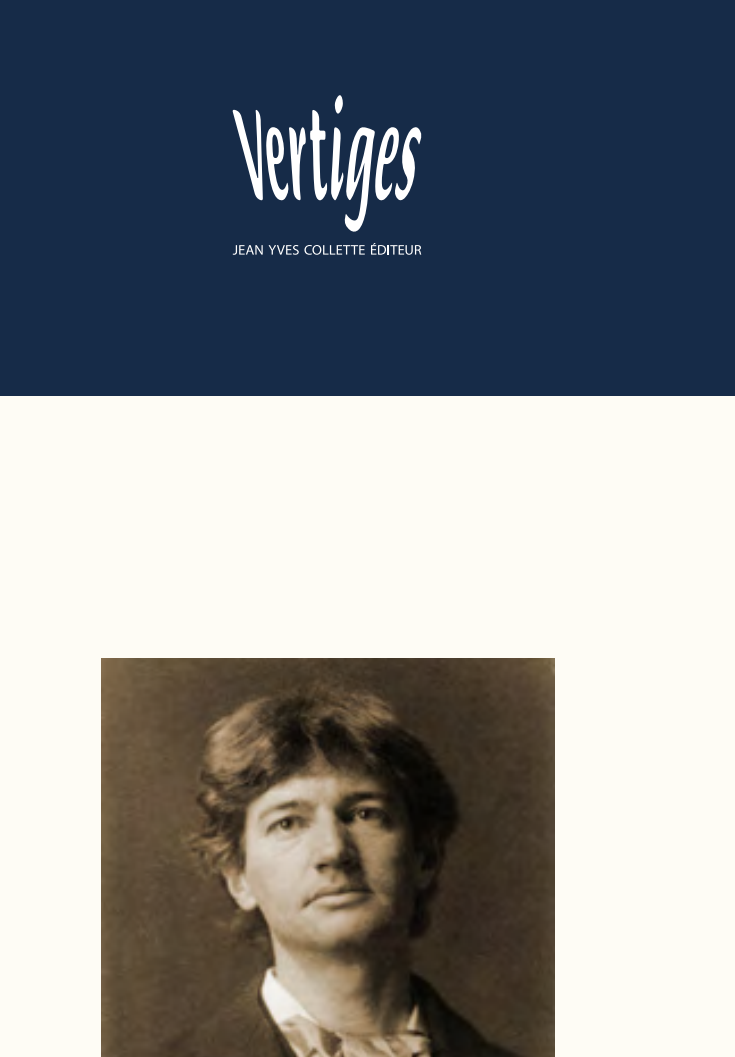


William Bliss Carman

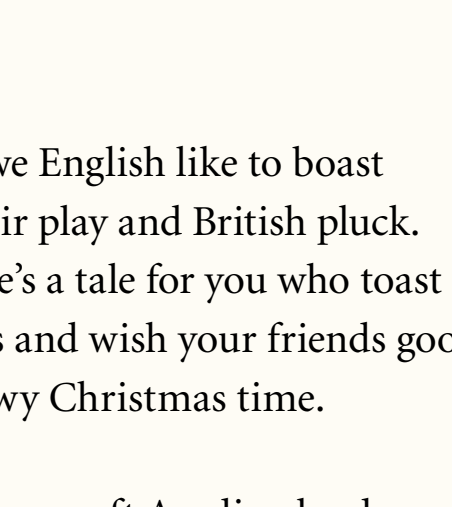
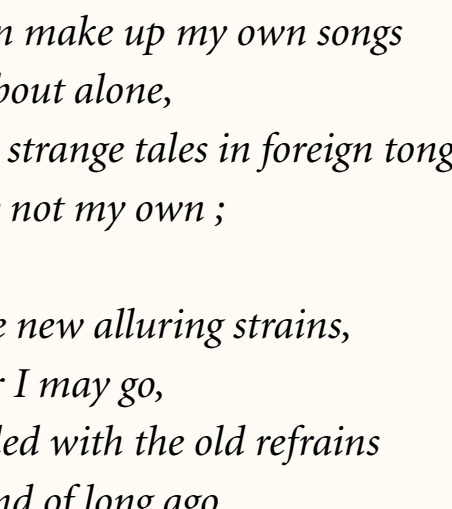
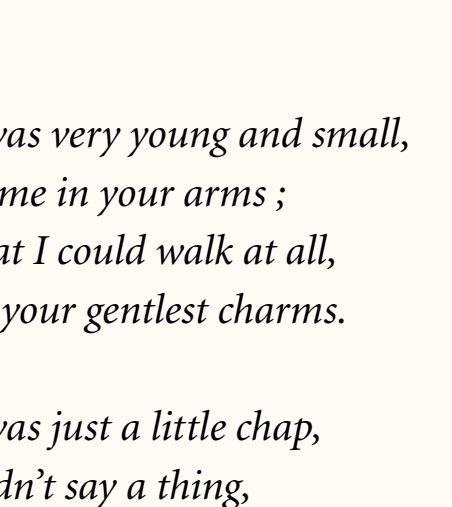
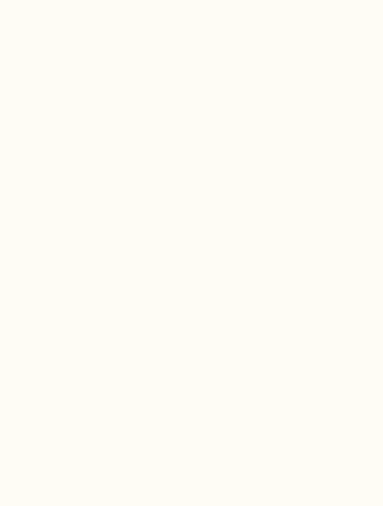
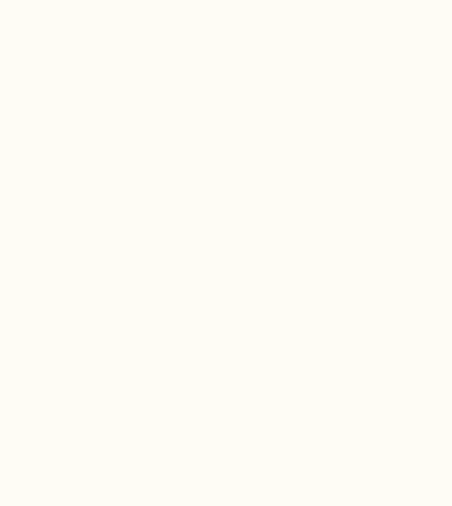
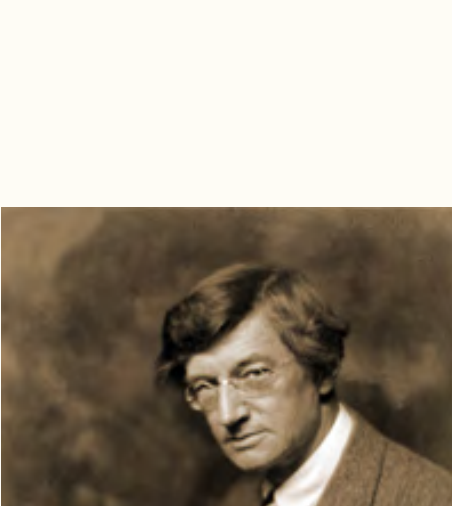
# The Vengeance of Noël Brassard

A Tale of the Acadian Expulsion



Vertiges

LES ÉDITIONS VERTIGES



WILLIAM BLISS CARMAN  
(Fredericton, NB, 1861 – New Canaan, CT, 1929)

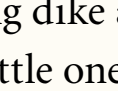
To J. H. B. AND E. W. R.

*When I was very young and small,  
You held me in your arms ;  
Before that I could walk at all,  
I learned your gentlest charms.*

*When I was just a little chap,  
And couldn't say a thing,  
You used to take me in your lap  
And talk to me and sing.*

*Now I can make up my own songs  
And go about alone,  
And hear strange tales in foreign tongues  
Of people not my own ;*

*Yet all the new alluring strains,  
Wherever I may go,  
Are blended with the old refrains  
That sound of long ago.*



You say we English like to boast  
Of our fair play and British pluck.  
Well, here's a tale for you who toast  
Your toes and wish your friends good luck,  
This snowy Christmas time.

You take our soft Acadian land  
In summer for your thoroughfare ;  
One of the gardens from God's hand,  
Orchard and dike, it greets you there –  
A dream of the world's prime.

