

Santa Clara Valley Troubadour:
A Life & Selected Poems of
Thomas Clarence Urmy

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*"Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever,
for they are the rejoicing of my heart." Ps 119:111*

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Introduction

Clarence Thomas Urmy (1858 – 1923), who called himself “A California Troubadour,” was the first native Californian to publish a book of poems. He wrote of California and especially of the Santa Clara Valley where he settled near the banks of the Guadalupe. Though his work was printed on distant presses, and he occasionally received fan mail from far away, Clarence Urmy was a local poet of local fame. He was admired as a writer while he lived, and his reputation was not entirely extinguished after he died.

This essay asks the question, what is the value of a local poet such as Clarence Urmy? Great poets contribute to a culture and a civilization by poems that stand independent of

the lives of their authors. Local poets like Urmy contribute as much by the lives they lead as by the verses they write.

Urmy's reputation deserves a revival because his best work vividly recalls California in a time of rapid development and change, especially as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth began. Through his life and work Clarence Urmy gives us a window on history. He tells the story of his time in highly-charged language and telling description that no diarist or chronicler can match. He reveals the mind of an educated person with a community spirit and a reverence for the culture the pioneers had brought to the West.

1. "The Day That I Was Born"

On the July day in 1858 that Clarence Thomas Urmy was born, the story goes, a French street-singer wandered over San Francisco's Rincon Hill, along Folsom, Harrison and Bryant streets, and down Hawthorne, passing through South Park into Third Street. There he disappeared into a crowd of hurrying omnibuses, hacks, express wagons and drays. Afterwards Clarence's mother told him a story of that time:

Only a little while before you were born the singer stood close by our front door, and sang looking up at my bedroom window. I was oh, so anxious to have a look at him! So your father gently moved my bed over to the window. I leaned far enough over to catch a glimpse of his long-plumed hat, gay cloak, and old guitar. Just at that moment he glanced up at the window, threw me a kiss, and ran quickly down the street, followed by a crowd of children and grown people. We heard him singing in the next block, then faintly again over the brow of the hill, and then . . . not long after . . . in a few hours, you were born." [1]

To that Urmy wistfully added: "1858 is so long ago!"

The story of that day ends at Third and Silver streets where according to a newspaper report a strolling singer, known as "French Louis," was struck and fatally injured by the

omnibus of the International Hotel. The singer left a locket with a mademoiselle's picture and was buried in the cemetery at Market and McAllister at the city's expense.

How much of this is true, and how much is an embroidered nursery story that a man dimly remembered fifty years later, is anybody's guess. Yet Urmy used the story to suggest that the medieval troubadours—a major cultural influence in the high Middle Ages who fell into disrepute before the dawn of modern Europe--had their descendants still. Urmy would eventually think of himself as “The California Troubadour,” and that became the title of his most memorable work. [2]

2. Provincial California

Clarence Urmy's factual history, as opposed to his imaginative one, also has elements of romance--the romance of the California pioneers that mingles with all the discomfort of an ocean voyage in a leaky wooden ship, the mud of an isthmus passage and the wind and grit of frontier San Francisco. His father, William Smith Urmy, came by that route, arriving in the summer of 1853. He tried the gold diggings, but like so many others abandoned his dreams of fortune as winter snow settled on the Sierra. [3]

Yet William Urmy had cause to stay in the west, and beyond a cause, he had a call. He had experienced a conversion at fifteen in the nineteenth century fashion at a camp meeting (a multi-day revival) outside of Sing Sing, New York. “I felt almost at once that I was called to the ministry,” he wrote, “and began the study of Greek and the reading of books that would fit me for the work”[4]

Under the direction of the stalwart presiding elder Isaac Owen, Urmy was allowed to preach and then was accepted on probation as a minister by the California Conference of the Methodist Church. He hoped to better prepare himself for the ministry through further

study, but there was no leisure for that. The older, experienced men of the Conference saw the harvest before them and urged men of Urmy's age into the field. [5]

The young Rev. Urmy began in Sonora and Columbia where he worked under a senior pastor and had the whole of Tuolumne County for his labors. Next he went to Ione Valley in Amador County, which the miners also called "Hardscrabble" and "Freeze Out." With Ione as his base, he preached at a series of eight points along a circuit, traveling on foot from one appointed meeting to another. His mere arrival on the circuit doubled the number of active Methodists there.

In the mid-nineteenth century hardly anyone knew California better than a Methodist circuit rider. The Methodist plan for itinerant preachers meant that ministers were reassigned every one or two years to a new appointment, a new field of work. In only a few years William Urmy became acquainted with the gold region from Sonora to Oroville, where he laid the corner stone for a new church. In 1856 he rode the circuit that included the New Almaden quicksilver mine and Santa Clara County, and later he served in Gilroy.

