

The following poems were composed by an elderly migrant worker and recorded by E. A. Bierbaum, Farm Advisor at Anna, Illinois. These poems, which were published in the Anna Gazette-Democrat in May 1940, are intended to reveal the philosophy and attitude of the migrant worker.

I'll tell you a story but, of course, I mean no harm,
it's all about the fun we have on Dr. Bitter's farm.
We awake from our slumbers at the dawn of day,
get out of our bed of straw and hay,
put on our shoes, with holes in our socks,
then build a fire between two rocks,
put some water on for coffee to boil,
We fry bacon and eggs and have breakfast royal.
then we wander around the barn
with a six quart carrier on our arm,
the boss is there to write some names,
it may be Frank, Jane or James.
And after he has written down our names,
he has a speech for Frank, Jane or James -
it's pick them ripe and pick them clean,
but not in rotten or the green,
pinch your stems very short,
round our the corners of each quart.
You can hear this speech around the barn
Or the packing shed on the farm,
And I have heard it so many times,
that I can recite it all in rhymes.
Now my boss I wish to please
While picking his berries on my knees,
But when I go to get my nickel and dime,
He or Mrs. impress upon my mind,
you have some berries that's a little green,
Some stems too long or none it seems,
Or, perhaps, I have stumped my toe,
And my berries have sunken very low.
So it keeps me guessing just what to do,
For to please the boss and myself too,
I'd like to be honest, it gives me peace of mind,
But I love to get his nickels and dimes.

Long and broad is the old road depression,
that leadeth out among the unemployed,
And many idle men you see wandering thereon;
But straight and narrow is the way that leadeth to a job,
And few there be that find it.
So as I go on my journey through the State of Illinois,
I meet and pass each day many idle boys.
As they go on their journey on the pike and track
Weary, worn and shabby, carrying packs upon their backs.
What are in those packs you may ask me; why of course I do not know,
I can only judge my fellowman by what I see and know.
But my pack I have carried, so I'll speak for all the rest,
This pack you see me carry I call my treasure chest;
A spoon, knife and fork, needles and some thread;

Sometimes a bacon butt and a stale loaf of bread,
A little salt and pepper, little coffee too,
A few nails and some leather for to fix the shoe,
Soap, towel and comb, glass and razor too,
A frying pan and coffee can, and a can to make the stew.
But we depend on the merchants for to eat, if lose or win,
It depends on how we find them, if the boss is out or in.
So it keeps us quite busy, though we try to do our best,
But it keeps us always begging to fill our treasure chest.
Then we buy our bacon butts and sleep on straw or hay,
But we go picking berries in the summer month of May,
But the crops soon are gathered and the work doesn't last,
So it's back in the jungles as we had in the past.
And after we spend our little money and wish to eat again,
We've got to go a-begging through the sunshine or the rain,
So that is why you see us on the pike or on the track,
Weary, worn and shabby, carrying packs upon our backs.

Once he was a boomer worker, but now he's old and gray
He has no food or shelter and there's no place for him to stay,
So he goes wandering through the country for he cannot get a job.
He travels the railroads and the highways and his life is very hard,
And each day brings more misery to the old man on the road.
The burdens he has to carry is quite a heavy load,
He gets up in the morning hungry and he lies down again at night.
There's no food or shelter for him and no relief for him in sight.
He gets nothing from the government, from the Old Deal or the New
Not even a piece of meat for to make a stew.
They say he is not worthy for he has not got a home
And he has no job or money, so the country he must roam.
It's bad enough for those who have a place to eat and sleep
And a few days work each month for to keep them off the street,
But there's nothing for the old man, only the country for to roam.
Yet he helped to make this country, building railroads and ships
He's worked through rain and sunshine, sometimes in mud up to his hips,
To the northwest woods, the mines and mills, the boomer was the first to go.
And those who followed after the boomer had made the way
Has claimed the credit for all was done, now the boomer they've turned away.
He's old and gray and has no home, and no relief for him in sight,
We claim we live in a Christian land; do you think he is treated right?

There's no hill on the road to Hell--
It's all down grade and travel'd well.
You have no right for lights or traffic cop
You pull through to Hell without a stop,
And the time you're having, you think it's fine
Drinking beer and whiskey, rum and wine.
Of course you have your sweetie too,
And she's the dame that'll help you through.
You use no brakes, no lights or horn
For the Hell-bound car doesn't stop or warn.
A hundred miles the car will do
And you're the guy that'll prove it too.
You have plenty of oil and lots of gas
So you try all the other cars to pass,
But soon there comes a crash of ill
Your car is wrecked and that is Hell.
So before you start on your trip today
Heed to his warning that I have to say,
It will save you trouble and a big expense
If you'll use a little common sense.

I wonder where the good dogs go
After they have been scolded and kicked around by mankind here below.
There are no dogs in Heaven, the Bible tells us so,
For the Bible says they're outside, so I wonder where they go.
Perhaps, dogs in Heaven wouldn't be just right
They might keep the angels quarreling and the saints awake at night;
Yet they are the best friend to mankind while on earth we're bound,
Humans may forsake you, but not your dog or hound.
No you may think me foolish but still I think I'm right,
That they should have a hunting place to hunt to their delight -
To tree coons and possums just like in the days of old,
Without any fear of the foot that kicks or the tongue that scolds.
Now I have written many stories in the book I call my log
But I never yet have written anything about a dog,
So it's got me in a puzzle for I really wish to know,
That's why I ask this question--Where do the good dogs go?