But winter, when the snow comes down  
From the red edges of the fall,  
To cover babbling stream and town  
With velvet silence like a pall,  
Can you guess what it means ?

The rivers sleep ; the sun is lost ;  
And in the deep woods now and then  
Some great tree, riving in the frost,  
Cracks, and the stillness falls again  
Among the evergreens.

But one man learned too well who prowls  
Those wintry barrens choked with snow,  
And guessed what manner of thing crows  
Its empty visage from man so,  
Seeing that face too near.

The Shadow Hunter, whose long stride  
Mortal has yet to tire or tame,  
Like moonbeam over mountain side  
Following round the world – whose name  
Men hold their breath to hear.

And yet, they say, he has a word  
Sweeter than any save the sea,  
To summon those who once have heard  
Beyond the bourns of misery.  
Though one man doubted, I must think.

Noël Brassard, named Beausoleil,  
That lovely fall... It was the year  
The English traitor did betray  
His king and honor ; far and near  
He made his hapless province drink

The dregs of sorrow ; blood and bone,  
He ground them into dust between  
The upper and the nether stone,  
The French and English. Wide and green  
The farms lay in the sun ;

The apples hung in scarlet ropes  
And glisten clusters ; the raven glances  
Went billowing up the mountain slopes ;  
And over running dike and plain  
The thousand cattle one by one.