The knowledge of California that his father amassed would become central to Clarence Urmy's identity. He would come to see northern California—and, in fact, all of the country west of the Sierra peaks—not just as a cohesive region, but as a setting as familiar and intimate as the view from his window. He would never forsake this identity, and during a later interval in the East, his thoughts were continually of California. [6]

Throughout his young life Clarence was most influenced by his mother, Emma Brainerd Thomas, and her family. Like his father, Clarence's mother also came to California by sea. Emma Thomas was the 16-year-old daughter of a Methodist minister

and eldest of his four children. Her father, Eleazer Thomas, a graduate of Lima Seminary in New York, had begun his career as a minister in 1838. Her mother, Cordelia Brainerd Thomas, also graduated from the seminary, making her one of the first American women to receive a classical education. [7]

Emma Thomas remembered the nine-day voyage from New York to the Isthmus as “long and somewhat tedious.” She arrived in San Francisco with her family on May 1, 1855. Though Emma confided in a letter after landing that New York had never looked so good to her, she nevertheless took readily to California. She became her father’s companion on journeys to Sacramento to meet with church leaders and to revival meetings to welcome the newly committed. With her mother and siblings she worshipped at the Powell Street Methodist Church in San Francisco, where her family represented the kind of stability that Easterners increasingly were bringing to California. [8]

3. The Spread of Culture

The Thomas family also represented the spread of culture, especially in the work of Emma’s father. Nearly six feet tall, well-proportioned with a light complexion, blue eyes, and a massive forehead, Eleazer Thomas was a man of commanding appearance. He became editor of the Methodist newspaper, the *Californian Christian Advocate*, one of the widest circulating papers in the state. It printed religious news, of course, but also general, business and finance news and printed fiction and poems [9]

Since the days of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century, the publication of a church newspaper had gone hand-in-hand with the publication and distribution of hymnals, devotional tracts, Sunday school materials

and general literature. “The dissemination of books in the West became a particular preoccupation of the Methodists,” wrote Louis B. Wright in his *Culture on the Moving Frontier*. Whenever a circuit rider rode into a dusty California camp or clapboard town he was certain to have books in his saddlebags both for sale and loan. [10]

All of this had a direct impact on the life of Clarence Urmy. The Methodists distributed books through the Methodist Book Depository, which shared offices with the *California Christian Advocate*. Urmy’s grandfather had access to literature from the East and London coming through his office and contact everyday with ministers, preachers and others who were interested in books. Through his grandfather, young Clarence had books for his use and as much access to literary talk as any young man growing up in California in the 1860s and ‘70s. [11]

In his grandfather’s house in San Francisco, where the Urmy-Thomas family assembled, as well as in remote parsonages with his parents, Clarence Urmy absorbed a distinct cultural awareness and identity. He was part of a movement that Louis Wright described:

The anarchistic and disintegrating forces of the frontier met another force less violent but eternally steady in its pressure: the determination of a few persistent men and women to re-create in the wilderness a stable social order with its traditional amenities. [12.]

Young Clarence was raised among these persistent people, who saw themselves as the “old Americans,” the Atlantic stock assimilated into an older and largely English tradition and transferred to the Pacific Coast. His people had come west with a civilizing mission. They were people who possessed, as Clarence’s sister Mabel explained, a “punctilious respect for all the amenities of civilized life” and yet “breathed the free air of

the far west.” This background was a living presence in the atmosphere of his grandparent’s home, and this civilizing mission propelled Clarence Urmey through the whole of his life. [13]

Clarence spent his early years in that once most fashionable district of San Francisco, Rincon Hill. Dr. Shumate, president emeritus of the California Historical Society, described the hill that once rose south of Market Street: “Rincon Hill and South Park had become the homes of numerous leading citizens of San Francisco many years before Nob Hill became fashionable, and at a time when Van Ness Avenue and what is today known as Pacific Heights were still wilderness.” At that time it was the one place in California, Gertrude Atherton recalled, where a person could be respectably born. [14.]

Clarence was still a very little boy during the Civil War, though at six years old he could have rejoiced at General Grant’s victory at Appomattox. With the exception of such an event as that, the world beyond his family little touched him. “His mother,” his sister remembered, was “always so close to him.” From his earliest childhood he sang songs she taught him, and as he grew older she sang alto while he carried the air. [15]

Clarence attended the South Cosmopolitan School, a public school on Post Street, near Union Square, where Professor Bolander presided. As he grew Clarence became familiar with several San Francisco neighborhoods. The dearest to him, at least in memory, was that neighborhood of lower Bush Street that he called “my little France.” It included a French rotisserie, where Clarence watched through the windows as live frogs swam in crystal globes and cooks worked in their white caps and aprons, surrounded by glittering copper pots. Nearby was the French opera house where Clarence once saw the curtain descend as the diva was dying on stage.

Sometimes after school he passed by Notre Dame des Victories, the French Roman Catholic Church on Bush Street, and peeked in at the ornate altar, carved saints and antique organ in the dark loft over the door. “My beloved parents,” he recalled, “were most strict Protestants, and both very much ‘set against’ Roman doctrine, rites, and ritual.” As Catholicism was “foreign” to his family it was all the more fascinating to Clarence. [16]

France and the French remained a life-long fascination for Clarence Urmey, a substantial token of his mother’s influence in an era when ladies were expected to have some knowledge of French. Urmey studied French and read it all his life, accumulating his own collection of French books. [17]

When Clarence was about twelve the family relocated to a small stone parsonage with a huge fig tree in the yard at Woodland, Yolo County. By this time his mother had borne seven children, a daughter and four sons who survived, a son who had died and an infant daughter, who was brought as an infant in arms to Woodland and died there in 1871. After the loss of that child Emma Urmey never recovered her strength and began what one of Clarence’s brothers’s called “her long invalidism.” [18.]

