

Lumber Lyrics

By
Walt Mason

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Our Best Greetings to You

Christmas! And the bells are clanging! Christmas! And the goose is hanging high and joy's abroad! Christmas is the happy season! Though the weather may be freezin', human hearts are thawed! Here we see the ancient codger sporting like an artful dodger with the laughing kids; here we see the haughty chappie smiling broadly and as happy as the katydids. Every one has shed his sorrow, dropped his burden till tomorrow, dropped the world and care; Christmas is no time for sadness—all the world is full of gladness, each should have his share.

Therefore, if you deal in lumber, let your business rest and slumber, till the day is o'er; think no more of lath and plaster; frolic fast and frolic faster till you split the floor. Cast aside all thoughts of timber; show the folks your legs are limber, and your soul unspoiled; show your heart has not been toughened, show your nature's not been roughened, by the years you've toiled. Let no thoughts of sash and siding your attention be dividing on this day of grace; help to fill with glee your shanty, till grandmother, sister, auntie, bless your cheer-up face.

Christmas! When the reindeer travel, and Old Santa scratches gravel, making good his dates! Men who don't get good and mellow when is due that brave old fellow, surely are cheap skates. When the Christmas music's rollin', and the children's socks are swollen, we should all be young; young as when we watched and waited for those reindeer, rapid-gaited, by the

night wind stung. We can be as young in spirit as the kids, or pretty near it, if we only try, though our heads are gray and dusty and our joints are worn and rusty, and no longer spry. Then when Christmas time is ended and we to our tasks have wended, we shall bear away something of the youth we captured when the whole world was enraptured with its Christmas day.



In my Lumbering Way,
Yours Truly
Oaet Mason

Walt Mason

—Everybody's Poet

Walt Mason is a poet and the world knows it. He is read by more people than any other living writer. His prose rhymes are published in 200 daily newspapers with an aggregate circulation of about 12 millions. Walt says his only claim on the nation's gratitude is that he does not go about the country reading from his "works." Indeed, he doesn't have to, for his writings are read with avidity by hosts of people.

Walt Mason lives in Emporia, Kansas, most of the time, but spends his summers in Estes Park, Colorado. He does nothing but write prose rhymes. And at this job he is one of the hardest working men living. He is probably the only poet who makes his living solely by the sweat of his brow.

Many people have wondered what Walt Mason gets for his contributions to CURTIS SERVICE. This is rather a personal question but it is sufficient to say that he gets enough money from work of this kind so that his monthly income has totalled as high as \$875.00. At any rate, this was the figure he gave out in an interview in a Kansas City paper in 1914, and like everything else, prose rhymes weren't as high then as they are now.

As Mr. Mason himself explains, he was never a lumber dealer, though he has tried to sell everything from hardware to hogs.

How, then, can he write lumber lyrics that hit such a responsive chord in every lumber dealer's mind? The Lord knows. He was born that way. His prose rhymes "get under your hide" and under every other lumber dealer's hide, because Walt Mason has an interest in you and your fellow human beings.

Walt Mason was born in Columbus, Ontario, May 4th, 1862. He was the fifth of six sons of poor parents. When Walt was four years old his father was accidentally killed. After his mother died, when he was fifteen, he went to Port Hope, Ontario, and worked in a hardware store for \$2.50 a week, boarding himself. He soon forsook the hardware business, in 1880, and crossed Lake Ontario into New York State, where he hoed beans until he decided that there wasn't any sense in hoeing beans.

"Arm in arm with the star of empire," he took his course westward, stopping in Ohio and in Illinois, and then in St. Louis. There he wrote "some stuff" for a humorous weekly called *The Hornet*, which obtained for him a position at \$5.00 per week doing everything from writing gems of thought to sweeping the floors.

When *The Hornet* went broke, Mason continued westward and worked for three years as a hired man in Kansas. He became disgusted with the work and managed to get a position with the *Leavenworth Times*. From there he floated to the *Atchison Globe*, and was off and on connected with newspapers in a dozen cities. At last, William Allen White, publisher of the *Emporia Gazette*, offered him a position.

