alan Rose, Chief Justice, had said at a prize giving, where he was chief guest, that it was not a wise policy to detest the English language simply because one hated the Englishman. "Dont throw out the baby with the bath - water" he said.

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THE SCHOLAR'S DISILLUSIONMENT

I have a friend called Sali
A Scholar in the Pali
Who had acquired much Oriental lore,
To satisfy a yearning
For occidental learning
He crossed the mighty Seas and studied more.

He mastered Philosophy
Midst draughts of beer and coffee
And crowned with laurels reached his native shore,
To find his power of earning
Unrelated to his learning
Which made him feel embittered and quite sore.

He thought of Pat, the Baker,
And Bob, the undertaker,
And hosts of other tradesmen and of crooks,
And thought it rather funny
That they acquired more money
Without the aid of scholarship and books.

It is a condemnation
Of this strange civilization
That knowledge is not rated as it should,
That bootleggers and builders
May amass their piles of guilders
But scholarship is no material good.

Written in Sept. 1949, when Lord Soulbury, Governor-General of Ceylon, in his Convocation Address to University students at Peradeniya, warned against expecting too much from their academic achievements.

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THE PENALTY IS DEATH

In helpless rage I almost weep
To think that life is held so cheap,
We fuss about the single deer,
The royal marksman honoured here,
But what of those who boldly kill
Their fellow human-beings at will?
And do we seek the reason why,
These folk are thus condemned to die,
Dispatched with unrelenting speed
By some dastardly villain's deed.
The hand-made bomb's terrific blast,
The cruel steel, or poisoned draught,
The bullet dread, or bloody knife
Has claimed the unsuspecting life.
The victim of such coward blow
His sudden end would never know;
His wife and children tearless yearn,
For him, who's now beyond return.
How many a woman in her prime
Was butchered in a ruthless crime?
A jilted lover in despair,
Destroys a life so young and fair;
Or some adulterous villain dread
Has sought to share another's bed.
But sex and passion, theft and pride,
Hate, envy, drink and dope beside,
What ever motive is adduced
The crime itself is not reduced.
No power on earth can yet restore

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Life to the corpse that breathes no more;
Nor can we ever compensate,
The bereaved, who bemoan their fate.
But people still will sympathize
With killers, not with him who dies
And so we spare the monster's life
Who fired the shot or plunged the knife,
And crime and murder stalk the land
Whilst those in power stay their hand.
Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth,
May be Mosaic law in truth,
But death alone will satisfy,
The luckless victim's anguished cry.

Written in March, 1958, this poem expounds the case for retention of the death penalty for offenders.

The "royal marksman" was the King of Nepal, H. R. H. Mahendra Singh, who on a visit shot a deer in the Game Sanctuary in Wilpattu. The incident caused a public outcry.

About Nov. 1976, Lord Avebury an active member of Amnesty International, which had been consistently campaigning for abolition of the death penalty, visited Sri Lanka. He spoke on this subject at a public meeting as the guest of the Sri Lanka Rationalist Association. During his visit the author had the opportunity of having a discussion with Lord Avebury on this subject for about an hour at his home. Thereafter the author handed to him a copy of this poem which was kindly acknowledged by Lord Avebury writing on Christmas Day and commenting in detail on the poem and using the reductio ad absurdum argument by suggesting drastic torture before hanging. He ended by quoting to a rationalist "Hatred doth not by hatred cease; hatred ceases by love."

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THE POSER FOR PARENTS, PROFESSORS & POLITICIANS

An exotic tradition of the snooty Undergrad
Was ribald fun - exuberance of youth,
Which has degenerated through the bully and the cad
To a vile display or sadism - in truth.

If the quest for higher learning in this boosted Buddhist Isle
Is at the cost of anything so base,
If we can't remove the causes or the culprits who defile
The nation has a tragedy to face.

When a fresher is subjected to an orgy called a rag
No decent man or woman would believe,
That the sadist and the pervert and the bully and the brag
Are licensed their foul instincts to relieve.

The diabolical tortures that the freshers must endure
Without retaliation or complaint,
The Dons and politicians, if they cannot find a cure,
Must exercise some effective restraint.

If the Dons within the Campus and the men who wield the power
Are helpless or unequal to the task,
Must we idly be spectators while the villains run for cover
Or should we not these excesses unmask?

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To crush a fellow's penis till he faints of pain and shock
Or hold a lighted candle to those parts,
Is the victim made of iron or hard metal or of rock
Or have his vile tormentors human hearts?

When the modesty of maidens is so flagrantly outraged
Like helpless chicks surrendered to jackals,
When the parents and the public are so righteously enraged
Can we not see the writing on the walls?

Will you lead them to the slaughter and then wildly ring your hands
Or crush the evil 'ere it is too late,
Will you let your son or daughter fall a prey to vicious bands
Or save them from this ignominious fate ?

On the incidence of sadistic ragging in the University Campuses which grew to a shocking degree in 1973.

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BUILD MORE SCHOOLS — PRESERVE THE OLD

The schools that served our fathers,
The schools that served us well,
Preserve them for our children,
You, who have known their spell.

They guided us to manhood,
They taught us right and wrong,
They e'en bred our demagogues,
Oh may these schools live long!

What crime have they committed,
What shame have they to hide,
Have they not served our country
With honour and with pride?

Then wherefore is this clamour
To rob them of their toil,
Have fairplay and justice
Been swept from Lanka's soil ?

There is sore need in Lanka
For more and better schools,
Let's help the State to build them,
But let us not be fools.

Beware of empty slogans,
Know - what you would destroy,
It is the precious heritage
Of every girl and boy.

And will you not defend them
And will you not be true,
To all that you have cherished,
That mean so much to you ?

A protest against the agitation in 1960 for the take over of all private schools.

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THE SQUATTER PROBLEM

The squatters are a problem to
Their neighbours and the town,
They have no land, no dwelling house,
No place to settle down.

By pavements and on vacant plots
O'ernight the shanties spring,
Of thatch, of planks, of rusted sheets,
Of almost anything.

These are their shelter from the storm,
The roof above their head,
Where families must pass the night,
At dawn to seek their bread.

No water, lights, no lavatory,
No privacy at all,
The hardships which these folk endure
Our conscience must appall.

When crime waves overwhelm the town,
Or epidemics spread,
Officials sweep down on these shacks
With speed the owners dread.

Within a trice, their box and dice
Are flung out on the road;
Razed to the ground is shanty town
And all they could afford.

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Tho' storeyed flats are rising fast
To serve an urgent need,
The housing problem grows acute
As populations speed.

With Rent Control and Housing Loans
And Hire-purchase schemes,
Which are designed to bridge the gap
And realize their dreams. -

Still housing shortages prevail
And building costs soar high,
While other priorities press,
As none can dare deny.

Written in June, 1974.

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THE RESERVOIR OF YOUTH

They have no land to plant or sow,
A job they do not shirk,
The G.C.E. they have to show
And strive to find some work.

Each day they join the endless queue
In hope to find some job
I wish complacent people knew
Who ask, "Why do men rob ?"

Large limousines fly past the drain
With power and plenty there,
Youth stand bedraggled in the rain
Or grill in heat and glare.

Broad acres idle as before,
Cash idles in the banks,
There's wealth in sea and more on shore
Fresh water fills the tanks.

While learned experts sit and plan
And foreign loans are got
To cater for the common man,
Is clamant youth forgot ?

The brawny arm and willing heart,
The young and eager mind,
Are straining for an useful part
In some project to find.

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They chaff impatient of delay
And can no longer wait,
Thro' blood and tears they force their way
And storm the narrow gate.

Then harness this impatient youth,
This reservoir of power,
And realize the urgent truth
And seize the fleeting hour.

Written after the insurgency of 1971. It was published in the "Times Weekender" of 22.7.71, in the "Sun" of 17.7.71 and in the Marxist quarterly magazine "State" in its issue No.3 of 1975.

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TO HELL WITH LAWYERS AND DOCTORS

The layman should be over joyed,
From henceforth he'll be free
To plead another's cause in Court
And even charge a fee.

What need have we for schools of law
Or tests of skill to pass,
The law is only common sense,
The law is not an ass.

Trained lawyers are a band of crooks
Exploiting human ills,
Like doctors who exploit the sick
With mixtures, drugs and pills.

Of common ailments and disease
What knowledge do we lack?
But doctors will oppose the cures
By him they call a quack.

All lawyers, doctors and the like
Are an exploiting class,
Who over-rate their diverse skills
And freely fleece the mass.

Elected members must be free,
So speaks the people's voice,
To practise medicine and law,
Aren't they the people's choice?

Let us control the lawyers' fees
And doctors' fees as well,
Replace them with the people's choice
And let them go to hell.

On the Administration of Justice Bill passed in 1976 which, among a number of controversial features, introduced fixed rates for lawyer's fees

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THE ADVOCATE OR GUINEA HORA

The English Barrister evolved
A most exclusive Club,
Which local advocates resolved
To copy - That's the rub.

They charge no fee, these gallant men
All learned in the law,
But fight forensic battles when
Injustice, wrong, they saw.

And some whose learning, skill and wit
The Royal eye did see,
Applied for silk and made a hit
When honoured with Q.C.

'Twixt counsel and his client came
A mercenary breed,
Who introduced, to cause him shame,
The element of greed.

They slipped into these sober gowns
Whose pocket is behind,
Corrupting guineas, even crowns
To dull each noble mind.

Refusing and resisting still
The right to charge a fee,
The advocate's forensic skill
In theory is free.

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But publicans and pressmen must
Malign this noble class,
And drag their honour in the dust
And tax them like the mass.

The publican will disregard
The learned counsel's plea,
And proctors find it very hard
To brief them without fee.

So may we now explode the myth
And call a spade, a spade,
And frankly charge the counsel with
The guineas he is paid.

Written in December, 1968.

The high fees paid to Advocates was a topic of adverse comment and the protective convention in the profession against issuing receipts for fees received was further highlighted by the Tax Department's insistence that Advocates should maintain a fee –book or issue receipts.

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JOIN THE WAR ON HUNGER

Let us reflect upon the price
We pay for our accustomed rice
Time was, when we did sow and reap
And rice was plentiful and cheap,
And all our needs we could import
Without much cost from foreign port.
But now a changed economy
Based on our Copra, Rubber, Tea,
Involves Exchange and sacrifice
And food is scarce and high in price.
Exchange, which we can ill afford
And foreign debts increase the load.
The State cannot now subsidise
Or buy more Sugar, Flour, Rice ;
An independent Lanka should
Be self-sufficient in her food.
Let's till the land and sow the fields,
Increase our efforts and our yields,
And train ourselves to substitutes
Like Soya Bean and yams and fruits.
Expose the rogue and profiteer,
Dishonesty must scram from here,
Corruption, force and graft will thrive
When we permit them to survive.
Depression, famine face the land,
Unite and fight should be our stand.
A war on hunger is the call,
Let's rally to it, one and all.

Written in 1973, when there was a food production drive.

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SELL SWADESHI

Not here of foodstuffs or of bowls,
But simple toilet-paper rolls;
The prices now have soared so high,
Some local substitutes we'll try;
Sandpaper would be rather rough
And newsprint is now scarce enough.
Fresh water, did you say, my friend?
We use it freely at the end,
But first the paper, then the soap
Is not a luxury, I hope.
It's recommended for hygiene
And keeps the body fresh and clean.
Swadeshi from our Eastern Mills
Will serve the needs and slash the bills.

Written in November, 1975.

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OH THOSE BABY FARMS!

Why raise such strident false alarms
At our reproachless Baby Farms?
They serve the destitute, the poor,
The helpless foundlings, to be sure.
The infants and their mothers too
Are housed for just a month or two
In wards so hygienic and clean
Till we export them from the scene.
Home Study Reports say, Who's Who,
The foreign parents are screened too;
Probation Service, Child Welfare
Of our industry is aware.
We even pay the lawyers' fee
And render all this service free.
So we dont give a tinker's cuss
To those who grossly libel us.

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DEATH WITHOUT DRAMA

Prune proud display and painful rites
We lavish on the dead,
Long nights of weary vigil by
A sallow corpse's head.

The Oaken silk-lined casket is
Engraved with shining plate,
Cloth banners and young palm leaves hang
From grave-side to the gate.

The floral tributes piled up high
On open mobile floats,
Strewn rice and sand and foot-cloth spread
To drummers' mournful notes.

Mass, rhythmic chants and dirges sung,
The candle, book and bell,
Cannot create a heaven or
A non-existent hell.

Loud praise and long orations by
Impressive funeral pyres,
May gratify the living as
Do sacrificial fires.

Our public men of rank and power,
E'en men of lore and skill,
Swell earnest crowds who gather round,
Enslaved by custom still.

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Man-hours that can be employed
In useful social work,
Convention, creed and class conspire
To make a Nation shirk.