Clarence’s father, the Rev. Urmey, was appointed next to North San Juan beyond Nevada City, on the ridge between the south and middle forks of the Yuba River, a place that made a lasting impression on the family. For the rest of their lives the Urmey family would remember it as the place where they heard and first tried to absorb some tragic news that made them all the more keenly aware of who they were and what they represented.

[19]

4. “An unspeakably sad time”

The Modoc War is a story of racial conflict written in blood across the early history of California, and one that became central to the lives of Clarence Urmy and his family. The most important account of the war was written by Jeff C. Riddle, the son of a frontiersman and a Modoc woman named Winema. He traced the origins of the conflict back to the arrival of whites and a raid at Bloody Point by Pit River Indians that killed sixty-one settlers. In retaliation a hastily-assembled militia, which failed to distinguish between hostile warriors and peaceable people, killed many Modoc Indians, including women and children. [20.]

Hostilities continued until the U. S. Government and several tribes including the Modocs signed a treaty in 1864. By agreement the Modocs moved to a reservation. Later, when they left reservation to return to their own lands, they were pursued by the U. S. Army and driven to the lava beds on the south shore of Tule Lake. There 175 of them, including fifty-three warriors, holed up, and from their stronghold held off a great number of American soldiers, inflicting heavy casualties.

About that time Clarence Urmy’s grandfather, the Rev. Eleazer Thomas, received a telegram announcing that President Grant had appointed him to a peace commission to the Modocs. He responded: “It has been my calling to carry peace to men; that is my mission now.” He served with a former superintendent of Indian affairs and a prominent judge. [21]

As the peace commissioners met with the Modoc leaders on April 11, armed Modocs rushed the commissioners. The Rev. Thomas was shot through the lung and skull and died. A military officer that accompanied the commissioners was also killed, another

commissioner lay seriously wounded and the third commissioner and an interpreter escaped. With that all efforts for peace ended. Four tribal leaders were eventually tried and hung for the murder of the commissioners. The Modocs, as prisoners of war, were forcibly removed to Oklahoma.

The news of the murder of her father came to Emma Thomas Urmey, Clarence's mother, by telegram, delivered to the parsonage at North San Juan as she was giving her little children their evening bath. Her husband was away. Years later her daughter Mabel recalled the scene:

With her telegram in her hand she stood there in the little parsonage so silent, so tragic. She spoke no word, there was no human help hereby. Even the babies remembered it. [22.]

Clarence's brother Ralph remembered how the grief of that time affected his mother and that his family moved again in the fall of 1873. "It must have been that this merciless blow of bereavement in the sudden assassination of her father drove her with a great longing to the San Francisco Bay Region, where the rest of the family lived; and the Bishop appointed my father as pastor at Vallejo." In this instance the pitiless Methodist program of moving ministers' families every one to two years was a blessing, as it moved the Urmey family closer to the Rev. Thomas' grieving widow and the extended family. More generally, however, the itinerancy took a toll on Emma Urmey that her children never forgot or entirely forgave. [23]

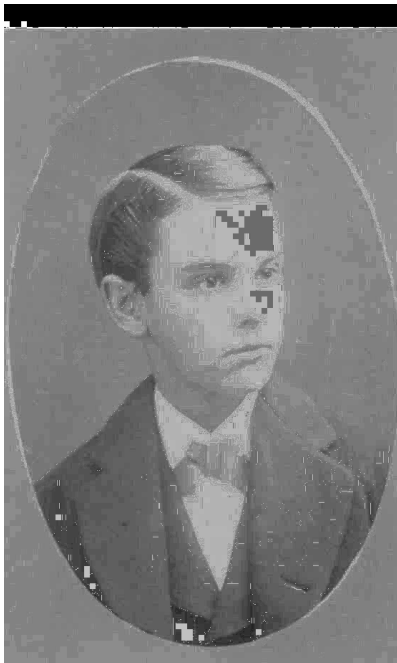
Emma Urmey died in April 1874. Clarence Urmey's sister Mabel referred to those years as "an unspeakably sad time." From that period comes the first of Urmey's poems that we can date—an epitaph for his mother's grave:

In her heart the peaceful quiet,
Heaven granted;
In our hearts the blooming roses
Which she planted.

He was seventeen when she died and he never got over it—but who could? His mother was the love of his life. [24.]

5. A Methodist Education:

After the death of his mother, Clarence was not much at home, but mostly away at Napa College, one of two Methodist colleges in Northern California. (The other was the University of the Pacific in San Jose.) There Urmy's studies centered on liberal arts and music, as the Methodist colleges had an unusual affinity for that subject, given the importance hymnody in Methodist worship. The only record of his time in Napa are his



Bachelor of Arts diploma, dated May 1880, and a program that lists him as an orator at the commencement exercises, suggesting his high standing in his class. [25]

Young Clarence Urmy
Courtesy California State Library

During these years Urmy struggled with questions of vocation, and specifically whether he had a call to the ministry. Given his heritage it seemed likely enough, but perhaps that very likelihood was what Urmy struggled against.