Trailed their long shadows by the sea.  
Grand Pré, Port Royal, Tantramar,  
Minas and Shubenacadie,  
Cobequid, Beauséjour, Canard,  
Melanson, Aulac, and Pereaue.

What easier than, simple folk  
Fearing the majesty of law,  
To scatter them as the slow smoke  
Is scattered on a windy flaw,  
From Beaubassin to Gaspereau ?

Pluck them and set them down the world –  
A second St. Bartholomew –  
Leaving the land whence they are hurled  
For Lawrence and his pirate crew,  
Which we enjoy to-day !

Noël Brassard stood by his door,  
And there was haste. The last to flee,  
When brand was set to granary floor,  
House, barn, and church, in Chipoudy,  
That fall, must for a moment stay,

Loading his cart to climb the crest  
The sun at Michaelmas just clears.  
His wife with her tenth child at breast,  
His mother with her ninety years –  
Safe now and half-way up the hill.

And there they halted ; the red sun  
Crimsoned the fir-tops over them ;  
Below they saw the great tide run  
Between the grassy dikes that hem  
The meadows, when the rivers fill

From Fundy like a sluice. They saw  
Their windows in the sunset glare,  
Then the first smoke of burning straw  
Steal from a rick and burst and flare.  
But soft ! What ails you, mother Brassard ?

What fancy shakes your age ? « My son,  
« I shall not go with you, for I  
« Am dying, and my strength is done ;  
« And by your father I shall lie,  
« Where the white crosses are,

« This night. » They listened. She was dead.  
(The record is La Guerne's, the priest  
Who buried her.) And as she said,  
It happened ; the first soul released  
Upon that march with Death !

At night two figures, digging late  
For safety, had brought to a close  
Their pious work ; the graveyard gate  
Created on its hinges ; the moon rose ;  
And the white valley held its breath.

Ah, Beausoleil, before you now  
The wilderness ; and by your side  
The shadowy Walker of the Snow,  
To journey with you, stride for stride,  
On many a drifted valley floor !

Behind you, worse than Death can do !  
As dust upon the stream is spilled,  
The wreckage of your kin shall strew  
The shores of the world. The land they tilled,  
A politician's prize of war.

Small choice, Brassard ! Your folk are sown  
To the four winds ; to men henceforth  
From Baton Rouge to Plomidon,  
Labrador and the unpeopled North,  
« Acadian » is an exile's name.

He chose the wilderness. Be sure  
There is a record of that trail  
From sounding Fundy to Chaleur,  
In the great map that does not fail !  
Yet now we only read, he came

To the blue Restigouche with spring.  
Under their ice-floors did he hear  
Tobique and Napadogan sing,  
And Mamozekel whisper clear  
Secrets not good to know ?

By Villebon's fort did he press on,  
Where dwell the unwarlike Melecites  
By the great route of the St. John,  
In boreal colds and summer heats,  
From Nerepis to Cabineau ?

Or was his way by the North Shore,  
Far up to lonely Tracadie,  
Where the sand islands hear the roar  
Of the great gulf, and Miramichi  
Slows to meet the tide ?

Did the Sevogle see him flit,  
A gray and haggard shape of woe ? –  
Or the headlong Nepisiguit,  
Where the Basque sailor long ago  
Wedded his Mohawk bride ?

He saw in the long solemn night  
The giant lanterns of the pole,  
Streaming about the sky, to light  
His haunted trail. Nay, Beausoleil,  
Dark was your sunshine then !

And always at the dusk of day,  
Out of the brushwood, pace for pace,  
Would come to join them on the way  
The One whose snowshoes left no trace,  
They knew not whence nor when.

Mother and children, one by one,  
He bade the strangers stay with him ;  
And they stayed. Beausoleil went on,  
With reeling mind and senses dim,  
One – three – five – nine –

He saw them smile and close their eyes,  
As the tall Spectre of the cold  
Detained them by some wooded rise.  
Then sink to sleep within the fold  
Of moonlit drift and shine.

In the first breaking-up of spring,  
To the blue Restigouche there came,  
With two pale children following  
Upon his heels, his eyes like flame,  
In the gaunt semblance of a man,

Noël Brassard. Say, rather, one  
Who had looked horror in the face,  
And the bleak goblin had undone  
The latches of his soul. Yet trace  
Of hunter's skill to scheme and plan

Was left, – the mind to hunt and hound  
His persecutors from the land.  
A frenzy at the very sound  
Of English names would twitch his hand  
To let the flintlock's hammer fall.

Before he died on D'Anjac's roll,  
By thronged stockade and lonely hut  
He marked them ; never missed a soul ;  
And nicked them on his musket butt  
Twenty and eight in all.

That is the story straight and plain.  
Because one Englishman could pawn  
His country's honor for mere gain,  
More need we English should not fawn  
On Truth to cloak his crime.

Too simple your Acadian heart,  
My Noël, and too late you strove !  
Not in the world was your fit part.  
Yet peace ! The world moves on to love,  
This snowy Christmas time.

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