No penance, prayers or futile tears
Nor Gods whom we implore,
Can bring the dead once more to life
Or some dear one restore.

Then let us cherish memories
Of those we hold most dear,
And be resigned to tryst with death
Sans ignorance and fear.

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A LOST CHRISTMAS ?

What is Christmas ? Dinners, dances,
Cabarets and cake and wine,
Shopping sprees and entertainment,
Parties, carols, dresses fine.

Sleepless nights and dissipation,
Revels, orgies, endless feasts,
Turkey roast with ham and chicken,
Lamb and bacon claim the beasts.

Fireworks and noisy crackers,
Coloured jets on Christmas trees,
Gaily decked with stars and tinsel,
Gifts the children to appease.

Have we lost the joyful tidings
Heard two thousand years ago ?
"Peace on earth, goodwill to all men,"
Sow the seed and let it grow.

Lo ! the infant in the manger,
Born amidst the humble poor,
With the oxen calmly feeding,
Love and peace he did assure,

Was his mission to be fruitless,
Vain his noble sacrifice
For the world of pride, corruption,
Hatred, envy, greed and vice?

Let us hearken to His message
Even at this distant day,
Rid our hearts of pride and envy,
For peace and justice pave the way.

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RAGS OR ORGIES ?

Do we not call an axe an axe,
Likewise a spade, a spade ?
When words and meanings are not lax
Our thoughts are well conveyed.

Then why are euphemisms used
Where learned Dons preside,
And freshers molested, abused,
And sadists crow with pride ?

A rag has humour, coarse but clean,
It should cause pain to none,
It is not vulgar or obscene,
No vicious deed is done.

Must brutes and bullies big be bred
Each year in so-called rag,
When decency and shame have fled
That criminals may brag ?

These are no rags but coward crime,
Where thugs and force prevail,
Such orgies must be checked in time,
Is law of no avail ?

Are Undergrads above the law,
Will none the order give,
That students to the Campus raw
With dignity may live ?

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SECTION III

Rationalism & Science

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PREY TO MANY GODS

With a vast expanding vision
In our little span of life,
Can we make the right decision
'midst the tensions and the strife ?

Creatures of our circumstances,
Circumscribed by heavy odds,
Contributing to advances
Of belief in many gods.

Like a barque upon the ocean
Tossed by the tempestuous sea,
Harried man accepts the notion
Of a saving deity.

In the rat-race for survival,
In a world by conflicts torn,
Comes the religious revival
With its promises outworn.

Captive of his own creation
In the fearful human zoo,
Faced with over-population,
Unemployment, famine too -

Insecurity, frustration,
Science threatens to destroy
Human hopes and aspiration
By the power it can deploy.

Few who can with courage reason
And surmount these heavy odds,
So the mass succumb in season,
Falling prey to many gods.

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AN AGNOSTIC'S WISH

When I have shed this mortal coil
To rest at last from weary toil,
Don't bury me beneath the sod
Or commit soulless me to God
With clergy, candle, book and bell,
Who knows no heaven or no hell.
The corpse in crematorium burn,
Then put my ashes in an urn
And lay them in my parents' grave.
But if the Church and clerics rave,
Refusing consecrated space
To doubting me, devoid of grace,
Then do not fret or with them clash
But on some river cast the ash
To float unhindered to the sea
And merge in vast eternity.

The author's parents, who were Roman Catholics, have a family vault in the Catholic Section of the Kanatte (Colombo) cemetery. Permission of the Church is required for any burials in this section.

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THE TWIN TABOOS

It's freely admitted that gambling and drink
Are strongly condemned by all people who think,
For over indulgence in either is vice
The craving for drink or the lure of the dice.
But deeply ingrained in the nature of man
Are liquor and gambling, deny it who can.
Both in joy or in sorrow, in sickness or health,
In cottge or castle, in penury or wealth,
The cheer and the solace of liquor are known
To those who drink wisely and will not disown.
Then face the facts squarely and let us endure
The evils which Nature herself will not cure.
All life from the cradle to grave is a risk
Like the toss of a coin or the turn of a disc.
The law does not seek in folly to ban
The social diseases so common to man,
But in its great wisdom it sets out to cure
The scourges which Nature will have us endure.
For it is acknowledged that hunger and sex
Have deeper foundations than even the Lex.
And so with the wine and the dice let it be
The individual's choice in a democracy.
The thrill of the hazard, the chance of the race
The turf and the table we cannot displace.
Let social reformers with eyes on the votes
Not fall for the slogan and burn up their boats.

Written in October, 1955. It appeared in the "Ceylon Observer" of 14.10.55 and in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1969.

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THE KASSIPPU MENACE

For argument let us suppose,
That bars and taverns were to close,
That spirits, malts and other brew,
By Lanka's laws were made taboo ;
That sparkling toddy from the tree,
Had faded to a memory,
That honest men were driven to
Drink Sudhiyas and Kassippu,
In sordid dens of reeking vice,
Or pay the smugglers' heavy price.
Why should this be, why may we not,
Enjoy our bottle or our tot?
Men must be free to act and think
And what is more to choose a drink.
Does prohibition ever dare
To see the answer to its prayer?
A cheerless world condemned to think,
That it is wrong to have a drink,
To raise a glass or give a toast,
To some congenial friend or host,
Or to round off a tired day,
With one to drive the blues away,
Let Prohibitionists beware
Of falling prey to this great snare,
Kassippu kings and smugglers wait
Their victory to celebrate,
For paradise it would be then -
Another Eden for these men.

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THE BARBECUE

The truth about the Barbecue
Is really known to just a few.
No local ox was ever bled,
No single drop of blood was shed,
No bubbling cauldron claimed a life,
No butcher plunged his cruel knife
At Poya, when the hallowed light
In silver sheen did clothe the night.

Some many moons ago this ox
As frozen meat lay in a box,
Four thousand miles across the sea
Beyond the aid of sympathy.
This carcase that could breathe no more,
In course was shipped to Lanka's shore
And roasted at the Barbecue.
Alas ! if these good critics knew.

But they, no doubt in honest ire,
Drew lurid pictures of that fire,
Each adding to the gruesome tale
Some grim adornment in detail.
Who could care less, what were the facts
Of this and other kindred acts ?
Is it not meet that we inquire
Ere we cast others in the fire ?

In 1957 it was rumoured that Sir John Kotalawela, Prime Minister, had on a poya (full moon) day caused a calf to be slaughtered and barbecued. The poem sets out the true position.

The poya is devoted by Buddhists to religious observances and meditation and the eating of flesh and taking of life are especially abhorrent.

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CURSE THE COMMON COLD

Though just a layman, I make bold
To write about the common cold,
The ailment which no man escapes
Which takes so many forms and shapes,
Which makes you drivel at the nose
And pour out mucous like a hose,
Which makes you violently sneeze
Feel seedy, sick and ill at ease,
Its concomitant is a cough
At which you cannot lightly scoff,
It keeps you 'wake the weary night
When tired tissues need respite.
And when you have survived a week
The doctor's aid you vainly seek.
He percusses your chest and lung
Peers at your throat and coated tongue
A diaphretic mixture he
Prescribes as well Vitamin C.
If fever and headache set in
He'll recommend some Aspirin
Some Vapor Rub or Thermogene
An inhalation and hygiene,
But you will only curse and swear
The cold remains to your despair.
Throughout the years I've found a friend
Which I can safely recommend
To serve you in your direst need
The faithful Coriander seed.
No none can cure the common cold,
But this is worth its weight in gold !

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BAN THE BEATLES

John Lennon when you went to school,
Perhaps you learnt to play the fool;
But even young conceited cranks
Must not offend the holy Yanks.
Your frenzied cult afar has spread
To keep teen-agers out of bed;
All day and night, they shriek and yell
And turn and twist beneath your spell;
In the free States you'll not blaspheme
Despite your fans who rave and scream.
The Ku Klux Klan may murder Blacks,
But they'll not tolerate your cracks
At Jesus and his sacred name;
They'll strip the tinsel off your fame.

Written in 1967.
Appeared in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1969.

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RESPECT THE ROBE

Ordained with candle, book and bell,
For years he served his Maker well,
As steward of the Church's estate
He functioned till a recent date,
His duty often made him fly,
To foreign climes which tempt the eye
With goods in short supply at home
But plentiful in Lourdes and Rome,
Transistors, nylons even bras
Were cheap at those exotic spas.
Then in his charity he thought
Of kith and kin, who dearly sought
These trifles which he could with ease
Take back with him their hearts to please.
At Lanka's Customs' narrow gate
The busy priest forgot to state
The trifles in his travel bag
Which proved to be so big a snag.
But what provoked the lynx-eyed men
Was that the holy father then,
Tried hard to make these worthies feel
His lapse was through religious zeal
And then he vainly sought to try

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To say the goods were valued high,
But finally, he paid the tax
Which no official would relax.
But now the father of the flock
Still reeling from the cruel shock,
Is trying hard the truth to probe
And save the honour of the robe.
Let us assist him in this task,
The cowl must not be made a mask
When laymen err it's bad enough,
Priests should be made of nobler stuff.

Written in 1973 apropos a Customs' incident in which a Christian priest figured at the Bandaranaike International Airport, Katunayake, on his return from a pilgrimage to Europe.

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TURKEY TIME

Why should the guiltless turkeys lay
Their lives for us on Christmas Day,
That men may celebrate on earth
The day of Christ, the Saviour's birth ?
He died that sinful men may live
And God their scarlet may forgive.
But now that noble sacrifice
Is tainted with a pagan vice,
For Christmas Day is not complete
Till turkey roast and ham we eat.
Peace and goodwill to man and beast
Is the great message of the Feast.
Then why, I ask you in this rhyme,
Is Christmas turned to Turkey Time ?

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THE ATTORNEY'S PAEAN

Oh what a joy it is to wear
The collar and the bands ;
It puts more knowledge in your head
And money in your hands.

It almost makes one jump for joy
And feel so very proud,
To pass off as an advocate
And so impress the crowd.

And when at trials we appear
No counsel can deny
The title "learned friend" to us,
He knows the reason why.

For with the dawn of Seventy-Four
All equal we shall be,
No Proctor, Counsel, Bar-at-law
But just an Attorney.

And every court shall open be
To Attorneys at will,
To practise without let or bar
And try unproven skill.

But if negligent we are found
Unequal to the task
The client is indemnified -
Damages he can ask.

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And if by some mischance we can't
Comply with any rule
We can be dealt with for contempt ;
The client is no fool.

But magic lies in that attire,
The collar, gown and bands,
It makes us equal overnight
And frees our fettered hands.

The Administration of Justice Bill of 1974 sought to do away with the distinction between Advocate and Proctor. Every member of the legal profession was to be called Attorney-at-law in future.

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WITCH - HUNT FOR SPECIALISTS

Steeped in the science of his art
He launches out to cure
He knows your inside out by heart,
His remedies are sure.

As daily duty in the wards
His wonders he performs,
His patients thank their distant gods —
His miracles are norms.

Conditioned by the social need
He works around the clock ;
Some call it avarice and greed
But he can take the knock.

His counterparts out in the West
Will marvel as they see
Him do his best by every test
In cures and surgery.

And should we now the witch-hunt join
To stone and scourge these men ?
Some other slogan we must coin —
Not Socialism then.

Oh, Socialism in they name,
What blunders we endure !
Let doctors work for pelf or fame
So long they work the cure.

In Feb. 1972, 28 Government medical specialists indicated their intention to quit medical service following the decision to abolish private practice. The poem appeared in the "Ceylon Observer" of 11.2.72 and in the "Sun" of 24.1.72.

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A POYA MESSAGE

A mellow moon was riding high,
The temple bell rang loud
Re-echoing thro' the azure sky
And summoning the crowd.

The children filled the open hall,
Their mothers by their side,
The fathers and the brothers, all
Thronged in the yard outside.

The elders clad in spotless white
With baskets of fresh bloom,
Were such an edifying sight —
They sought the Image room.

A bhikkhu in his yellow robe
Recites the Pali text
Embracing mortal and microbe,
Expounds the Dhamma next.

Compassion for the meanest thing
Is what the Master taught,
Alike to commoner and king,
Was life with sorrow fraught.

Of hate and envy free the mind,
Of falsehood, lust and greed,
In righteous thought and action find,
A satisfying creed.

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THE CURSE OF THE DOLLAR

When first the Pilgrim Fathers did
Rest on their weary oars,
Upon that distant Continent
Far from the Lion's roars.

With courage resolution,
They fought a mighty power,
And hope and freedom triumphed
In their victorious hour.

In the struggle for survival
Alas! the Indian Red,
Was massacred and butchered
His lands were freely bled.

The race for filthy lucre saw
The gold-rush and the farm
The cotton and tobacco fields
Whose profits caused such harm.