When he visited his father's home, he talked to his sister, who could do little but listen, as indeed she listened to all of her brothers as they each wrestled with the same question. In

the end, only the youngest brother, Ralph, went into the ministry and he served a long career with the Methodist Church, especially in New Jersey. [26]

Not the ministry or the law, engineering or business appealed to Urmy. His interests were aesthetic, and he wanted to live a life in appreciation of beauty. Years later he explained in words of advice to young poets: “In order to write beautiful verse, one must live a beautiful life. As a means towards attaining this desideratum follow Longfellow’s advice: . . . ‘Everyday look at a beautiful picture, listen to a beautiful piece of music, and read a beautiful poem—this will keep your life beautiful. Supporting some semblance of this beautiful life became Urmy’s almost constant anxiety for the rest of his days. [27.]

After graduation from Napa, Clarence Urmy began his career first as organist at an Episcopal Church in Petaluma and then working at Sherman and Clay music store in San Francisco. Later he set up house with his sister and aunt at College Park, between San Jose and Santa Clara. In succession Clarence’s younger brothers joined them in order to attend the nearby University of the Pacific. [28]

Clarence Urmy always took seriously his responsibilities as older brother and supported the household by working at Waldteufel’s music store at First and Fountain streets in San Jose. Later, when Clarence’s widowed grandmother came to College Park, the household relocated to a larger house at Hedding and Elm streets. In 1883 Clarence augmented his income by becoming organist at the Methodist church in Santa Clara. After less than a year in that position, he left to become organist at Trinity Episcopal Church at Second and St. John streets in the center of San Jose, a position he held for most of his life [29.]

6. San Jose High Life

After his siblings had their chance at higher education, Urmy settled in San Jose's Vendome Hotel, located (as Mabel Urmy remembered it) "on the edge of San Jose." It became his residence for the next quarter century. He established himself as a music teacher and earned a modest living from giving private piano and voice lessons combined with his work as organist and later choir master. [30]

In the 1880s and 90s Clarence Urmy was a young man about San Jose. With a friend from Napa College he sang the Gilbert and Sullivan songs that were the rage at evening parties. Urmy also gained notoriety as a local performer, once singing a popular ballad, "O Willie Boy, Come Home, Come Home," in such style that "several women fainted and the very audience sobbed." San Jose's society columnist remarked that Urmy "writes charming songs which he sings in excellent style, frequently both words and setting being his own composition." [31]

Urmy's song writing dated from this time and included his most popular, "My Heart to Thee Is Singing," with music by Julius Oettl, published in San Francisco in 1885. (See reprint of the song in the Appendix, pages J-M.) Some of his other published songs included "Across the Field" (1882), "A Lute Song" (1909) and "Beside the Door" (published posthumously in 1928.) But Urmy never seemed to look on song writing as anything more than an amusement and his songs as any more than ephemera. He never thought of songs as his essential work. [32.]

7. Early Poetry

Mostly hidden from view, and not shared with acquaintances or friends in his man-about-town years, was the work that Urmy considered essential—his poetry. He had begun writing as a school boy and during his college years his verse appeared in the *California Christian Advocate*, the Methodist newspaper. His work was soon appearing in newspapers and San Francisco and Sacramento.

While poems are not biography, Urmy's poems do give insight into his preoccupations and interests and some glimpse at the architecture of his mind. They suggest his development as a writer as well as a thinker. In some indirect yet comprehensive sense, his poems are the substance of his story.

***Clarence Urmy about the time
his poems began appearing in magazines***
Courtesy of the California State Library

Although throughout his lifetime newspapers continued to publish Clarence Urmy's work, within a few years he was appearing in more prestigious publications. In June 1883 his poem "One Evening," for example, appears in *The Overland Monthly*, the west's primary literary journal. (See page A.) The theme in "One Evening" of a separation that results in the loss of an



innocent self is one of the great themes of Romantic literature. Urmy inherited it from a

century of preceding poetry in English, written by such luminaries as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats. His ability to write in this vein demonstrates that the resources of the Methodist Book Depository had not gone to waste. He was saturated in the work of earlier poets and had absorbed their themes as well as their idioms and rhythms.

This early poem is largely derivative. It rehashes themes of the past and is marred by such hackney phrases as “starry dew” and “sunset seas.” Yet despite these defects, the poem’s clarity of feeling and expression signals something rare. This little work introduces not just a young man of deep thought and feeling but a writer of genuine talent.

“One Evening” also uncovers the well spring of all of Urmy’s early poetry—the love for a mother who died young. He was fired by a grief that could find no consolation, except fleetingly in the moment of composing or later of reading his poem.

8. *A Rosary of Rhyme*, 1884

As “One Evening” appeared in the *Overland Monthly* Urmy was already selecting and compiling the poems that he would include in his first published volume. In the following year, 1884, the firm of Joseph Winterburn and Company of San Francisco published Urmy’s *A Rosary of Rhyme*. The volume shared the spirit of all his work to that time, as his sister wrote: “Every other poem in his first book . . . bears testimony to the place his mother held in his heart and its inspiration in all his music and poetry. . . .” [33.]

Mabel Urmy didn’t exaggerate. Many of the poems in this book allude to his dead mother, but there’s more than elegy between the covers of *A Rosary of Rhyme*. Its chief interest lies in that it introduces a number of other themes that become characteristic of

Urmy's work throughout the rest of his life, and those themes reflect the time and place in which he lived.

