

# THREE POEMS

BY HAL SAUNDERS WHITE

## YOU WELL MIGHT FORGET THE ARTS

You well might forget the arts—  
The singer his voluting aria;  
The painter his convenient pallet and easel;  
The poet his musical measuring apparatus,  
The strophe and whatever of spondees and dactyls . . .  
Whose voice shall induce the silence to answer you?  
Is your impatient pen slower or swifter than the tides or rivers in being true?

Measure! Let there be none of your contriving.  
The heights and depths you need not play with;  
They are as they were.  
And truth does not blink, or suffer arterial alteration  
Because you have invented a new technique in measuring your words.  
You might better forget that you are artists.  
The name's a power to poison.

Look up!  
Watch the little mountain rivers as they go—  
A falling silent thunder of white over invisible rocks . . .  
Only as they must—with ease, with a grace unmeasured . . .  
Only as they must  
Because they have not willed to curve and flow into any measure of grace.

You might better forget to be artists, remembering these.

## ALIEN DESIRE

The sun speaks slow silence  
Communicating itself without effort  
To red apples and men.  
A direct eye-flash; pulses bound together  
In such words.  
Rather than speech, movement;  
Rather than movement, being, in change.  
This is the word of truth!  
Why will I be forever limiting what verily is,  
Interpreting with applied littlenesses?  
I am inclined to know this body and mind and soul—  
This undetachable self—  
Could read the riddling sun  
But for this alien desire for speech  
That strikes it dumb and blind  
Beneath the great unhurried circling silences.

## SOFT LITTLE WOMEN

Soft little unrebelling women  
Who wait your lords with meekly opening knees  
In the thronged littleness of four walls—  
One day, even you will know  
There are great winds over pine forests,  
And, what was never whispered till yesterday,  
Women grown great and liberal as these.

# COAL IS CHEAPER NOW

"MY mister was the best coal loader in the pit. Nobody could load coal like my mister," the blonde wife, mother of six children, said with pride. But now the doctor tells her that her mister's backbone is dislocated and rotten and that he may live one year, two years, three years, but he'll never load coal again.

The superintendent wants the house back—a company house. He's told them to move but they won't do it. Where will they go? Hadn't the mister worked four times for the company in the seven years past. And it wasn't his fault he got hurt.

The mister himself came in: the wreck of a tremendous man, not so tall but so broad shouldered. He came in walking stiffly. A little boy grabbed his arm. He winced with pain. He wears a steel jacket, fitting up to a band about his head.

It happened two years ago. He was a shot firer but the company didn't give him proper safety materials—the right powder. His life was endangered and he was violating the law. He complained so much that the company put him to digging coal—a much cheaper job.

Then the company gave him no



DRAWING BY LOUIS LOZOWICK

STEEL GIRDERS

timber man and hardly any timber. He was working in nine and a half foot coal with slatey roof. It took big strong timbers and two men to put them in, but he had to work with small pieces of timber and by himself.

He pleaded desperately. Timbers cost money, he was told by the assistant foreman.

"I'll be killed," he kept on pleading.

"I can get ten men to take your place," the assistant foreman answered.

The man talked slowly and seemed to be living over the fear and agony. He had been very much afraid. But he had no money to move his furniture and his children; so he took a chance.

The cross bar or timber overhead that he was trying to put up unaided came down. Another timber fell and so did slate. Everything went dark. When he came to, he had to drag himself for two hours to the shaft. No car was given him to ride up in. Finally the foreman stopped the coal loading long enough to take the injured worker up.

Then the company doctor, saying it was nothing much, telling him in a few days to go back to work.

After months his own doctor and an X-ray, and after a year \$48 a month compensation with back compensation, and some of this money going for rent! He pays no rent now but he has to pay the company for coal he burns.

The man seems to be no radical. He is telling the truth. He ponders at his own fate. He doesn't know the com-

pensation law but he knows it's unjust, the whole treatment.

As he talked the old mother-in-law broke out shrilling. She was a ghastly-looking creature with rotting teeth. The companies, she says, don't care anything about you after they get the work out of you. Her man is in the hospital of the nearest large town and he may be dead in a few days.

He was a coke worker, stood in front of an oven for years and the heat cooked him. The doctors in the hospital stuck a knife into his hip and no blood came.

We went to another house down the street to see an injured Negro, the crippled mister telling us to watch out for the police.

The Negro was a beautifully built miner. He had had his left forearm crushed in a jam between two coal cars. He drew a diagram to show how it happened. His horse was pulling five or six cars and rounding a sharp curve, over flooded tracks. He lost control and his arm somehow got jammed between the cars and brake.

His wife is furious: "Makin' my man drive a horse! He don't know gee from haw. I'd like to tell that boss man what I think."

The miner has to haul out his own coal with horses, a new rule, eliminating the wage of the driver who used to stand by and wait. The company has to pay nothing for this work, the miner getting paid only for coal he actually loads; so his wages stop while he drives.

Art Shields