

The Old Chapel

How many boys came here to pray?
How many boys, to begin the day?
How many boys came here to pray
In the days of old?
Not numbers untold,
Not numbers untold,
Not numbers untold,
Came here to pray,
To begin their day:
Not numbers untold;
But bold in type
Is their story told
Of boys who were bent
To this gracious mold,
Felt the Master's breath
And His warm wing-fold.
Far o'er this land
Is their story told,
Priest and bishop
And "statesman bold";
In thronging city and in rural fold,
Continent-wise is the story told
Of the boys
(Not numbers untold,
Not numbers untold)
Who came here to pray,
To begin their day
In the days of old.

What boys turned men
Left this clearcut mold?
Not numbers untold,
Not numbers untold.
Boys from the village,
The town, the farm:
The lively step, the bulging arm:
Rugged and rough
Was the life of old,
Of boys who had know the joy of hay,
The smell and the glory of it raked and coiled;
The threshing day, and the snuffling chaff,
And the hearty roar of an honest laugh.
Then September days

Set them all a-prance,
Brought the jig and the reel
In the school house dance.

Then up and away and off to the books:
Home-spun and hand-made
In bearing and looks:
With meagre store of the hard-earned cash,
To their mind and soul
Went the style and dash.

Who were the boys
Who came here then?
Were they big? Were they small?
Were they half-grown men?
Who came here to pray,
To begin their day,
In the days of old;
To be shaped by that priestly band of men:
The unbroken chain of St. Dunstan's Men.
Not numbers untold,
Not numbers untold.
Though many came in their callow youth,
Others themselves had expounded truth
To many a pupil roundabout;
Or had worked in the woods,
Or had gone to sea:
To tame a tough school,
Or to swing an axe,
Or ride through the Latin or Greek syntax
They were equally apt
And as much at ease.
Such men as these,
Such men as these,
In the days of old!
What, numbers untold?
No indeed,
Not numbers untold.

And here came I;
But I couldn't quite fill the heroic mold:
Stretch as I would
Still a draughty spot
Showed a corner filled
And a corner not.
But I came here
With the boys to pray,

To begin the day
(Not numbers untold)
And wondered then
Of the boys of old
Who came here to pray,
To begin the day.
Were they awed by the touch of the pale green walls?
By the faintly spiritual smell of the wax?
By the long, low pews
And the morning backs of the boys at pray
To begin the day,
In the days of old?

Now when I'm farwandered
And turned at bay,
By the foes of life,
By this human clay,
My heart comes back
And slides in here
(In a day scholars' pew)
And I catch once more
The calm firm tones
Of the rector's voice,
Or the O.M.I. or the C.S.P.
Or the C.Ss.R.
Or an Old Boy home
From the Field Afar:
And the spell takes me
Of this gracious mold;
And I think of the men and the boys gone by,
Who had shaped our life,
Who had tamed the sod:
Men who gave at the Lord's mere nod:
And again I am strong,
Through these boys of old
Who came here to pray.
How many boys, to begin the day?
How many boys, in the days of old?
Not numbers untold,
Not numbers untold.

A. P. C.

"The cause of civilization lacks a solid foundation if it does not rest on the eternal principles of truth and in the unchangeable laws of right justice."

—"Evils of Society" by Pope Leo XIII.