From the first stanza a sense of place dominates, and that place is emphatically by "sunset seas." Urmy's poems throughout his life overwhelmingly evoke the American West, and that particular portion of the West on the windward slope of the Sierra Nevada. Most of his poems describe those mountains, or the foothills and valleys by the Sierra or Coast Range, and the identified settings are especially those places where his father and grandfather served as itinerant ministers. This was the California of his experience, memory and imagination, and as his sister said: "He owned it all." [34.]

As Clarence Urmy described California, his mind was ever moving through the natural landscape and beyond into the realms of idea and finally of faith. He established this orientation beginning on the title page of this first book: *A Rosary of Rhyme*. He strung his poems like prayer beads. In poem after poem he deploys images of tolling bells, vespers and benedictions, nuns in habits and padres walking dusty trails. To him California's Catholic past was everywhere, an inescapable heritage and presence; even "the sea waves don their nun-like hoods" Indeed, for Urmy nature in California is a choir "chanting one melodious psalm." [35.]

Catholicity stands out through Urmy's whole career as a distinguishable feature of his poetry. It is not, to be sure, imagery drawn by someone who knew the rigors and disciplines of the old faith as a boy or catechumen. His is the catholicity of the boy at the door peering into a forbidden sanctuary, and yet he embraces it fully and weaves it into his most intimate thought. In his early poems images of the Catholic faith attempt to

restore a sense of the past in a land that, at least in the eyes of settlers, lacked the mystery and awe of antiquity.

Urmy's imaginative embrace of the Catholic faith revealed in him a capacity for veneration and a conservatism almost radical in its depth. In the paths of the padres and rituals of the missal he conjured an alternative to the frantic exploitation of American public lands that had begun in his grandfather's generation, and the untamed spirit of industry and commerce that had leaped unbridled to the Pacific Coast. In opposition to the perverted "progress" of boosters and engineers, he tried to carve out a space for mystery and imagination, and in doing so elevated a catholicity that his own Protestant family would have found obscurant. His sister, Mabel, called Urmy's identification with a pre-Anglo and pre-industrial California the "Spanish influence," and it is nowhere better evoked in his first volume than in a sonnet based on his recollections of a San Jose convent—"Inside the Convent Wall":

"Ah, here is peace! The world is far away—
(Walk three short steps and lo, the busy street!)
Only an echo of the wheels and feet
Reaches this spot where noise has turned to clay. . . (See full text on page B.)

Urmy concluded his first book with ten sonnets that are the strongest verses in the collection, and they include a vivid description of sunset, "Off Point Pinole" (page B). The book concludes with the sonnet "Sea and Star" (page C) that owes enough to Keats' sonnet "Bright Star" to be considered imitative, and yet honestly conveys the struggle of a young man seeking conciliation with the inevitability of death. No one could have read these sonnets then (or read them now) without recognizing that poetry of a high order was being written in California remarkably soon after American settlement.

Urmy's family was entirely justified in taking pride in him as California's first native-born poet. As his sister wrote: "California at that time was unwritten and unsung." Clarence Thomas Urmy was "the first native poet of California to sing her praises for the world." Urmy seemed to have written in his own hand on the fly leaf of the volume that ended up in the New York Public Library: "The first book published in California by a native son of the Golden West." [36.]

9. *A Vintage of Verse*, 1897

The major themes of Clarence Urmy's *Rosary of Rhyme* find expression thirteen years later in his *A Vintage of Verse* (1897) published by William Doxey of San Francisco. Here we find again poems to his mother and places reconsidered since the first volume, as in "Napa Revisited." And here recur the imagery of the Catholic Church and Spanish California. Yet in his second volume, Urmy consciously strives to extend his range.

By the time his second book appeared Urmy had discovered a prophetic voice that spoke in the poems that his contemporaries loved best. One is "As I Came Down Mount Tamalpais" (pages C-D), a poem that appeared in anthologies into the twenty-first century.

As I came down Mount Tamalpais,
To south the city brightly shone,
Touched by the sunset's good-night kiss
Across the golden ocean blown;
I saw its hills, its tapering masts,
I almost heard its tramp and tread,
And saw against the sky the cross
Which marks the City of the Dead. . . .

When printed alone, as it has been recently [37], the stanza above seems to belong to a disillusioned twentieth century rather than to the optimistic nineteenth. Without the context of the three other stanzas, the “good-night kiss” assumes the ironic sneer of modern verse. With reference to the entirety of the poem, however, any ironic effect is tutelary to the prophetic vision that follows:

As I came down Mount Tamalpais,
To west Heaven’s gateway opened wide,
And through it, freighted with day-cares,
The cloud-ships floated with the tide;
Then, silently through stilly air,
Starlight flew down from Paradise,
Folded her silver wings and slept
Upon the slopes of Tamalpais.

Through such imagery Urmy transmutes a poetical vision into a religious one, the recognition of a divine order that will bring the day, as indeed it will bring the world, to a peaceful, comprehensible close.