The ruthless exploitation
Of captive Negro slave,
Sowed death and degradation
From cradle to the grave.

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Sex, violence and liquor are
The culture of this hell,
Where the worship of the dollar has
Replaced the book and bell.

Where every lad's a gunman now
And every lass a whore,
Small wonder that they go berserk
And shoot up five or more.

Is that their precious culture that
They would on us impose?
From aid with strings or naked force
Let's keep our Lanka close.

Written in 1966, the poem deplores the worship of Mammon and the growth of violence and immorality in the US.

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PEACE TO MEN OF GOODWILL

It's just a week from Christmas now
A nip is in the air
And children's hearts are beating fast
With thoughts of Christmas fare.

No, not of ham and turkey roast,
Of chicken, lamb or chops,
But carols, crackers, cakes and cream,
Of Santa Claus and tops.

The spirit of the season spreads,
And peace on earth will reign,
But for the harsh and cruel laws
Which make men work for gain.

The profit making shopkeepers
Have spread their nets to lure,
Within their bright attractive folds
The unsuspecting poor.

This wretched tribe of sharks apart,
A few good men remain,
For whom the season of goodwill
Is not defiled by gain.

For such as these does Christmas mean
Gay children and good cheer,
With crackers, carols, Christmas trees
And cakes and wine and beer.

And when warm-hearted men arrange,
To thrill the little folk,
We call to mind the words of peace
That once the angels spoke.

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HAIL GAGARIN

Thrice welcome gallant Gagarin
Your prowess we admire,
Your proud unrivalled cosmic spin
Has set the world on fire.

When powerful nations grimly strove
To conquer outer space,
The Sputniks scared above and drove
War-mongers from the race,

The war clouds gathered overhead
And atom bombs piled high,
When epoch making Sputniks sped
And circled in the sky.

With frenzied brains devising fast
Destruction swift and dread,
Hopes of survival seemed at last
From human hearts had sped.

And then your Spaceship soared with power
The Fatherland had won,
The hero of that mighty hour
Were you, its gallant son.

All glory to the Soviet
And you it's Cosmonaut,
With Megatons exploding yet
World Peace cannot be sought.

Major Yuri Gagarin of the Soviet Union became on April 12, 1961 the first human space traveller; he was launched into orbit from Siberia in a spacecraft called Vostek I, and returned to Earth safely after one circuit of the globe. He visited Sri Lanka in the first week of December, 1961. He died in 1968

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SPARE THE FLOWER ITS FLEETING HOUR

So pleasant to the eye and nose
The blooms of varied shapes and hue,
The fragrant Jasmine and the Rose
And Lily sparkling in the dew.

The Oleander clusters fair,
The Buttercup of yellow gold,
Anthuriums and Orchids rare,
Attract alike the young and old.

The Bougainvillea on its bower,
The Morning-glory straggling wide,
The Hibisous and Temple-flower,
The vandals pluck them in their stride,

They reck not of the patient toil
And care that brings a plant to bloom,
Of these who dig and tend the soil
And guard the tree from early doom.

At morn before the sunrise hour,
'Ere honest householders awake,
Unthinkingly they pluck the flower
Their votive offerings to make.

Cannot these offerings be made
With reverence before the tree,
That some with merit may be paid,
Yet others still the beauty see?

A tree-goddess of yore did say
To steal a fragrance is a wrong,
Then more the crime to haste decay
Of blooms which nature will prolong.

On the practice of making floral offerings at the cost of despoiling plants of their beauty.

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BRAVO BARE BUTTOCK

The Masai is a famous tribe
That keeps one buttock bare.
No government at this should jibe,
No President should dare.

Each warrior, with shield and spear,
A royal beast must kill
To win his bride; he knows no fear,
His courage conquers still.

But recently a prudish law
Bids every adult male,
To cover what before we saw,
And keep his sable pale.

Chief Oli Tiptip will defy
This outrage; he will wear
No silly trousers, but rely
Upon his buttock bare.

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If God Almighty saw no fault
In Adam in the nude,
Tanzania must cry a halt
Or face a fierce feud.

In 1968 in Tanzania a government decree was passed that any citizen found improperly clad would be liable to be punished. This was to overcome the practise of the Masai Tribe whose traditional dress left one shoulder and one buttock bare. Chief Oli Tiptip, Kenya's Minister of Commerce & Industry, was protesting against the decree as prudish:" If God Almighty could stomach to see the entire anatomies of Adam and Eve in their complete nudity, is it not a little prudish for an African government to have fits by merely viewing a casually exhibited Masai buttock?" He had asked President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya to intercede with President Nyerere to stop this "unholy crusade". He said that the Tanzanian Government had damaged the honour of the tribe and exposed it to international ridicule.

This poem appeared in "Tribune" on 3.3.68 and in the "Nation" of Feb. 1968.

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A SAVAGE SENTENCE

Poor Karen's parents now despair
Her youthful life to save,
Love, sympathy, devotion, care
And funds they freely gave.

All human skill has been explored,
All hope of cure gone,
The parents have the law implored
Distraught, with hearts forlorn.

For Karen lives in name alone,
Her brain is almost dead,
A living corpse, all skin and bone,
Thro' tubes she breathes, is fed.

The Court and clerics who ordain
That Karen must survive,
Should themselves bear the cost and pain
To keep what's left alive.

The sanctimonious hypocrites
Who fear to face the facts,
Should be condemned by their own writs
To undertake these acts.

If Karen only could express
Her wish to die in peace
She 'd put an end to her distress :
Then will this torment cease.

Written in Nov.1975, on the rejection by an American Court of an application by the parents of Karen Quinlan for permission to allow their daughter to cease to exist by getting the respirator taken off. The patient had been unconscious for many months and was a virtual human vegetable with no prospect of recovery. The Court ruled that the patient's brain was not dead. Later that decision was upset by the Supreme Court of New Jersey State which ruled that the life support system may be turned off without risk of civil or criminal liability.

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OUR SPECIALITIES

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away",
The specialists flee with the ban,
Tho' Parliament is omnipotent today
Disease is the karma of man.

Religion also we call to our aid,
The numerous gods we adore,
But to human affliction we cannot put paid
So the faithful depart by the score.

The fault's in our stars, the astrologers say,
Our national talent lies here,
The malefic planets will soon move away
And our troubles will all disappear.

We've nostrums, talismans, charms and taboo
And auspicious days of the year,
So if we observe them in all that we do,
Why then, we have nothing to fear.

On superstition, astrology and black magic. The poem appeared in the "Times Weekender" of 30.1.72 and the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1972.

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LIBERALISE ABORTION

Abortion is an ugly word,
An offence it connotes,
On prejudices so absurd,
False ethics it promotes.

Religionists and prudes denounce
It from an early time,
And antiquated laws pronounce
This act, a heinous crime

Desperate women seek relief
When contraception fails,
But rigid law and false belief
Condemn the poor females-

To nostrums and to wily quacks,
Who eager lie in wait,
For those on whom we turn our backs
And drive to this sad fate.

Tetanus, sepsis, every snare,
Ev'n death they have to face,
If they survive, for life they bear
The stigma and disgrace.

Our population now explodes
And living costs soar high,
"No food, employment or abodes",
Have you not heard the cry ?

Unwanted pregnancies let's end,
Liberalise the law,
Relief to sufferers let's send,
Their lives hang on a straw.

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APPEAL TO SATHYA SAI BABA

Devotees of great Sai Baba,
Dark war-clouds overhang Lanka.
Senseless slaughter, hate and fear
Claim precious lives and values dear.
Mortors, bombs and mines explode
Destroying bridges, rails and roads,
Abandoned homes are gaunt and bare
As victims shelter in despair.
Fathers, mothers, husbands, wives
Young sons and daughters lose their lives.
You sing his praise in hymn and prayer,
Implore his mercy, aid and care,
Invoke his blessings and his power
In our Sri Lanka's crucial hour.
With truth and justice forge a peace
That will endure and fighting cease.

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HANGING MAIDENS, BURNING BRIDES & SATHI

Oh India, Mother India
How can you take your place
In great Assemblies of the World
Yet permit this disgrace?
The laws alone are helpless
To root this evil out,
This relict of dark ignorance,
Of poverty and doubt.

By birth the weaker vessel
Condemned to serve the male,
A woman is a household drudge
Whose tears are no avail.

By cruel customs sanctioned by
Convention and belief,
The dowry hunters work their will
While brides burn for relief.

Economic independence,
Education has not brought,
Relief in any measure from
The sacrifices sought.

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Dowerless maids hang grim in death
And brides in anguish burn
While widows immolate themselves
To share their husband's urn.

Ye Godmen, Rishis and Babas
Have you no thought to spare
For the sufferings and wretched plight
Of women in despair ?

Awake from your dull stupor,
Use now your vaunted power
To save these helpless victims from
The flames that them devour.

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SECTION - IV

(i) Politics & Human Rights (Misc.)

(ii) Alma Mater

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MOCK INDEPENDENCE

(PUBLISHED IN 1948)

Independence in thy hallowed name
Patriots have died to live again in fame.
But here, alas, thy ghost, thy bloodless shade
Enacts a farce, — a hollow masquerade.
Where is our nation's wealth, our country's pride
The Kandasamys who for truth have died,
The N.Ms and the Colvins of the land
Who with the toiling workers firmly stand?
They are not here. What means this crude display
Of gartered knights and clowns in fine array,
Of proud mammas and pert self — conscious maids
Decked in their jewels and their silken shades?
Woe to the authors of this shameful scene
For whom no coward act can be too mean,
Who tax the poor and spend the public purse
Regardless of the starving mother's curse !
While Royal guests and Ministers are fed
The honest worker is denied his bread.
And soon the new born State so freely bled
Will need a Christ to raise it from the dead.

With the Ceylon Independence Act of Feb. 4, 1948, Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) became a Dominion of the British Commonwealth. Elaborate Celebrations were held from Feb. 4 to 16. Published at the time, this poem boldly strikes a dissenting note from the general jubilation.

V. Kandasamy, a Government clerical servant, was shot dead on June 5, 1947, when Police opened fire to disperse a crowd during the General Strike.

Dr. N.M. Perera was M.P. for Ruwanwella and Leader of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and Dr. Colvin R. De Silva was M.P. for Wellawatte-Galkissa and then Leader of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) group which later merged with the LSSP.

The Duke of Gloucester represented King George VI at the celebrations and the Duchess accompanied him.

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V. KANDASAMY : AN EPITAPH

Shot like a dog upon the muddy street
He died a martyr at his comrades' feet,
Yet gloriously his spirit still survives
In men who will avenge him with their lives.

For every single Kandasamy dead
A hundred others spring up in his stead
To carry on the struggle in its course
'gainst Police Raj and unrelenting force.

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TOWARDS A WORKERS' STATE

Well may the Tamil Congress shout
The U.N.P. is turned in rout,
But louder, greater the applause
If it espouse the workers' cause.
The Workers who with blood and tears
Prepared the country for these cheers,
Who sacrificed their flesh and bone
To claim no more than is their own -
Their birth-right which has been denied
By grasping Power and Scornful Pride.
If now the Congress will extend
A loyal hand to greet a friend
The Coalition may create
Conditions for a Workers' State.

Published in the "City News" of 11.10.47 when the UNP, having suffered defeat in the northern areas to the Tamil Congress in the general election, had to form a Government by means of a coalition with the latter.

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FORGE LEFT UNITY

With Socialism as its goal
The Front made fair progress
To break the shackless of the past
And former wrongs redress.

A common programme helped to keep
Three parties in accord,
To work towards a common goal,
Submerging strife, discord.

With working class and mass support
Industrial peace prevailed,
And bases of reaction were
Relentlessly assailed.

The capitalist structure rocked,
The tycoons felt the quake,
And vested interests have combined
United Front to break.

From Chile and Bangaladesh
The lesson can be read,
How foul reaction shoots its way
To raise its ugly head.

The conscious masses know the truth
And will defend their gains,
So all progressives must unite
To help to break their chains.

In August, 1963, the Communist Party, LSSP & Mahajana Eksath Peramuna ("People's United Front"), joined to form a United Left Front which ended when the LSSP linked up with Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) Government in June, 1964. At the 1970 General Election the CP, LSSP and SLFP formed a United Front.

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THE TRANSFERENCE OF POWER

For centuries the vast estates
Held firm in feudal bond,
Devolved upon the heirs at law
Of generations fond.

Acquired, unjustly in conquest
By legislative power,
Or wrung from needy peasants in
Some sorely stricken hour.

Exploiting peasant labour on
The acres so acquired,
For meagre wage or through tenure
Their service was required.

Mere fractions of these acres broad
Were cultivated, used,
But rather were the private rights
Of ownership abused.

The choice of crops to people's needs
Were not related then,
The seed the soil, rotation, yield,
Or what to plant and when.

