

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

TWO RIVERS

Sir Charles George Douglas Roberts (1860-1943) was born in Douglas and grew up in Westcock, New Brunswick. His family moved to Fredericton in 1873, and he attended the University of New Brunswick, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1879 and a master's degree in 1881. He then served as principal of Chatham High School from 1879 to 1881 and York Street School from 1881 to 1883. After working briefly as editor of *The Week* in Toronto, he became a professor at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. In 1897 he moved to New York, in 1907 to Paris, in 1910 to Munich, and in 1912 to London. He enlisted in the British Army during WWI, and after the war he returned to Toronto and continued writing poetry, publishing nearly twenty collections by the time he was knighted in 1935. The following poem was published in the July 1937 issue and included in the collections *Canada Speaks of Britain and Other Poems of the War* (1941) and *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose Charles G.D. Roberts* (1974). In his essay "The Classical Poetry of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts," Fred Cogswell interpreted this poem as a reflection of "the sharply contrasting environments of Roberts' childhood and his young manhood," which "developed in him the duality that he states explicitly as being part of his being."

Two rivers are there hold my heart
And neither would I leave.
When I would stay with one too long
The other tugs my sleeve.

For both are in my blood and bone
And will be till I die.
Along my veins their argument
Goes on incessantly.

The one, inconstant as the wind
 And fickle as the foam,
Disturbs my soul with strange desires
 And pricks my feet to roam.

The other, a strong and tranquil flood
 With stars upon its breast
Would win me back from wandering
 And snare desire with rest.

II—THE TANTRAMAR

To you, my moon-led Tantramar,
 I turn, who taught my feet to range,—
You and the vagrant moon conspiring,
 Twin arbiters of change,—

To you I turn, my Tantramar.
 A wide-eyed boy I played beside
Your wastes of wind-swept green and chased
 Your ever-changing tide.

I watched your floods come tumbling in
 To fill your inland creeks remote,
Assail your prisoning dykes, and set
 Your long marsh grass afloat.

I watched your venturing floods at full
 Falter and halt, turn and retreat,
And race with laughter back to sea,
 Mocking their own defeat.

Far up to Midgie's farms you flow
 And there for a brief space rest your fill,
Then back past Sackville's studious halls
 To Westcock on her hill.

Draining your vast red channels bare
 To shine like copper in the sun
 You tremble down the gleaming chasm
 And whimper as you run;

But, soon repenting your dismay,
 With challenging roar you surge again
 To brim your dykes, and reassume
 Your lordship of the plain.

Across the estranging, changing years,
 Blind puppet of my restless star,
 In discontent content alone,
 You urge and drive me, Tantramar.

III—THE SAINT JOHN

To you I turn again, St. John,
 Great river, constant tide,—return
 With a full heart to you, beside
 Whose green banks I was born.

A babe I left you, and a youth
 Returned to you, ancestral stream,
 Where sits my city, Fredericton,
 A jewel in a dream.

Your broad tide sweeps her storied shores
 Where loyalties and song were bred,
 And that green hill where sleeps the dust
 Of my beloved dead.

From many a distant source withdrawn
 You drain your waters,—from the wash
 Of Temiscouata's waves, and lone
 Swamps of the Allegash,—

From many a far and nameless lake
Where rain-birds greet the showery noon
And dark moose pull the lily pads
Under an alien moon.

Full-fed from many a confluent stream
Your fortunate waters dream toward sea,—
And reach the barrier heights that hold
Your calm estates in fee.

In that strait gate you stand on guard
While Fundy's floods, without surcease,
In giant wrath assault in vain
The portals of your peace.

Outside, reared on that iron rock
Where first the Ships of Freedom came,
Sits the proud city, foam begirt,
That bears your name and fame,—

Saint John, rock-bound, rock-ribbed, secure,
To her stern birthright constant still,
She fronts the huge o'er-mastering tides
And bends them to her will.

Dear and great River, when my feet
Have wearied of the endless quest,
Heavy with sleep I will come back
To your calm shores for rest.