Later in the volume, in a lyric titled “Weights and Measures” (page D) Urmy deploys his prophetic voice in an effort to verbally outflank the materialistic forces that he recognized as indifferent to his aesthetic, cultural and religious values. More marvelous than all the newly discovered wonders of the natural world, the poem contends, is the capacity for love that resides in the human heart. This didactic poem is perhaps Urmy’s clearest, most succinct statement of his moral and cultural stance.

10. The Magazine Scene

By the time *A Vintage of Verse* appeared Clarence Urmy’s neighbors in San Jose and admirers throughout California had grown accustomed to seeing his name in magazines

that arrived in the post. Urmy's poems delivered the touch of local color and regional imagery sought by western magazines, like *Overland Monthly* and later *Sunset*, and by many eastern magazines. His work appeared regularly in the well-established, high-brow monthly magazines, such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *the Century* and *The Smart Set*. [38.]

His work also appeared in the new, slick mass-circulation magazines such as *Munsey's*, *Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *Youth's Companion* and *Cosmopolitan*. These fashionable weeklies capitalized on technical breakthroughs in printing. They fed on advertising, rather than subscriptions, and thus sold for as little as a dime or a nickel. They had hundreds of thousands of subscribers and achieved circulations unimagined by the older monthlies. The *Saturday Evening Post*, for example, topped 1,000,000 subscribers by 1909.

Clarence Urmy soon had a place among the best-known poets of the Far West and beside such contemporaries as Ina Coolbrith, Edward Rowland Sill, George Sterling and Edwin Markham. In Santa Clara County he was known as "one of America's most popular poets." Most descriptions of California poetry, including those by Rockwell D. Hunt in *California and Californians* and Markham in *California the Wonderful*, mentioned Urmy. His biography appeared in dictionaries of American authors, and the magazine *Current Literature* featured his photo with a two-page spread of poems. He received flattering notices in newspapers from Scotland to Montana, and the *New York Times* described him as a poet expressing California, "its optimism, its splendor and its vivid youth." His work appeared among the country's most distinguished poets in Edmund Clarence Stedman's *An American Anthology* (1900). [39.]

11. The Frontier's Genteel Tradition

Despite the esteem that Clarence Urmey knew, his star wasn't destined to last. It was his fate to write at the end of an era. His poetry represents what we might call the "art school" of Victorian poetry that descended particularly from Keats and Tennyson. His contemporaries compared his work to that of the English poet Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), a Victorian poet of the same school. But because Swinburne probed the sensual in exuberant expression before romping into incoherence, Urmey probably would have found the comparison distasteful. [40]

As Urmey and his American contemporaries were generally unwilling to follow the likes of Swinburne, or Walt Whitman, what was left was what Edmund Stedman called a "twilight interval." It was a period when poets substituted technique for imagination, and explored odes, sonnets, canzonets, and other novel forms, but failed to penetrate new realms of thought or purify the tongue. Poets were working, Stedman said, as if "a place worth having can be earned by polishing the countless facets of gems." [41]

The literary era in which Clarence Urmey wrote—between the Civil War and World War I—has been best remembered, in philosopher George Santayana's expression, as "the genteel tradition." The American literary critic Malcolm Cowley called such gentility "in part . . . an attempt to abolish the evils and vulgarities and sometimes the simple changes in American society by never talking about them" The refined sentiments of gentility that infected most American writers of the era left them ill-suited for plumbing the depths of the soul or broadening the intellect. [42]

Clarence Urmey was reared in such gentility. By training and temperament, he was not a man to explore or even acknowledge the base aspects of existence, and when he did

allow so much as unhappiness in his work it was within the context of Christian consolation. His personal motto was “nothing ignoble.” In his poem, “The Poetic Touch,” he wrote:

To touch no thing that’s vile, unless to teach the world to scorn it,
To touch no thing that’s beautiful save only to adorn it!

As a poet Clarence Urmy was, as Santayana would say, “all genteel tradition.” The result, despite the genuine achievement represented by his books, was a deficiency that makes much of his work difficult reading today. At times the contemporary reader struggles to penetrate the dated diction, conventions and tone as well as the labored alliteration and clichés. Too much of Urmy’s work tinkles like a music-box. His tropes and images sincerely expressed his personal genius, but they were mere fancies compared to what a real observer would have said in the same circumstances. That he came himself to some awareness of these short-comings, and admitted to himself perhaps that his work was avoiding the darker truths, may explain (along with his inherent humility) why Urmy didn’t call himself a poet and never claimed to write anything more than “verses.” [43]

One might reasonably presume that writers in the raw American West would have been the first to burst the strictures of gentility, but in fact in the West the genteel tradition was sustained by cultural forces. In his famous “frontier thesis,” historian Frederick Jackson Turner wrote: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.” Turner went on to point out (especially in reference to institutions like land grant colleges), that transplanted Easterners were conscious of the need to erect

standards for culture and community. Louis B. Wright, in his specific study of cultural diffusion, extended the theme. [44.]

Urmy followed his pioneer parents and grandparents in establishing culture in a newly-settled land, and in protecting the finer things for the young people who could appreciate them. In doing so he consciously turned to the models he found in the cherished books that came west by ship or wagon or through the channels of the Methodist Book Depository. “Far away as we natives of California were from the home of our progenitors,” his sister Mabel wrote, “we were still vitally connected with its forms.” [45.]