The economic use of land
To serve the country's need,
Was not the yardstick, but the whim
Of each proprietor's greed.

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The profit motive ruled the land,
Few thought of public good,
So Tea and Rubber were enthroned
O'er clothing, shelter, food.

The princely incomes from exports
Were spent on living high,
The cost of imports higher rose
Yet few would reason, why.

With universal franchise and
All education free,
The Marxist dialectic spread
From hill side to the sea.

Appeals to language, race and creed
Released a mass upsurge,
Which swept the mighty from their seats
In a peaceful bloodless purge.

With mass support United Front
Achieved what none did dare,
A Sovereign Republic with
A Socialistic flair.

There are Ceilings now on incomes
House ownership and Land,
And Tax on Profits, Wealth and Gains -
The Levy is at hand.

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The Land take-overs symbolise
The transference of power,
From bourgeoisie to the mass,
Impatient for the hour.

Regenerate sons of the soil
Enthusiastic press,
Collectively to work the lands
And former wrongs redress.

Of all economic reforms introduced by the United Front (SLFP–LSSP–CP) Government of 1970 the 50-acre ceiling on land owned by any individual was the most radical.

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THE SAGA OF SAIGON

We have read of Thermopylac
And how they kept the pass ;
We respect and honour highly
The heroes of that class.

We have learnt of Balaclava
And of the Light Brigade,
We revive that glorious saga—
The gallant charge they made.

But neither feat may equal
The epic of this age,
Writ as a burnished sequel
To history's bright page.

The unrivalled dedication
Of the fearless Vietcong,
Has humbled a great nation
And is enshrined in song.

They stormed the Yankee citadel,
And blasted their way through,
Till Yankee power and prestige fell
Before the dauntless few.

With breathless admiration
We watch the Vietcong,
Chastise a mighty nation
And drive it home headlong.

Written in Feb., 1969,

In March, 1968, President Lyndon B.Johnson announced that the areas of N.Vietnam subject to US bombing raids would be drastically curtailed and, shortly after, Washington and N.Vietnam agreed that their representatives should meet in Paris to discuss, if not a cease-fire at least the conditions for opening peace talks. The first of the meetings was held on May 13, 1968.

Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, was later renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

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LEARN MORE FROM UNCLE HO

The rice grain 'neath the pestle's blows
Emerges purified and white,
So only he who suffers knows
The lessons of misfortune's blight.

All land reform, says Uncle Ho,
Is like a hot but healthy soup,
It must be taken rather slow
Not gulped like water from a brook.

Ho rid his country of the French,
And beat the Japs back to their shore,
From ghastly field and gory trench
The Yanks withdraw for evermore.

His forces small he didn't pit
In open war against great foes,
To guerillas he did commit
The task of dealing crushing blows.

Such wisdom learn from Ho Chi Minh
Who hewed a rugged path to fame
Both Mao Tse and Kosygin
His worth and prowess do acclaim.

Written in May, 1970.

Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969) former President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the most illustrious figure in Vietnam's struggle for freedom, founder of the Viet Minh. A pragmatic, Comuunist of whom it was said that he "came to power not in the wake of the Soviet or other foreign armies but through the victory of forces under his own leadership in a long drawn out revolutionary war, the only anticolonial war ever fought and won under Communist / leadership".

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A LA MODE AMIN

Let Idi Amin loudly roar,
Expel all Asians from his shore,
Without a passport or a pie
To freeze on British soil and die,
This vicious work is hardly done,
He drives the European nun;
The savage jackal snaps and howls,
The tactful lion only growls:
Oh Amin, have you lost the taste
A roasted judge is such a waste :
You'll soon be sallow like the White
Who lost his flesh-tooth and the fight.
Nationalize and mobilize
But don't despoil and victimise.

POSTCRIPT:

Be well advised and get to bed
Your mental state is best unsaid.

In 1973 Idi Amin expelled from Uganda 55,000 Indians and Pakistanis mostly businessmen and shopkeepers.

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VERWOERD'S FAREWELL

The wheels of God grind slowly
It has been truly said
And hope has reawakened
For Verwoerd now lies dead.

The architect of hatred,
Of White supremacy.
Is now the luckless victim
Of his own lunacy.

A conscientious message
Conveyed in solid lead
Would certainly have softened
A less obdurate head

But not this proud apostle
Of racial hate and weal
Who spread his gospel further
With unabated zeal.

Secure in the assurance
Of his bright store of gold
He braved the condemnation
Of Whites outside his fold.

For those who worship Mammon
But bow before the Cross
Would rather burn than suffer
An economic loss.

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Defying world opinion
And sanctions on their trade
The price of persecution
The ruthless Boer has paid.

Resounding hallelujahs
Ring out throughout the world
As arrogance and power
Have from their heights been hurled.

On April 9, 1960, South African Prime Minister Hendrick F.Verwoerd was shot and seriously wounded by a white farmer in protest against Apartheid policies. He recovered rapidly, but on Sept. 9, 1966, was stabbed to death in the House of Assembly by a deranged parliamentary messenger. Elected Prime Minister on Sept.2, 1958, he established the South African Republic. He was Apartheid's High Priest, S.Africa's chief theoretician on the notorious doctrine & practice of racial inequality. The Sharpeville massacre occurred during his regime.

This poem was written in Sept., 1966 and was published in "The Nation" of 12.8.66 and in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1968.

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APARTHEID - THE END IN SIGHT

"The mills of God grind slowly,
Yet grind exceeding small ; "
So hath the Black and lowly
Responded to Life's call.

A heart beats in the Nigger
His blood is red and right,
It's larger far, don't snigger,
Than of the Christian White.

Despised and persecuted,
Condemned to hate and strife,
In death he has executed
A testament of life.

He has helped his White oppressor,
To mock the sting of death,
Forgiving the transgressor.
E'en in his dying breath

The Black man's contribution
To save the savage White,
Has brought home retribution,
To end Apartheid.

The implanting of hearts from coloured donors in white patients is spotlighted as revealing the utter illogicality of Apartheid. This poem appeared in the "Ceylon Observer" of 14.1.68, the "Tribune" of 13 1.68, "The Nation" of 29.1.68, the "Sun" (under the heading Black & White") and in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1968.

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THE BANISHED BOER

To flaunt the colour of one's skin
In sport is a most heinous sin.
It's pride and arrogance of race
Which world opinion must efface.
For in the classless field of sport
Where men are equal as in Court,
The only claim to which they yield
Is prowess on the track or field;
And here the victor has the grace
To hold the vanquished in embrace ;
A common goal, a high ideal
Bind sportsmen in a bond so real
This spirit must all men uphold
Despite the urgent lure of gold,
Or soulless men would propagate
Johannes Vorster's hymn of hate:
So let the leprous Boer remain
Expelled and exiled - not in vain -
Till fit to mingle with free men
Of saner views. We say, Amen.

Written on Oct. 6, 1968, on the exclusion of S.Africa from the Olympic Games.

Balthazar Johannes Vorster had been Premier of S.Africa since 1966 when he succeeded Verwoerd as party leader & Premier. A pro-Nazi, he quadrupled the Security Police and sponsored the notorious Ninety Day Law (1963) which empowered the Police to arrest and imprison suspects without recourse to the Courts.

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SAVE ANGELA

In New York gaol Angela's clapped
For murder she is framed,
Tho' in lone cell in madhouse trapped
Her spirit is untamed.

She hails from Alabama where,
Her beauty and her brains
Have caused the racist Whites a scare;
They'll keep her now in chains.

Where Whites bomb churches and Black kids
In this enlightened State,
Her race and colour far outbids
All values - such is hate.

They hate the Blacks and fear the Red,
Angela doth combine
In harmony these colours dread -
Her cause is yours and mine.

Both truth and justice must prevail
And human rights upheld
And White supremacy will quail
'Ere Angela is felled.

University teacher & Black activist Angela Davis was in June 1972, acquitted of the charge of murder, kidnapping & conspiracy following the shooting of four persons including two judges in California on Aug. 7, 1970.

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ANGELA

A victim of the racist White
Thrown out of campus chair
For holding views she knew were right——
A Red with crinkled hair.

Framed for the murder of a judge
Her courage did not fail,
"Crime passionale" they said to smudge;
She didn't wince or quail.

Confined she was in lonely cell
Yet she was not alone,
Throughout the world, she knew quite well,
Her fruitful seed was sown.

For thirteen weeks she braved the dock,
The jury pondered long;
Their verdict gave the rudest shock
To those who judged her wrong.

"Not guilty" said the jury White
Of every charge of three;
The world applauds the verdict right——
Angela is now free.

Yes, free to lead the fearless fight
For freedom for the Blacks.
For justice and for human right
For all the Black man lacks.

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With clenched fists they hailed the hour,
Right in that august court,
And loudy pledged to forge Black Power
To storm the racist fort.

Appeared in the "Times Weekender" of 11.6.72, in the "Forward" of 17.6.72 and in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1972.

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FAIR PLAY THE ENGLISH WAY

When in the classless field of sport
You vie with rivals White,
What boots it if you top the lists
Unless your race is right.

For when the great selectors come
To judge your shining claim,
They check if you are Black or White
Before they write your name.

Mean souls and Insoles have sold out
The English nation's soul,
And sacrificed it to preserve
The messy porridge bowl.

The Smiths and Joneses must admit
They dare not be so bold
To practise principles they preached
And lose South Afric gold.

Written in Sept, 1968, when Basil D'Oliveira was dropped from the M C C. team for the projected tour of S. Africa on the obvious ground of Colour. The Chairman of Board of Selectors was Douglas ("Doug") Insoles Eventually the team did not go to S. Africa but came to Sri Lanka with D'Oliveira included.

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THE CRICKET RECESSIONAL

When colour barred the M.C.C.
From Afric's darkened coast,
Our little island in the sea
Was proud to play the host.

When Cowdrey and his mates stepped out
With Dolly to the fore
Tumultuous was the welcome shout.
That hailed them on our shore.

Now vindicated stands the game
With England's head held high,
While boors hang their heads in shame
And wring their hands and cry.

For sport transcends all barriers,
Of colour, class and creed,
Good sportsman should be carriers,
And sowers of this seed.

So cricket must promote good-will,
Respect for fellow-men;
Fair-play and justice more than skill,
Must be its aim. Amen.

Written in Feb, 1969.

"Dolly", popular name of D'Oliveira, coloured member of the M.C.C. team.

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BLACK EYES FOR WHITES

We do not grudge the gift of sight
To men who practise apartheid,
But rather do we freely give
Our coloured eyes that they may live
Like humans, with their sight restored
And tread the broad and open road,
That these benighted Whites may see
The force of kindness, sympathy,
And cease from hence to propagate
The vicious creed of racial hate.
They swop the dying Nigger's heart,
But gladly with our eyes we part
And many vital spares we'll send
Those sickly hearts and minds to mend,
We'll give our hearts, our eyes, our all,
To do a perfect overhaul,
And make those men to see the light,
And shed the hateful apartheid
It's not the colour of one's skin
That matters, but, what is within.
You may be Black or Brown or White,
But don't refuse to do the right.

On the grafting of corneas from Black donors in Sri Lanka on Whites in S.Africa.

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LUCY, WE SALUTE THEE

Fight on brave heart altho' the tempests roar,
Your cause will be espoused from shore to shore.
You symbolize the trials of your kin,
Whose crime is in the pigment of your skin,

Time was when haughty Whites bestrode the earth,
And sacked and plundered what was ours by birth;
For them the power, the sceptre and the throne,
For us the right to suffer and to mourn.

Ah yes; to mourn a parent or a child,
A wife, a brother, or a sister mild,
Whose precious lives were sacrificed to make
The filthy lucre for their masters' sake.

No power can now resist the rising tide
Of truth and justice, that is on the side
Of coloured millions, who have broken free
Of bonds that held us in our slavery.

From proud resurgent China's martial strand,
To re-awakened India's hallowed land,
From Indonesia on to Afric's coasts,
Will rise the tidal wave of coloured hosts,

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So fearless and with courage face the mob
Of savage beasts, who will your freedom rob,
From stones and missiles, Lucy, do not flinch,
We will avenge you - you they dare not lynch.

Yet should you fall a martyr, in your pain,
Know that your blood has not been shed in vain;
You'll symbolize the triumph of your race,
O'er men whose hearts are blacker than your face.

Published on Feb.27, 1956 on Autherine Lucy, 26-year-old Negress, who was first admitted to the hitherto all-White University of Alabama and then was banned after violent racial demonstrations.

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JUSTICE IN THE BICENTENNIAL

The Black who scaled the White House fence
Armed with a pipe of lead,
Ere he was heard in his defence
Was brutally shot dead.

A White that very fence may scale
Armed with a deadly gun,
The sentry's rifle will not fail
To wound him on the run.

