

## Clamperdom's Favorite Poet

I want to wish each and every Clamper across all of Clamperdom a most Merry Christmas, and for you and your family to have a safe, prosperous and Happy New Year!

Thank you for all the charitable work you've done to help your local community, Pair "O" Dice Chapter and for all of your perseverance and effort in continuing to make ECV the greatest fraternal organization on the planet. Without you and your labors, life wouldn't be as good for the rest of us.

Robert Service became my favorite poet some 60 years ago when my maternal Grandfather took me upstairs to his study and shared with me the *Ballads of a Cheechako*. From the moment I read the *Cremation of Sam McGee* I was hooked,.. and still am. I never tire of hearing or reciting some of my favorite verses, especially at Christmas time when the weather is nasty, the hour calls for a good drink, and you can look across the room out the window and recite:

*"When out of the night, which was fifty below,..  
And into the din and the glare,..  
There stumbled a Clamper, fresh from the creeks,..  
Dog-dirty, and loaded for bear"*

There is no greater gift you can give to a loved one, especially a child, than the best tales of the Yukon. If you buy your daughter or son or niece or nephew a book of Robert Service poetry and read it out loud to them, it will become a memory they treasure for the rest of their lives. Hook 'em while they're young! Ages 9 to 11 are ideal targets. Ages 8 and 12 are pretty good too.

To help commemorate our incoming new year, 6024, I'd like to share with you one of the many *Songs of a Sourdough* first published in 1907. Below is perhaps the most famous poem Robert Service ever wrote. And so, my fellow Clampers, I hope you read the following out loud as you time travel the arctic trail of ninety-eight, and that it puts you and your family... under the spell of the Yukon!

Meanwhile, I'll see you down the trail of '24 at Emperor Norton in January. Stay well Brothers!

Your humble and loyal servant,



**Bill Wensrich**

Sublime Noble Grand Humbug

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## **The Cremation of Sam McGee** BY ROBERT W. SERVICE

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun*

*By the men who toil for gold;*

*The Arctic trails have their secret tales*

*That would make your blood run cold;*

*The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,*

*But the queerest they ever did see*

*Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge*

*I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee, where the cotton blooms and blows.

Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the Pole, God only knows.

He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;

Though he'd often say in his homely way that "he'd sooner live in hell."

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way over the Dawson trail.

Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed like a driven nail.

If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze till sometimes we couldn't see;

It wasn't much fun, but the only one to whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight in our robes beneath the snow,

And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe,

He turned to me, and "Cap," says he, "I'll cash in this trip, I guess;

And if I do, I'm asking that you won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a sort of moan:

"It's the cursèd cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through to the bone.

Yet 'tain't being dead—it's my awful dread of the icy grave that pains;

So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would not fail;  
And we started on at the streak of dawn; but God! he looked ghastly pale.  
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his home in Tennessee;  
And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death, and I hurried, horror-driven,  
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid, because of a promise given;  
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say: "You may tax your brawn and brains,  
But you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid, and the trail has its own stern code.  
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load.  
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight, while the huskies, round in a ring,  
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows— O God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay seemed to heavy and heavier grow;  
And on I went, though the dogs were spent and the grub was getting low;  
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad, but I swore I would not give in;  
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing, and it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge, and a derelict there lay;  
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was called the "Alice May."  
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at my frozen chum;  
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry, "is my cre-ma-tor-eum."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I lit the boiler fire;  
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I heaped the fuel higher;  
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—such a blaze you seldom see;  
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like to hear him sizzle so;  
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled, and the wind began to blow.  
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled down my cheeks, and I don't know why;  
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow I wrestled with grisly fear;  
But the stars came out and they danced about ere again I ventured near;  
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said: "I'll just take a peep inside.  
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"; ... then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart of the furnace roar;  
And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he said: "Please close that door.  
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm—  
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first time I've been warm."

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