Long after California was linked to the East by railroad, and no one could any longer trace the line of the American frontier on a map, Urmy still saw himself as a paladin of culture. The days of his adult life, given the accelerating pace of change, were arguably as turbulent as the times of his pioneering forebears. As he crafted his poems, the national character was changing as a result of immigration--the immigration America demanded for its booming industries. Fifteen million, for example, arrived in the first fourteen years of the twentieth century.

Without any evidence of nativism in his reaction, Urmy worried that the American culture he valued could be swamped by such an influx. His response was to do his part to inculcate in the immigrants the values of an older American culture. Through such forms as his poems, his manner of speaking and writing, indeed, through the example of his life, he sought to preserve the modes of manner and thought that accompanied high culture. He sought to sustain the liberty and self-restraint that people like Urmy’s own English forebears had planted on American shores. This spirit of liberty, as Louis

B. Wright has argued, was inherent in the culture that Americans carried across the plains and deposited on the moving frontier. After the frontier had closed, Urmy continued to believe that poetic forms and diction, and the restraint inherent in his own expression, could serve as a vehicle for cultural and political values. [46.]

Perhaps Urmy need not have been so concerned. Soon enough the polyglot peoples that arrived in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adopted as their own the kind of liberty that Urmy valued. Amidst Santa Clara County, “the largest orchard in the world,” they established a Jeffersonian democracy of small ranches, orchards and farms in the Valley of Heart’s Delight. Still, Urmy’s work reveals the preoccupations of those of older American stock as they responded to a changing landscape a generation after the Anglo settlement of California. [47]

12. *A California Troubadour*, 1912

As the twentieth century was dawning Clarence Urmy was collecting poems for his third book. Yet Urmy sensed his career was faltering. His poems weren’t selling as they had before and he felt out of touch with Eastern editors. He feared, as he wrote his sister, that he was “getting so hayseed in San Jose.” He put his furnishings in storage and spent the summer of 1907 through the winter of 1908 in New York City. [48]

There Urmy spent his days reading and writing in his room, and also riding streetcars, pounding the pavement and calling on one magazine editor after another--Miss Harrison at *Vogue*, Mr. Titherington at *The Munsey*, Mr. Gilder at *The Century*, and many more. He supported himself selling poems and articles and revived his career

In the spring 1908 Urmy returned to San Jose, determined to resume his life in California. As his train climbed into the Sierra and crossed the California state line, he

lifted his hat in celebration. “My work is here,” he wrote his sister, “and here I’ll work and die.” [49]

Three years later A. M. Robertson of San Francisco published Clarence Urmy’s most successful book, *A California Troubadour*. It presents in abundance the themes and impulses already explored in his earlier books—especially the local color and regional imagery, full-flowered Catholicism and an unfulfilled longing for a lost mother. Yet with a new energy the verses of this book animated and quickened everything that has gone before. This vitality exuded from a new awareness, from Urmy’s self-conscious role as California’s poet, and not just a poet but a “troubadour,” a poet come to restore a lost age of romance.

No single poem better distills the essence of the book than Urmy’s “Blondel” (pages E-F) a dramatic dialogue. It counts on the reader knowing that King Richard I, the Lionhearted, was held captive by Duke Leopold V of Austria in 1192 as a result of a dispute during the Third Crusade. Rescuing Richard was rendered impracticable because the Duke had a string of castles lining the hills above the Danube River, and Richard’s followers didn’t know in which he was imprisoned. It was Richard’s faithful minstrel Blondel who went from castle to castle singing a song that Richard loved, and when he sang beneath the walls of Dürstein, he heard Richard’s voice returning the song.

As a statement of the dilemma of the poet in the genteel age, this poem is a little masterpiece. The poet, as a character who dreams of Blondel, seeks to restore poetry to its place among the men of action such as Richard Lionhearted. He seeks to restore the balance between the arts, aesthetics and practical affairs, passivity and action, femininity