He'll be alive the charge to face,
His motive could be found,
Or every doubt of crime erased
If proved of mind unsound.

Two hundred years of vast progress,
Material wealth and power
Have not for Blacks achieved redress
Up to the present hour.

They proudly claim the laws the same
For coloured man or White,
But will they free him of the blame,
Who shot the Black at sight?

Written on a Reuter report that Washington Police on 26.7.76 shot dead a 30 year-old Black named Chester Plummer who had scaled the White House fence. He was alleged to have had a metal pipe in his hands and he was killed by a single bullet fired into his chest.

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HAIL! SERVANT OF INDIA

The conscious crores have made this choice,
To sweep to victory
The idol of their cherished hopes,
The child of history.

The worthy scion of a house
Whose name still casts a spell
She learned to feel the people's pulse,
She knows their mood to tell.

So nurtured from her tender years
To serve the country's need,
The lathi charge and prison cell
She suffered as her meed.

A trusted leader well-equipped
To steer the ship of state,
Who knows not fear nor pettiness, —
— "The people cannot wait",

She swept the mighty from their seats,
The Princes took the rap,
Between the wealthy and the poor,
She seeks to bridge the gap.

This overwhelming victory
Will help her to advance
Her socialistic policies,
And little leave to chance.

Written on March, 23, 1971 two months before the General Election in which Mrs.Indira Gandhi led her Congress Party to a great victory gaining a two-thirds majority in the Indian Parliament. The author received a letter of thanks dated 26.4.71 from the Deputy Secretary to the Indian Prime Minister to whom the poem had been transmitted by the Indian High Commissioner in Ceylon, saying: "The Prime Minister is touched by this gesture and has asked me to thank you for the very generous sentiments which you have expressed."

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THE U.S.A.

America you land of guns,
You butcher all your noblest sons,
Thro' Lincoln, Kennedy and King,
We hear the fatal bullets ring,
And ere your Nation's tears are dry
For brother John, echoes the cry
That Robert joins the honoured dead,
Shot by a gunman in the head.

Hang low your head in abject shame
Search in your heart and take the blame
You set such store by gold and guns
And sacrifice your worthy sons.
Their precious lives you will devour
In your foul quest of wealth and power,
Degenerate, devoid of love
You breed the hawk and kill the dove.

You thrive on armaments and war,
The rule of force - your highest law
Your policy is genocide,
You kill for pleasure and for pride,
Alas ! the tribes of Indian braves,
And Negros who have died as slaves,
And now heroic Vietnam
You'd crush with rockets and napalm.

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Abjure this cult of force and hate
Accept with grace your clear fate
For Vietnam must surely win
And Michael X assert his skin,
Stop vile incitement and intrigue
Against the friendly Arab League,
Renounce your proud Imperial aims
And strive for peace as fits your claims.

Rouse not the mighty Dragon's ire
For she'll consume you in her fire,
And set the world ablaze in flame.
In total war - with you to blame.
Retrace your steps, recast your role,
Lest muffled bells for you do toll,
Race - hate and violence must cease
The way to honour is thro' peace.

Written on June 16, 1968.

Robert Kennedy was US Attorney - General, Senator and brother of the late President John F. Kennedy. Robert, who championed the cause of the Black and the poor American, was assassinated in 1968 while campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination.

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A BOUQUET FOR MADAM SPEAKER

When Siva graced the Speaker's chair
She wore no jasmines in her hair,
But when she filled the role so well
She brought the House beneath her spell:
With one accord it gave the palm
To her who ruled with quiet charm.
No tempers frayed, no ugly word,
No blows exchanged - it seemed absurd -
That just a smiling woman could
Turn fiery metal into wood.
It was a triumph for her sex
And this alone some folk would vex,
The august seat she occupied
Tho' from the Opposition side.
She has created history,
Exploding myth and mystery.
The Speaker's mantle well may fall
On shapely shoulders after all.

In January, 1970, Mrs. Siva Obeyesekere, then a member of the Opposition, was called on to preside over a meeting of the House of Representatives. She was the first woman to occupy the Speaker's chair.

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MURDER AT MUNICH

A monstrous crime, a bloody massacre,
The flower of a Nation's youth shot down
When unsuspecting and unarmed they lay
Encamped in Munich, far from kith and kin,
To vie with chosen youth from distant clime,
In fair and open contest for the crown ;
The laurel wreath of peaceful sport to wear,
And decked with honour to their homes return.

Alas, what have we here? a ghastly sight
Of cold and lifeless corpses, air-borne,
Received by wailing, horror-stricken crowds
Of anguished kinsfolk and demented friends
What was their crime, the victims of this death?
What vile offence provoked the killer's hand?
None, none at all; but that as homeless Jews
They had been planted on pure Arab soil.

So, here's the cause, The roots of this foul deed
Lie in that wicked deal which Balfour made,
Who carved a home in Palestine for Jews
The refugees from Nazi crimes fled there.
The shades of Adolf Hitler must arise
And be arraigned with Balfour in the dock
For sowing here the seeds of hate and strife
To reap the bloody harvest that offends.

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Backed by the mighty dollar of the Yanks
Who sought an outpost in the Middle East,
The U.N. to this scheme its blessings gave
To seal this horse deal, recking not the cost —
The cost i n human lives in misery.
So now a desperate, determined race
Uprooted from their homes, seek vengeance,
Defying death and human sentiment.

With dedication to the single cause
Of winning with their blood their native soil
They roam the earth in restless hooded bands
To strike the savage blow which will arrest
Attention to their cause. Lest we forget,
Ere we condemn these men, remember that
They share their guilt both nations great and small
Who idly watch the rape of Palestine.

On the kidnapping and murder by Palestinian terrorists of eleven members of the Israeli team to the Olympic Games at Munich in 1972. Lord Balfour was the British politician after whom the Balfour Declaration (1917) was named. As Foreign Secretary he addressed on Nov.2, 1917 a letter to Lord Rothschild declaring that H.M. Government viewed "with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People."

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LAURELS FOR THE LEFT

The public recognise his worth
Who's 72 this day from birth,
His British double Doctorates
Are evidence of how he rates
'mongst scholars from the East and West
And politicians of the best.
Today on Nomination Day
To Victory he leads the way.

O'er 40 years without a pause
He led and steered the workers' cause.
When starving fevered peasants died
With dhal he hurried to their side
In wartime clapped in local jails
With comrades - even fiction fails -
To match their daring prison break
With life and future all at stake,

Then working from the underground
They built a Marxist party sound,
On principles which were ahead
Of ignorant and underfed
Peasants, who, tho' free to vote
Still lacked direction and support
To organise, unite and face,
Exploiters vile of varied race.

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The L.S.S.P. started then
To beard the lion in its den,
While White men of the ruling race
To Brown imperialists gave place
In hopes by this device to keep
Their stranglehold, and profits reap
From Tea from Rubber and Commerce
And strain our country's stricken purse.

But in good time came World War II
When mighty empires floundered too,
And from the seeds of war was born
The independence of Ceylon.
The reins of power still remained
In Brown Sahibs by Britain trained
To keep the pattern of commerce
Exploit the country, and what's worse,
Deny the masses right to share
And breathe of freedom's vaunted air.

With mounting pressure from the Left,
Free education not bereft
Of mother tongue, restored the voice
Of common folk to claim their choice
Of language, religion and race,
And their oppressors to displace.
But not before the General Strike
Against the cost of living hike
Had shown the worker that the hour
Had dawned to make a bid for power.

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Then yielding to the people's will
But faithful to its object still
The L.S.S.P. struck a blow
Unitedly to overthrow
The U.N.P. which had for years
Reigned heedless of the people's tears.
The Coalition played its role
Towards a Socialistic goal,
And power bases shifted make
All vested interests to quake.

When foreign, local class combined
The Common Front was undermined,
And Marxist allies were dismissed
As tho' they never would be missed.
The C.P. in their comrade's wake
A speedy exit had to make.
All this for promised foreign aid
Such was the heavy price we paid !

But with the advent of the polls
There is some scarching of the souls,
And isolation now extends
A welcome hand to former friends,
But now the U.L.F. is posed
In battle dress - its ranks are closed -
Tho' open still remains the door,
For those who yet may think it o'er.

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With N.M., Wicks and Sube there
And Nanda bringing up the rear
The disillusioned masses' choice
The U.L.F. will freely voice
And so advance the people's cause
Without a compromise or pause.
Progressives back the U.L.F.
Can any to this call be deaf ?

Written on June 6, 1977 the 72nd birth anniversary of Dr.N.M. Perera, Leader of the LSSP.

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THE REPUBLIC IN RETROSPECT

From the dawn of Independence
Thro' the milestones of the past,
Review the progress now achieved,
The benefits that last.

From fitful faint resistance to
Three proud Imperial powers
For centuries, we have regained
The freedom that was ours.

The heritage of Lanka fair,
Our far-famed, sea-girt isle,
Whose golden coasts and verdant hills
Reflect the sun's warm smile.

Regenerate with liberty
We choose our means and ends,
Free from the shackles of the past,
With giant Reds as friends.

Sri Lanka's foreign policy,
Progressive, non-aligned
Has won the plaudits of the world,
With aid and trade combined.

Conserving our resources we
Nationalise our port,
Our shipping, trade, insurance and
Our ground and air transport.

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Attracting Foreign Exchange and
Increasing our reserves,
Improving our economy,
Our development serves.

While ceiling higher incomes and
House ownership and lands,
While taxing incomes, gifts and gains,
The Levy also stands.

The urgent war on hunger launched
The drive to grow more food,
And harnessing of hydro-power
Have famine's threats withstood.

Constructing bridges, roads and dams,
Restoring bunds and tanks,
Electrifying villages,
Have earned the peasants' thanks.

Nationalising minerals,
Gems, textiles, steel and oil,
Tubes, tyres, ceramics and drugs
Find willing hands to toil.

Free education geared to serve
The country's present need,
Will offer more employment and
Help many mouths to feed.

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Promoting sport, reviving art,
Crafts, industries, commerce,
While Lanka's youth with credit vie
In spheres and fields diverse.

Family planning expertise,
Stern discipline and work
For better standards, outputs, yields,
No citizen should shirk.

They strive to curb corruption,
Hound racketeers and crooks,
Streamline our legislation and
Revise our Statute Books.

Unhalting Socialism is
The young Republic's goal,
And Lanka's men and women must
Ungrudging play their role.

Most human institutions are
Imperfect, - to man's shame,
So let us strive the faults to purge
And squarely take the blame.

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WHAT PRICE JUSTICE ?

The clever Mr. Keating
Would turn a heavy boating,
Into a tribute to his country's laws;
He's to the world proclaiming,
The trial was no framing,
The verdict true deserves our loud applause.

Another Lesser Noyse
Has also raised his voice
To claim the credit for that country's laws,
He charged the world with bias
Against the States so pious
Where freedom reigned sans prejudice or flaws

Well may the sceptics snigger
Angela is a Nigger,
An intellectual, militant and Red,
Who boldly fights oppression
Injustice and repression,
She's safer behind bars or even dead.

It couldn't have been better
With her guns and ardent letter
To prove the charge against her to the hilt,
Her flight, disguise, suspicion
Could cloud the jury's vision
To bring a biassed verdict of her guilt.

From Europe to Malaysia,
Africa, China, Asia,
The conscience of the world had been aroused,
"Free Angela !" was the cry
That resounded to the sky
Of all who had her bitter cause espoused.

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But for this timely action
'gainst pressure and reaction,
And Lee Branton's masterly defence
Both Noyse and Kenneth Keating
Their words would now be eating
And every line they wrote give more offence.

Thro' the smoke and dying embers
Of this struggle one remembers
The gallant White who freed her from the jail,
He staked his farm, his station,
Defied an angry nation
To let a Black activist out on bail.

The law's another racket,
Her trial cost a packet,
For justice and one's rights are dearly bought
It's scandalous - not funny,
They're still collecting money
To pay for all the legal battles fought.

Mr. Kenneth B. Keating, US Ambassador in India, wrote an article titled "Afterthoughts about Angela Davis".

Mr. Grosby S. Noyse wrote an article on "Angela Davis & the US System of Justice" claiming that the US system of justice was the most equitable in the world and that this was illustrated by the acquittal of Angela Davis.

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PEACE OR PERISH

Poor Jimmy Wilson is his name,
The Black who stole a dime;
By savage laws condemned to death
For this most monstrous crime.

The Stars and Stripes doth proudly fly
O'er land and air and sea,
And in the Councils of the world
Espouses liberty.

The Blacks within the homeland may
Not breathe of freedom's air,
Except of course in time of war
A hero's death to share.

Yes, integration is the law,
But blackguards boldly block
The coloured children from the schools
In towns like Little Rock.