The Gazette always printed on its first page an item of local interest with a border around it, called a “star head.” One day, the city editor was shy the necessary item and asked Walt to write something to fill the space. He wrote a little prose rhyme asking people to go to church next day, which was Sunday. The rhyme attracted attention, and on Monday he wrote another one, and a little later on, Walt and the “star head” became a feature of the *Gazette*. This was the origin of the prose poem and that was when Walt Mason came to himself—at the age of forty-five.

The rhymes of Walt Mason have had a marked influence on American literature. Their unusual character have made the “highbrows” wonder how to class them. His rhymes seem to be neither prose nor poetry, though it must be remembered that the poems of the classics were written in lineless form, and therefore, that Mason’s stuff can’t be condemned simply because it isn’t printed like verse.

Mason used to write for a great many house organs, but today CURTIS SERVICE, for which he has been writing since the third issue of the publication, in September, 1913, is one of the few on his list.

Walt Mason believes that poets are born and not made. At any rate, he says that they must have an ear for rhyme. The manner in which he sends in his contributions to CURTIS SERVICE shows that he doesn’t chew up many pencils paring down his rhymes and changing them about so that their feet will toe the mark.

Though he is a poet he has but one eccentricity: he is fat. He tried out a large number of eccentricities, because he knew all

poets had to have some, but finally decided upon being fat as the one with fewest drawbacks and the least inconvenient.

Who's Who says he married Ella Foss of Wooster, Ohio, in 1893, and that he is a Republican in politics and a Unitarian in religion. His twelve million readers all acclaim him as a "regular guy."

Lumber Lyrics

The prose poems appearing in this little book have been written by me for the Curtis Companies during the past few years, and, judging from the many letters I have received from lumber dealers all over the country, they took kindly to the little effusions; and often these correspondents have asked me where and when I had experience in the lumber business.

I have had no experience in that line, except as a customer at the lumber yards. I have bought a lot of boards and such things in my time, and when I was buying them, or waiting for my change, I looked around. Anybody who looks around, and who doesn't wear blinders, observes many things in the course of a lifetime.

I have always been interested in the things around me and close to me. I have an insatiable curiosity; I want to know all the facts about anything I am interested in. When I go to a lumber yard to buy the materials for a cupboard or a coffin, I ask a million questions. I want to know where the boards grew, and who harvested them, and how they were prepared for the consumer, and all about them; and, as a rule, lumber men know their own trade, and can give any reasonable amount of information. I have been asking questions all my days; and, having a good memory, very few facts get away from me.

And so I am prepared to write a rhyme about anything at an hour's notice. If I am to write about a steam engine, or a whale, or the north pole, I usually do it without consulting any books;

at various times I have questioned people about steam engines, and whales, and north poles, and the things they told me are on file in my memory.

So with these poems. They have been suggested by things I have heard lumber men say, perhaps day before yesterday, perhaps twenty years ago.

There are many people who will tell you I am not a poet, and I am not going to quarrel with them about it. The true poet, in the estimation of the highbrows, is one who can so befuddle a subject with words that an ordinary citizen can't tell what he is driving at. I have never had an ambition to be that kind of a poet. Really, I can be as cryptic as any of them, and can write things that would give you a sick headache, trying to understand them; but few people enjoy sick headaches.

I have never been interested in Greek gods or Lethean rivers, or things remote, either in time or distance. Most of my life I have been associated with people who worked hard for a living, and I have done all kinds of manual labor myself. It is with such people, and such varieties of labor, that my verses deal.

The lumber yard on the corner is of more enduring interest to me than the Field of the Cloth of Gold, on which sundry kings played to the gallery long ago. Every time the lumberman sells a wagonload of his goods he is contributing to the general welfare, as well as to his own; and this fact seems more important to me than any story treating of the doings of Ulysses or any other fabled gent. So I write of lumber and let the gods slide.

