

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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The Song of the Wage-Slave

The Song of the Wage-Slave
(Robert Service)

Look at my face, toil-furrowed; look at my calloused hands
Master, I've done thy bidding, wrought in thy many lands
Wrought for the little masters. Big-bellied they be, and rich
I have done their desire for a daily hire, and I die like a dog in a ditch

But when the long, long day is over, and the big boss gives me my pay
I hope that it won't be hell-fire, as some of the parsons say
And I hope that it won't be heaven, with some of the parsons I've met
All I want is just quiet, just to rest and forget

Thou knowest my sins are many, and often I have played the fool
Whisky and cards and women, they made me the devil's tool
And I was just like a child with money; I flung it away with a curse
Feasting a fawning parasite, or glutting a harlot's purse

Living in camps with men-folk, a lonely and loveless life
Never knew kiss of sweetheart, never caress of wife
I with the strength of two men, but savage and shy and wild
Yet how I'd have treasured a woman, and the sweet warm kiss of a child

I, the primitive toiler, half-naked and grimed to the eyes
Sweating it deep in their ditches, or swining it stark in their sties
Hurling down forests before me, spanning tumultuous streams
Down in the ditch, building o'er me palaces fairer than dreams

Master, I have filled my contract, wrought in thy many lands
Not by my sins wilt thou judge me, but by the work of my hands
Master, I've done thy bidding, and the light is low in the West
And the long, long shift is over -- Master, I've earned it:
Rest.

note: Marla Fibish put the tune and edited the words, 1989 JN

JN