The Teddy Boys of London Town,
The thugs of Notting Hill,
Have set upon the coloured folk
To plunder, maim and kill.

And nearer home on Lanka's shores
A peaceful Aryan race
Is seeking to exterminate
All others in this place.

Injustice thrives throughout the world
And force appears to rule;
Must atom power the master be,
And not, of man, the tool ?

Written in 1958 on Jimmy Wilson, an American Black who was condemned to death for theft of a dime.

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VIJAYA'S CROWNING ACT

The coward killer's bullets sped
Thro' that brave bleeding heart,
Then riddled that fair face with lead
Beyond the surgeon's art.

The headless corpse lay steeped in blood
In crimson pools of gore,
Felled unsuspecting as he stood
Outside his open door.

The monstrous crime for which he paid
The price, his precious life,
His starry future lowly laid,
His children, home and wife.

For unity, for peace - end strife
Sans race, religion, class,
He strove for justice, better life
For the exploited mass.

The Socialist United Force
He brought to birth in life
Was signed in death o'er his corse
Led by his fearless wife.

The surging crowds that thronged the pyre
Pledged solemnly the Pact,
The martyr tho' consumed in fire
Lives in this crowning act.

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HAYMAN'S FAREWELL

Between the golden age of Stone
And Warden Saram's iron rule,
An Englishman we're proud to own
Came dedicated to our School,

With academic laurels crowned,
Endowed with massive frame and health
Though in his country well renowned,
He laboured here and spent his wealth.

The Fives Courts and the Swimming Pool,
His many gifts in cash and kind
Made misers think he was a fool,
His heart was large - he didn't mind,

When war clouds drifted to our shore
And some were posted to the hills,
Good Dr. Hayman as of yore,
Was ready there to foot the bills.

With earnest zeal his venture grew,
He strove with team mates staunch and true,
And ere long there proudly flew
The cherished flag, the Black and Blue,

Our politicians have no use
For noble men of Hayman's ilk,
So let our thanks be more profuse —
Have we not drained them dry of milk?

But Lanka's loss will prove the gain
Of those who recognise their worth,
And welcome them despite their pain
To serve in lands far from their birth.

Composed in 1963 when Dr. R.L. Hayman, Sub.warden of S. Thomas' College, retired after serving the College with self sacrifice and devotion for many years.

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THE MISSING LINK (OR DRINK ?)

When plant and turf do wilt and parch
Beneath the scorching heat of March,
A nervous lad may miss a catch
But not the Royal – Thomian match-
The match now hoary with the years,
Yet green with memories and fears
Of battles lost and battles won,
Of thrills, excitement and of fun.

As veterans of yester year
Hear wave on wave of lusty cheer,
And those nostalgic tuneful notes
Rise from the hoarse but loyal throats,
They call to mind the scenes of old,-
Encounters with this foeman bold,
When to the same inspiring call,
They made the stubborn wickets fall.

Back on the old familiar grounds,
We hear the same familiar sounds,
The blaring brass of ragged bands
In fancy dress of motley brands
The rowdy cliques that mar the view
With flags of varying size and hue,
Exploding crackers in the crowd
With deafening noise and feeling proud.

All, all are there as in the past,
The milling crowds, the stage, the cast,
The youthful heroes of the day
Rewarded at the end of play,
Save Bacchus of the flowing bowl
Where could he be? God bless his soul!
He helds court at the Thomian Fair
You'll find him and his cronies there.

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THE WARDEN'S SWAN - SONG

The Warden at a Prize Day
Was speaking at the School,
He said our peaceful country
Was threatened by mob rule.

Demagogues in office,
Were seeking to debase
The high ideals cherished by
The noblest of our race.

In blinded rage the Premier
Was quick to make reply,
A narrow-minded man like this
I never did espy.

I'm glad at last he's going
He has failed by every test,
He never once invited me
To speak, as honoured guest.

He barred the door against me,
Believe it, if you can,
When other schools have welcomed me,
He placed on me a ban.

The Warden promptly pleaded
And tendered his regret,
But the Premier raves in anger
And continues to fret.

Published in the "Sunday Times" of 21st September ,1958. The anti UNP coalition led by S W.R D Bandaranaike's S L F.P. was swept to power at the 1956 elections on the slogans of Sinhala languae, race and religion.

The warden was the Rev R.S. De Saram.

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OLD ROYALISTS - OLD THOMIANS' ANNUAL ENCOUNTER

When friendly rivals meet in sport
Down South in that historic fort,
Alumni of the famous schools
Relive the thrills of flannelled fools,
Enjoy the cricket, lunch and tea
With all the old time revelry,
And crown the orgies of the day
With Supper-Dance the Booza way.
The honoured guest this year will be
Our man from Galle, the I.G.P.
So let September Fifth be free
Midst taboos and austerity.

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THE ALMA MATER

It stands on the fringe of the ocean,
The massive grey pile that has grown:
I ponder with pride and emotion,
On the rugged old past we've known.

The low cadjan roof with the half-walls
Was dining hall, class-room and shrine,
The Lab. and the flat roofed main halls
Remain of that early design.

How plain and austere our beginnings
Yet planned with the future in view,
Half a century later our innings
Are writ in the old and the new.

The Chapel is witness to Withers,
A heroic labour of love,
When all around parches and withers
It showers its grace from above.

The dormitories and the main hall,
The new Science Lab. rising high,
Are silent stone witness of each call
To answer which many did hie.

The calls were an urgent reminder
To those whom she nurtured in youth,
That the College has thousands behind her
In quest of tradition and truth.

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All fired with fervour and burning
With a loyalty zealous and true,
To the tutors who gave of their learning
And lives for the Blue, Black and Blue.

The men who have toiled with devotion
Who strove not for profit or pelf,
Who recked not for gain or promotion
But sacrificed future and self.

We pride in the Pool and the Fives Courts
In the giants who passed into fame.
Whose prowess in studies and all sports
Have earned for the College a name.

"Be thou for ever" and flourish,
And serve Mother Lanka as well
As you did in the past, - may you nourish
The thirsty who drink at your well.

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ESTO PERPETUA

The spirit of our founder bold
Has seeped into our bone,
He built on firm foundations,
On Miller, Wood and Stone.

Add to these great headmasters past
Who sowed the precious seed,
The names of Warden Bacon,
Of Baly, Buck and Read.

The mantle of these pioneers,
These men of noble aim,
Is on their worthy pupils who
Add lustre to their fame.

With dedicated loyalty,
They laboured without pause,
Inspiring selfless bands of men
To join the noble cause.

And in the great upheavals of
A hundred and ten years,
The School has grown from strength to strength
Despite our recent fears.

Succeeding generations strong
All nurtured in this soil,
Have Lanka served with distinction,
None from their tasks recoil.

And binding all together fast
With ties both strong and true,
Is the common bond of brotherhood,
The Blue, the Black and Blue.

Now Thomians young and old rejoice,
Flock in from near and far,
To celebrate our jubilee
For all we have and are.

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THE FIRST TRANSPLANT

Some fifty years ago, today,
The first transplant was done,
No human life was signed away,
Rejection there was none.

The donor was in perfect health
His heart was good and true,
At sixty eight his storied wealth
Was writ in Black and Blue.

No dying patient was to get
This great and noble heart,
But everything was planned and set
Another life to start.

Surviving now for fifty years
The fitful winds of change,
The School defies the sceptics' fears
And rides the ageless range.

We proudly to the surgeon own
Our gratitude sincere;
Not flesh and blood, but solid Stone
Endures from year to year.

1968 was the 50th anniversary of the transplantation of S. Thomas' from Mutwal to Mt. Lavnia. The move was chiefly guided by Warden Stone.

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THE THOMIAN TRADITION

A Royal wit did taunt us
And this we gladly own,
That Thomians in their blindness
Bow down to Wood and Stone.

But not as to dread idols
Thro' superstitious fear,
But freely paying tribute
To what we hold most dear.

The high ideals and precepts
They lived up to and taught,
Were anvils and the forges
Where characters were wrought.

Wise Chapman and great Miller,
Two giants of the past,
Ordained the great tradition
In which our mould is cast.

And in their worthy footsteps,
Porud product of the School,
De Saram in his wisdom
Preserved their hallowed rule.

Thro' wars and social changes,
The School withstood each shock,
For firmly was it founded
And built on solid rock.

And we the proud successcors
To that great heritage,
Must keep the flame aglowing
For each succeeding age.

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THE CROCKS FOREGATHER

When J.R. wields the willow,
And Banda drops the ball,
And Dickie from love's pillow
Responds to Banda's call;
When Bonnie takes the leather,
And Stanley takes a catch,
We really wonder whether,
It is a cricket match.
Eardley's in the outfield,
And Kalla's gaining strength,
But batsmen all will soon yield,
If Raju finds his length.
There's Terrence fielding cover,
And Sidney keeping stumps,
And Percy looking sour
As though he had the Mumps
If Ian sends a spinner
Which Douglas takes at slips,
Who cares if he is thinner
Than you are round the hips.
Though Sare will be there,
With giants of his day,
You'll witness cricket rare,
Though none of them will play.
But what is more exciting,

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In those Umpires' coats,
The shape ·· ms are fighting
Of Jill and Eve, the sports.
And when we take ourstation
At table at the Tests,
Sir John and Noel Gratiaen
Will be the honoured guests.
When Crocks and Colts play cricket,
You bet there will be fun,
So rush and buy your ticket,
And come in everyone,
For those whe cannot bat or bowl
Can join the dance and Rock 'n Roll.

Written for the Souvenir published on the occasion of the cricket match at Havelock Park on 3 3.57 between the Old Royalist & Old Thomians and the Colts Cricket Club "Old Crocks". The former team was captained by J.R.Jayewardene and the "Old Crocks" by Stanley De Zoysa. The Jayewardene team mates were Bon Abeywardena, Carl V. Cooke, Raju Coomaraswamy, C.G.C. Ebell, E.Lieversz, W. Ian Pieris, P. Rambukpotha, C.E.L. de Silva, S.T.L. de Soysa, N.A. de S. Wijesekera, S.G.de Zoysa & F.R.de Zoysa.

Stanley de Zoysa's team included H.C.W. Achilles, J.Ariaretnam, Frank Fry, Noel Harridge, Emil Juriansz, D.W.L.Lieversz, A.L. Loos, J. Murray, V. Legan Smith, S.A.C. Shums, D. Soysa, and H. Wille.

The reserves were R.E. Blaze. Bonnie Jayasekera & C.W. Sehoorman.

The umpires were Miss "Gilly" Fernando & Miss Eva Wanigasekera and the scorer was Miss. Therese Loos.

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TO THE LATE W.T. KEBLE

In reverence our heads we bow
To one who is not with us now,
From England far to us he came
A scion of illustrious name,
To hold the torch of learning high-
Permit me friends to heave a sign,
With firm devotion to the cause
He laboured without rest or pause
And threw himself with earnest zeal
Into the vortex of our weal.

That stooping, small but rugged frame
Could hold a class or lead a game,
And soon the eager boys could tell
The mettle of his pasture, well.
A rough exterior hid a heart
No second to his counterpart,
The kindly Doctor who has done
More for the boys then anyone,
His reticence and accents dry,
A subtle humour did belie.

This earnest dedicated pair
Their time or money did not spare,
But gladly spent it on the boys
Who learned to share their simple joys
Of hiking over hill and plain
Or camping out in sun or rain,
Or swimming in the open sea
Enjoying Nature's bounty free.
For be it work or be it play
Unflinchingly they led the way.

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But then alas with changing times
Regretfully they left our climes
But not without a bitter tear
For all they loved and cherished here.
And we in turn lament the day
Conditions forced our friends away,
One whom we hope again to see.
The other a sad memory.
In Canada, his wife and son
Brave the new life they had begun.

But we in Lanka are the heir
Of the selfless labours of this pair,
The two flourishing Junior Schools,
The Fives Courts and the Swimming Pools
Will keep their memory enshrined
In every loyal Thomian's mind,
With such affection as is shown
To Wardens Miller, Wood and Stone.
So may I end this tribute feeble
To the lamented Thomas Keble.

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SECTION - V

Politics & Human Rights

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I CHOOSE LANKA

How few the countries that can boast
Of golden beaches, palm-fringed coasts,
Of terraced fields and verdant hills,
Of water-falls and lakes and rills,
Of tropic sunsets, azure blue
Of tranqui l waters calling you?
Here one may walk or swim or sail
In swift canoes which brave the gale,
Or laze upon the golden shore,
Whilst ancient locomotives roar,
And Jumbo-jets soar overhead
With tourists from Europe sped,
To beat the freezing winter's cold
And fill our coffers with rich gold.