Walt Mason

TREES

Most every tree is made of wood; the best ones are remote from cities; and in their cheerful neighborhood the birds keep singing ragtime ditties. Beneath their limbs the children play and swing within their leafy border, upon the long, bright summer day, when picnic parties are in order. And now and then the poets come, to eulogize the forest spirit, and you can hear their thought works hum, like auto wheels, or pretty near it. And it may chance, upon a day, that farmers from adjacent ranches, will bring a rope along this way, and hang an agent from the branches.

Now comes the woodman with his ax, and he selects some forest beauty; then through its noble trunk he whacks—it is to him a thing of duty. He has to feed his eighteen kids, he has to clothe his wife and auntie; he has to buy them pies and lids, and put new paint upon his shanty. And thus the forest giant falls, there's none to shield it or deliver; now other men in overalls, will float it down some rushing river. And then through loud and busy mills the good old tree in fragments dashes, and makes its bow as doors and sills, as scantling, joists and window sashes.

It's strange to labor at a desk and think that it, all carved and oaken, one time was standing, picturesque, amid a solitude unbroken; once in the forest dark and dim, these pigeonholes and doodads rested; this drawer was once a swaying limb, on which the robin sang and nested.

I sit upon my swivel chair, and meditate upon its hist'ry; these rungs and legs once waved in air, in all the strange primeval myst'ry.

This stool on which I milk my cow, this club with which I swat the heifers, though they are quite prosaic now, once rustled in the morning zephyrs; once they had leaves, and in the dawn they sang the world-old song of wonder; and in the dusk when day was gone, they saw the smiling lovers under.

This maple slat with which I soak my Willie when he gets too funny, and on his daddy plays a joke, came from some woodland sweet and sunny.

And thus in every lumber yard there's food for pleasant meditation; a plank inspires the modern bard, and tunes him up to beat creation.

SPRING COMING

Winter winds were round us snorting, for a weary while; now that Spring's this way cavorting, we should wear a smile.

Tempests, storms and kindred friskers lashed us with a whip, froze our noses and our whiskers, gave us all the grip.

Nights were cold and days were freezing, cheerless was the sky; we were coughing, whooping, sneezing, till we wished to die.

Now the winter's quit its prancing, it's an also ran; and the gentle Spring, advancing, should encourage man.

When the north winds, blood congealers, ripped along the earth, 'tisin't strange if lumber dealers strangers were to mirth.

For there was no rush or clamor in the building trade; and the rusty saw and hammer on the shelf were laid.

But, since balmy spring is coming, and old winter's canned, sounds of building will be humming over all the land.

When the skies are blue and sunny, and the birdlets sing, people will be spending money, as they do each spring.

They'll be building gorgeous houses, all along the pike, shelter for their steeds and corses, fences and the like.

So let glee and mellow laughter fill your lumber store, as you hand out joist and rafter, scantling, sash and door.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

When I go into someone's store, to buy a nickel's worth or more, some questions I may spring; for I have an inquiring mind; all kinds of facts I like to find, and place them on a string. I ask the grocer if his tea was grown beside the Zuyder Zee, or down along the Po; and I'm disgusted when he sighs, and claws his whiskers and replies, "I really do not know."

I hold that every business man should follow up the good old plan and know his stock in trade; the wise old grocer always knew just where his shredded codfish grew, and where his prunes were made. The wise old clothier knows that wool is never gathered from a bull, and tells his patrons so; that merchant wearies by his acts, who answers, when you ask for facts, "I'm sure I do not know."

We have a lumber man named Chee; I asked him, "On what sort of tree do lath and shingles grow?" He said, "We have the shingles there, and where they grew I do not care, and neither do I know." This answer filled me with amaze; he'd handled shingles all his days, and knew not whence they came; he'd played his hand for forty years, since he was wet behind the ears, and didn't know the game.

We have a lumber man named Dumm; I asked him, "Whence do shingles come—oh, whither, why and whence?" He said, "I'm always glad to tell the history of things I sell, regardless of expense. The shingle trees," I hear him say, "are only found at Hudson's Bay, and they have stately shapes; the shingles,

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