Here gorgeous blooms salute the eye
And hill-tops seem to reach the sky,
And luscious fruits beyond compare,
The pineapple and mango rare,
Banana, mangosteen and peach
Are still within our modest reach,
Fine fleshy guava, rambutan
Delight the eye and please the tongue.
Sweet cherimoya, soursop
Are fruits which keep our spirits up;
And orange, grape-fruit, mandarin
Conceal much wealth beneath their skin;
Whilst nature has no better drink
Than our king-coconut, I think.

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Then why should some leave Lanka's shore
With empty hands and hearts so sore,
As emigrants in futile quest
Of that now over crowded West,
Where jobs are scarce and costs are high,
Where power fails and planes don't fly
And fuel cuts in bitter cold,
Chill stouter hearts of oaken mould ?
Is it frustration or dispair
That drives them from our sunlit air ?
Have they no faith in this new plan
Of justice, equal rights for man ?
Our birthright is this favoured isle,
"Where only man" 'twas said "is vile".

Written in 1974 on the growing tendency to emigrate.

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THE CASSOCK OR THE CROSS

The tunic of the soldier lad,
The jacket of Jack Tar,
The searlet robes of judges will
Announce them from afar.

Tne policeman's tunic and his hat,
The lawyer in his gown.
The doctor and the nursing staff
Are known in every town.

The Customs House Official's dress,
The clippie in his coat,
The Bhikku in his yellow robe
One cannot fail to note.

Each wears a special uniform
Which marks his calling well,
And helps the public at a glance
The work or rank to tell.

The cassock's not convenient dress
For ordinary wear,
And e'en nuns have dropped their hoods
Tho' some at them may stare.

The robe does not the Bhikkhu make
Nor does the cowl the monk,
But something must distinguish them
As elephants their trunk.

Written on the increasing incidence of clergymen appearing in mufti much to the embarrassment and confusion of the public.

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A DIABOLICAL NECESSITY

My telephone, you phoney thing,
How peacefully you rest
Who knows that you can ring and ring
And be an utter pest ?

When first I got this fine device,
I thought I could control
Its service, for the handsome price
I paid, plus monthly toll.

A useful and efficient phone,
On which I could depend
To serve me with a pleasant tone
And be a real friend.

But often when I rush in haste
To make an urgent call,
I curse the service — what a waste.
There is no sound at all.

And when I lay myself to rest
Fatigued with work and care,
It rings and rings the ruddy pest,
It drives me to despair.

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And sometimes in the silent night
I hear the dreaded bell,
I ask the caller if he's tight,
Or tell him "Go to hell".

And often when at meals I sit
I hear the telephone,
It almost makes me throw a fit
Or choke upon a bone.

Could I let go the tiger's tail
I know I will be free
Of much annoyance, but I fail
A substitute to see.

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TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY?

Time was when games were won or lost
By standards fair, by art and skill,
When how you played did matter most
And Tests promoted much good-will.

When thousands thronged the pleasant green
To witness and enjoy the thrill
When nothing murderous or mean
Had entered into cricket still.

They watched the batsman at his crease
Face spinner googly, brake or swing,
When action, style, performance, please,
None would dispute - the game's the thing

No Thomson then or Lillee White
Would threaten or intimidate
To bowl a bouncing, bumping blight,
Regardless of the batsman's fate.

"We aim to hit him on the head",
Such is the coward bowler's boast,
Who worries if a man drops dead,
They'll take the Ashes to their coast.

When injured Chatfield senseless fell
And was restored by "Kiss of Life",
The saving feature in that hell
Was Lever's grief and anguished strife-

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To play or not to play again,
To maim, to kill, to sacrifice,
Or hound the bumper out as vain,
Denouncing it a deadly vice.

But should the game be held to scorn
In helmets and protective shields,
Avenging crowds by passion torn
Will turn the greens to battlefields.

Written in March, 1975 when Evan Chatfield, New Zealand Test player, was near fatally injured by a bumper from Peter Lever, England's fast bowler, in the first Test against England in N.Z, It raised the question of legislation to protect batsmen from bumpers. The England captain thought the best starting point would be for umpires to be more stringent in ruling on intimidating bowling, failing which legislation would be necessary. However, Nari Contractor, former Indian Test captain, who was nearly killed by a bumper from W. Indies fast bowler Charlie Griffith in March 1962, and still wears a metal plate in his skull, stated in an interview with a Correspondent of "The Hindu", in New Delhi, that he did not believe that bumpers should be banned. The Internation-al Cricket Conference at an emergency meeting at Lords in May 1975, decided to curb the threat of an excess of bumpers in the World Cup Matches in the following month.

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THE CADJU SELLERS

The simple Cadju vendor,
Though not so coy and slender,
Has learnt to place the accent on her sex,
With her closely fitting Bra,
She can stop a passing car,
The puritan and spinster both to vex.

For on the road to Kandy,
The common man or dandy,
Cannot resist the little cadjan stalls,
For every time he passes,
Those pretty village lasses,
Another willing victim to them falls.

Let us see why men prefer,
To buy their stuff from her,
And not from dusty pavements 'midst the stench,
Are her cadju nuts more tasty,
Now let us not be hasty
In passing bitter judgment on the wench.

The Pasyala seller,
Will admit it if you tell her,
Has realized the force of sex appeal.
It's the same technique, they use,
To sell you a pair of shoes,
Or to effect a million Dollar Deal.

In 1957 Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, stopped to compliment these women when on his way to Kandy and thus gave boost to the cadju sellers' popularity. This poem appeared in the "Ceylon Observer" of 23.3.57 and in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador" of 1970.

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THE PARSON AND THE PIE

A parson saw a wounded pie
A-lying in the drain,
And in his charity desired
To put it out of pain

"The little creature suffers much",
The kindly parson said,
"Come swiftly end its anguish with
A bullet through its head,.

'Your remedy's too drastic, may
I beg your pardon, Sir,
For life is precious even to
That little wounded cur.

And even if it had to limp
Around in search of food,
The poor dog doth cling to life
As any human would".

The parson flushed with anger, and
He left me with a sneer,
"Its sentiment like that", he said
"That stifles people here".

Written when the author resided at "Bertram House", College Avenue, Mt. Lavinia, near S. Thomas' College. and the College Chaptain lived next door in "Thalassa".

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TO MADAME VALENTINA TERESHKOVA

For the honour of residing in the same hotel as you,
For the privilege of riding in the bus
With one who won the admiration of the world-so few
I would express my grateful pleasure thus.
A little souvenir from a land where you have been,
A packet of the purest blend of tea
Is all I have to offer you of Cosmonauts, the queen,
So please accept this little gift from me

In July, 1965, the author, as member of the Ceylon delegation to the World Peace Conference in Helsinki, was accommodated in the same hotel as Madame Tereshkova of Soviet Russia, the world's first woman cosmonaut. He took the opportunity to hand her this poetic tribute with a packet of Ceylon tea. She immediately reciprocated with an autographed post-card of herself and a photograph in colour of her husband, Major Andrei Nikolayov, also a reputed Cosmonaut.

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IN MEMORY OF "H.V."

Five decades now these august halls
Have echoed to his voice
The undisputed leader of
The Bar by common choice.

This little man whose legal lore
Lies writ in every tome
Which piles upon those dusty shelves
With Maarsdorp, Voet and Sohm.

Abstruse and complex points of law
He simplifies with ease
In eloquent and lucid terms
Which cannot fail to please.

With tireless patience and with tact
He wins the judge's ear,
Which obstinately first refused
His arguments to hear.

His genius permeates the law
In every branch and sphere
In storied past or present time
He is without compeer.

Unspoilt by laurels at the Bar
Unruffled by the Bench
He gladly lends a helping hand
To legal lad or wench.

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To celebrate the proud event
Both Bench and Bar combined,
And young and old turned out in strength
To fete this master-mind.

Postscript

But tho' that honoured voice is still
The echoes still remain,
And legal lore and wisdom will
Attest his fame with pain.

Written in April, 1969, of Mr. H.V. Perera, Q.C., the undisputed Leader of the Bar for many years. The New Law Reports bear witness to his forensic skill and eminence. His 50 years practice at the Bar was marked by a complimentary dinner by his colleagues. It was said of him that he helped to formulate legal principles by the numerous decisions which he obtained in his favour in the course of his long and distinguished career.

The late Mr. Perera used to lunch in the Law Library Canteen which the author also patronised. One day, after the author had presented Mr. Perera with a copy of this poem, the latter walked up to the author's table. The author stood up nervously, not knowing whether he had given offence in any way. He was relieved and gratified when Mr.Perera tapping his pocket in which the poem was, said : "It is tributes like this that make one feel humble". Such was the characteristic reaction of a great and simple man.

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TO AN AUTHOR PATRIOT

(ON HIS 81ST BIRTHDAY)

Your rural roots and Western lore
And firmly scientific base,
Your stature grown beyond our shore
Will help this tragedy to face.

The time demands your knowledge ripe,
The fevered youth a guiding hand,
While troops engage and rebels snipe
Your voice will help a troubled land.

Written for his birthday, May 29, 1971. Dr. Martin Wickremasinghe, one of the best known and most erudite Sinhala journalists in recent decades (he was ex-Editor of the Dinamina) was also a popular novelist. He had a scientific outlook which influenced his independent views on traditional Buddhist beliefs and he was at times bitterly criticised by the conservatives. He died in 1976.

"This tragedy" was the insurrection of April, 1971.

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ODE TO AN INDIAN DANCER, SRIMATHI LAKSHIMI

Oh rarest gem of Travancore,
How thrilled I was to see,
Such beauty and such grace combine
In perfect harmony.

So eloquent with dainty feet
And sweet seductive hand,
You wove such wondrous legends
Of an ancient fairly land.

What need have you for human speech,
Or for a tuneful voice,
Your message touched a hidden chord,
And made my heart rejoice.

Back in my island home afar
I'll keep your memory
Ever green till once again
You charm me Lakshimi.

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A PRAYER FOR PEW-OWNERS

O Lord to thee for strength I pray,
To share the pew for which I pay,
With humble folk of low estate
Who strive to pass the Narrow Gate.

The Catholic Church in Dehiwala used to levy a monthly rental from parishioners who maintained pews in the church for their use. Some of them resented any outsider occupying the pew.

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TO DANESHAN FROM DAD IN THE NURSING HOME

At times you may be lonesome
Without your Dad to play,
But anything will be enough
To keep your spirits gay.

A picture-book, a pebble,
A pencil or a pail,
Will be to you as wonderful
As any fairy tale.

I see you on the door-step with
Your doggie by your side,
Feeling as your school-mates pass,
A little tinge of pride.

And as the minutes scamper and
It's time to wash your face,
I see your mother handle you
With very little grace.

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And as without much zest you sit
At table for your food;
I wish I could be sitting by
To tell you what is good.

And later as you hurry off,
Inquiring if you're late,
I know at school, the teacher has
Already shut the gate.

Each evening when the corridor
Re-echoes with your step,
I know my little son has come
To give his Daddy pep.

To watch you laugh and skip about
The sick-room is a joy,
Oh I will soon be well enough
To romp with you, my boy.

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REFLECTIONS ON BEARDS

Is there some power great and weird
That lurks within a shapely beard —
The growth that men of stature rare
So frequently are seen to wear?

It cannot be that every face
That goes unshorn reveals some grace,
Or that a genius lies concealed
Behind each thick and hoary field.

The martial Sikh for battles reared,
The big Baluchi in his beard
The Sanniyasi worn with prayer
Do all display this wealth of hair.

The jolly sailor soaked in Gin
Will fondly stroke his greasy chin,
The Frenchie will his beard wear
Trimmed to a point with tender care.

Is there a common reason for,
Darwin, Dickens, France and Shaw
Tolstoi, Ellis and Tagore,
And other giants by the score
To spurn the razor and the soap
For beards of promise and of hope :

In beards may we not then discover,
A secret source of latent power ?
If Samson's locks did strength enfold
What power may not a beard hold ?

Appeared in a Sunday paper of 12.09.1948 and also in the "Ceylon Rationalist Ambassdor" of 1968.

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OH! THOSE BARRELS!

Make no learned explanations,
It's no use, we're simply bored,
By that silly row of barrels
Planted midway on the road,

When the road was wide and open,
As a highway ought to be,
Traffic sped along with caution
Dodging daft humanity.

Accidents were not too often,
Reckless folk must come to grief,
That the barrels will protect them,
Is a bottomless belief.

Root that rusting row of barrels,
Let the policeman set his trap,
And with every prosecution
Add a feather to his cap.

Written in October, 1949, on an ill conceived and and unpopular Police experiment to increase road safety by placing wooden barrels down the middle of Galle Road, Colombo.

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A LION KEEPER'S HEROISM

Poor Elsa's back behind the bars
Her little freedom lost
Without a chance to plead her case,
She learned unto her cost.

On Lions' Island with her cubs
Beneath the open sky,
She lived at peace behind a moat,
She didn't hurt a fly.

Till vicious coward folk did dare
To rouse her regal ire,
Full twenty feet she leapt outside
Stark terror to inspire.

Then helter - skelter ran the crowd
Some stumbled in their flight
The guilty and the innocent
Were quaking now with fright.

A head was in her massive jaws
She deigned to spare its life.
But pandemonium still prevailed
And speculation rife.

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The keepers armed with bars and stones
With rifles in the rear
Were closing on the beast at bay —
Pervading all was fear.

Then throwing caution to the winds
The hero of the hour,
Subdued his frenzied, frightened charge
With gentle words of power.

She meekly crept back to her cage
Just like a chastened cur
Saved by the courage of the man
Who risked his life for her.

In March, 1971 the lioness Elsa in the Dehiwala Zoo leaped across a 20ft. moat and mauled a youth and others who had allegedly teased her. Lion keeper Siripala Perera saved the youth and soothed the lioness and led her back to captivity, else she would have had to be destroyed.

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THE ELUSIVE MOSQUITO

Among the worst of mankind's foes
Are those provoking mosquitoes
That buzz around the ears at night
And then with sudden swiftness bite
Some tender spot, that makes you shout
And in a fury lash about.
But bet your boots, you've missed the mark,
The foe retreats into the dark,
And as you're dozing off again
You feel the anguish of that pain.
Then up you start and in a rage
You swear a sleepless war to wage
And in the stillness of the night
You battle in unequal fight
With Culex and Anopheles
Like some heroic Ulysses.
Then as you rest your weary head
Upon the cold and cheerless bed,
You curse the carrier of woe,
The Damned Elusive Mosquito.

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ON GEORGE'S SUDDEN DEATH

In distant Ghana far from kin and home
A kindly man in single bliss did roam;
He hankered not for honour or for fame
But humanism steeped his rugged frame.
In habits simple and in dress austere,
He scorned convention, prejudice and fear
And with conviction born of honest thought,
This Scholar Marxist for ideals fought.
Unswervingly he strove in life to see
A classless state where men are equal, free;
But cruel Death decreed another fate
He will not see the classless Workers' State.
A week today, our George had planned to wed,
When tragic tidings reached us; –he was dead.
And now the joyous bells that were to peal,
Will toll for him. How sad alas! to feel
That we are left with memory's cold store
While dull unfeeling ashes reach our shore.

George Wikramanayake, an old boy of S.Thomas' College, Mt. Lavinia, was a classical scholar who won a Ceylon Government scholarship to Oxford University. A rugged individualist, he caused a sensation by boxing for his College barefooted. Returning to Ceylon he lectured at the Ceylon University but later became a lecturer in a University abroad.

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GEORGE'S REQUIEM

At the old College Chapel, the Bishop was there —
Friends and relations bowed sadly in prayer.
The bridegroom was missing, no bride would be wed,
A bowl of cold ashes was there in his stead.
His cup of contentment, his nuptials, the thrill,
Were dashed from his lips. Do you call it God's will?
No bitter reproaches, no prayer or pain,
Can bring back poor George to our midst once again.
He is gone! We shall follow, sooner or late,
In kindness and friendship he worked without hate.
A lifetime of service he rendered to men
And spread the true gospel of Marx with his pen.
The mellow effulgence his candle has shed
Will light up the road he had chosen to tread.

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SIR OLIVER'S LAMENT

Oh that I were in England
To race my fillies there
And dine and wine in gay hotels
With lords and ladies fair !

It's pleasant in old England
Far from the rising surge
Of Lanka's working classes
And the Bolshevistic scourge.

Time was, when I could will it
And were those days not gone
A bit of little England
I'd make of fair Ceylon.

Sir Oliver Goonetilleke, the first Ceylonese Governor-General (1954-62) settled in Britain with British citizenship and an English wife. Keenest of punters, he described Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) as "the safest bet in Asia".

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"THIS WAS A MAN" — (MR. S. SOMASUNDARAM)

He's gone; — but still his presence fills this p lace,
We hear his voice and see his kindly face.
With great and small he moved with equal ease,
His quiet humour never failed to please.
For young and old he had a word to spare,
With each a common interest he could share
Of religion, of politics or sport,
Of social change, of law and of the Court.
His breadth of vision spanned a canvas wide,
With truth and honour always on his side,
He spurned the wealth, publicity and power
Which lesser mortals in their flames devour,
And gave to God, to country and to race,
In that same order its true proper place.
As long as time and memory remain,
His fragrance we shall cherish and retain.

Mr. Somasundaram was one of the most respected members of the Proctors' Profession who had completed over 50 years of practice and died "with his boots on." He had been the President of the Law Society and was a Trustee of the Bar Association at the time of his death. He was a keen sportsman who had represented Royal College in cricket and distinguished himself as a bowler. He was also President of the Tamil Union Cricket and Sports Club when he died. He was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru whose friendship and confidence he enjoyed. He used to make frequent trips to India on some of which he was accompanied by the author. One such occasion in 1949, while attending the Indian National Congress Sessions in Jaipur, Mr. Somasundaram, the author and a few other Ceylonese friends were entertained to lunch by Pandit Nehru, Prime Minister, at his official residence in New Delhi.

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NO GIMMICK SAYS MCGILL

When Linda does the Channel swim
She'll have her heavy floats in trim.
In topless trunks it will be fun,
But at the start and finish, none.
The crowds will watch her from midstream
But she'll not shy at them or scream,
Down-under they don't really care
So long you have your underwear.
The British public must be told
Why Linda braves the bitter cold.
She'll rather risk the censor's raps
Than feel the fetters of these straps.
This is no gimmick by McGill
To give the British lads a thrill,

Linda McGill, Australian Olympic swimming champion, swam the English Channel in 1967 topless.

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HOLIDAYS AND CRIME

The problem that absorbs us at this time
Is holidays and their effect on crime.
In this fair Lanka where men scorn to shirk
The freedom to engage in honest work,
Can punishment more subtle be designed
Than idle hours decreed to vex the mind.

By that same token does the law deny
The wherewithal for men to profit by
This idleness, for where without much charge
The eager crowds their knowledge may enlarge
The Gallery, the Museum and the Zoo
On holidays must close their shutters too.

Whose is the blame, if men are forced to spend
These idle hours in pursuits that offend,
In gambling, drink and other forms of vice
That masquerade in transparent disguise,
As Carnivals, as Social Club and Dance
And games misnomered skill but games of chance?

Those in whose hallowed names such days are culled
By desecration have their lustre dulled
No Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Jain
Will other faiths or other gods disdain
But politicians struggling to survive
Will sacrifice their gods that they may thrive.

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THE GOURMET & THE GOOSE

Why did our fellow-mortals choose
To call so fair a fowl a goose,
Which sister to the graceful swan
On water glides, struts on a lawn ?
It's feathered coat of snowy white
Gives us much pleasure and delight ;
It's yellow bill and feet to match,
And tilted head our eye will catch ;
It's strident cackle sounds absurd,
But do not blame it on the bird.
It saved the Capitol in Rome
And can protect our humble home.
They have more sense than foolish men
Whose fad in good these birds condemn.

Published in 1974.

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THAT PLUMBING PEACH

When Janet Peach begins to plumb
She'll strike the lads of London dumb;
To belles she will this lesson teach
That plumbing is within their reach.
When pretty girls begin to learn
This trade by which their fathers' earn
They'll brighten up the ancient town
Of drab and staid Mr.Brown,
The thrushes will begin to sing
And usher in eternal spring.
No more the trickles and the blocks
When pretty plumbers shed their frocks
For overall or shapely jean
To keep the pipes of London clean.

Written about 1960 when Janet (15) daughter of an English plumber Charles Peach, took to her father's occupation, the first English woman to do so.

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WILL SHAKESPEARE SURVIVE?

Immortal bard, we marvel at your power,
You wrote not for an age or clime or hour,
Encompassing the cradle of the race
In your vast comprehension and embrace;
All actions and emotions you perceived
And situations, strange and true conceived,
From joy and grief to hope and dark despair,
From love and hate to lust and passion rare.
All Nature was to you an open book,
Sermons in stones, in trees and running brooks.
You knew them all and matchlessly portrayed
In choicest words the drama well arrayed.
Clean nuclear bombs all life will now efface
And of immortal Shakespeare leave no trace.

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THE MYTH OF THE RULING RACE

When Kipling was a stripling
In the days of Gunga Din,
He praised the British jingoes and
Their destiny to win.

He wrote of wars and triumphs of
That proud Imperial race
Of their victories and valour
And the odds they had to face.

He wrote of martial races
Of muskets and of men
Of Viceroys and elephants
Of God of hosts-Amen.

Of battle-fields and barracks
Of British beer and ale,
Of cannon-balls and carnage
Which leave us cold and pale

He sang of Simla summers
And of the tropic heat,
"Of East is East and West is West
And never twain shall meet".

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He sang of Windsor's widow, of
Her far-flung battle-line
Manned by her poor heroic sons
Who sacrifice and pine.

With the dawn of Independence
The British sun has set
With India in ascendance
The East and West have met.

Now natives rule their motherland
And Britain waives the rules,
While jingoes and such white sahibs
Are now their willing tools.

Having lost the brightest jewel
In the mighty British Crown
The myth of white supremacy
Has dawned on Mr.Brown.

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"MURDER MOST FOUL"

The King of peace of world renown
Now wears a martyr's noble crown.
The coward's fatal bullet sped
To lay him in a gory bed
With crimson fountains spurting blood
Just where he unsuspecting stood.
Alas! how violent an end
For one who freely chose to spend
The path of peace to salvage life
From poverty and racist strife.
With courage and with firm resolve
The Negro problems he would solve
Thro' love and peace - not violence
Or hate in which he saw no sense.
For dignity and Civil Rights
He led his people in their fights;
He took the helm, he steered the course
And put his trust in moral force.
That love will conquer everything
Was the conviction of this King.

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He spurned the old Mosaic truth,
Eye for an Eye, Tooth for a Tooth,
But held his bloody head unbowed
By racists' violence uncowed.
Throughout the States all men will know
The price of this assassin's blow,
And coward sniper racists will
Wish themselves dead before they kill.
America, your gold and guns
Have bred such dastards for your sons ;
They butchered Lincoln, Kennedy,
And now, this gruesome tragedy.
In sackcloth and in ashes wail,
A reign of terror must prevail,
Until you're purged of arrogance,
Injustice and intolerance
And you respect your fellow-man
As every decent human can.

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A TALE OF TWO SECRETARIES

Iron Lady, how forgiving,
Generous beyond compare,
Treating Cecil's indiscretion
As a personal affair.

Some profess Victorian morals,
Others lead their private lives,
While supporting tender daughters
And their uncomplaining wives.

True that forlorn secretary,
Big with child cannot be wed,
Commies breed no wretched bastards,
They look after them instead.

Keep, oh keep, your Secretary,
Let him not in shame resign,
For his service is unblemished
By loose women, graft or wine.

Let the Tories reassure him
Of their continued support,
And drive Speller and his faction
Off his bid for Centre Court.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mervyn St. Sebastian Casie Chetty, member of a well known family of the Colombo Chetty community, wrote poetry even before he commenced his career at the Bar 51 years ago. This book contains 130 of his poems. He learned to love literature at S.Thomas' College, the school by the sea at Mt.Lavinia. Family traditions also influenced him. His maternal great-grandfather was the distinguished Simon Casie Chetty, administrator, linguist, judge, legislator and prolific author of the early British era.

Mervyn Casie Chetty is a doughty espouser of causes, wielding a pen that could be humorous or satirical, didactic or vehemently expressive of righteous indignation. Perhaps he has been unequalled in Sri Lanka for his consistent output of poems of topical interest. Significantly, not a few of some of his early pieces, when read now, seem nearly as fresh as when they were first composed.

A constant curiosity and an amazing variety of interests have helped to supply grist to the poetic mill. Casie Chetty's active membership in associations and societies includes (among others): S.Thomas' College O.B.A. of which he is a Trustee, Medico-Legal Society of which he is a Vice-President, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, the Organisation of Professional Associations, the Classical Association of Ceylon, Afro-Asian Solidarity Association, Civil Rights Movement, Lanka Soviet Friendship League, Royal Asiatic Society (Ceylon Branch), of which he is a Trustee, the Association of Writers, Poets & Playwrights, World Peace Council (Sri Lanka Branch), Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association, Tamil Union Cricket & Athletic Club of which he is a Vice-President, Old Thomians' Swimming Club of which he is an Honorary Life Member and — may be the most significant though mentioned last — the Sri Lanka Rationalist Association, of which he is President.

In politics, Casie Chetty has supported the Lanka Sama Samaja Party since 1932, but his catholicity of outlook has enabled him to cultivate dialogue and friendship with persons of all communities and creeds, not excluding stalwarts of opposing political camps.

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