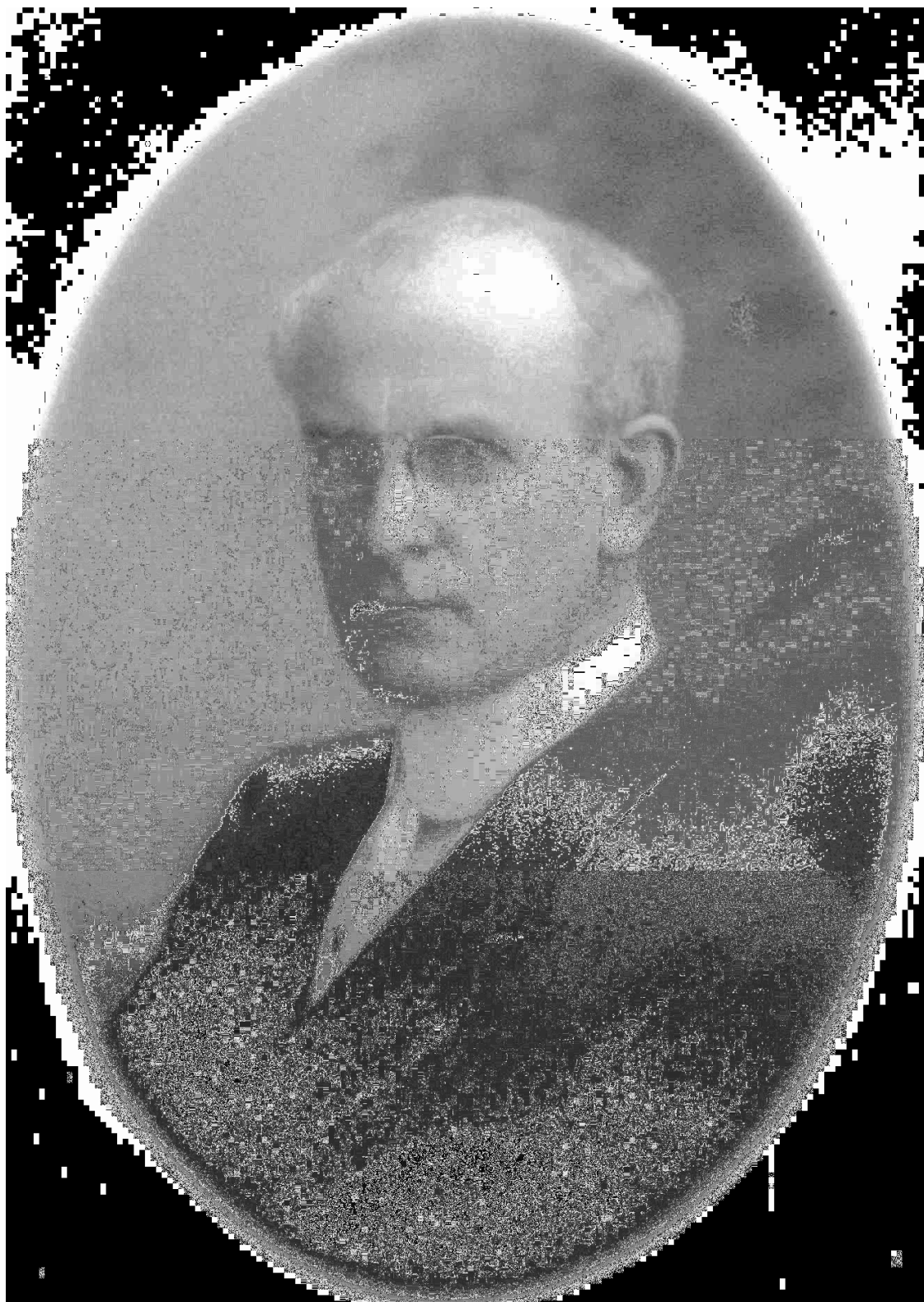
and masculinity. Tellingly, in the end, it can't be done: Blondel says, "No"; he no longer sings; the music is lost.

The volume includes many remarkable poems. Urmy's "Cameo-cutter" (page G), for example, is perhaps the only instance of Urmy describing someone at work—in this case a skilled artisan—though it leads him characteristically into reverie. His "A Legend of the Madonna" (pages G-H) uncharacteristically tells a story, and displays (as does "Blondel") his new-found interest in myth and fable. And it was a fable—Urmy's personal mythology of a Gold Rush era troubadour who died in San Francisco on the day that he was born—that unlocked his creative energies.

No one can claim that Urmy had any influence on the direction of modern poetry, but he had discovered myth as a structural element of poetry and a source of imaginative power at the time when an appreciation of myth was propelling those who would become the great writers of the modern era, especially Yeats, Pound, Joyce and Eliot. For Urmy to have made such a discovery within his work was a significant personal achievement.

After *A California Troubadour* Clarence Urmy continued to write poems until the sudden end of his life more than a decade later. Most of these he collected into two manuscript volumes that he called "Under the Toyon Tree" and "The Wild Willow." These collections celebrated the local scenes dear to Urmy as he aged, and especially cemented his ties to Saratoga, where he bought a summer house, "El Retiro," that became his retreat for the rest of his life. Among the verses in the manuscript are the "Choral Ode to Beauty" that Urmy wrote to be read by three solo voices and chorus at the graduation exercises at Stanford University in 1909. The occasion cemented Urmy's affiliations with Stanford, especially after the Phi Beta Kappa chapter made him an honorary member.

[50]



*Clarence Thomas Urmy, California Troubadour.
Courtesy Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries*

Throughout his life Clarence Urmey was prepared to contribute to the cultural commonweal. Most famously he did so in June 1917 as the writer for “The Story of San Jose Pageant” staged at Luna Park. Local historian Eugene T. Sawyer described the event as “a ‘never to be forgotten pageant,’ a benefit staged by 1,500 performers and witnessed by 5,000.” The pageant was part of the local Red Cross drive that raised \$135,000 in the months that immediately followed America’s entry into World War I. Urmey penned the libretto, including the central musical setting, the “Hymn of San Jose” (with music by Ruth Cornell). The opening stanzas were vintage Urmey:

From our city’s garden bowers
Blest with sunshine, fruit and flowers,
Lift we now this hymn of ours—
Valgate Dios, San Jose!
Thankful for the Past great treasure
And the Present’s well-filled measure
Hopeful for the Future’s pleasure—
Valgate Dios, San Jose!

In writing the lyric Urmey borrowed a phrase from a popular “historic description” of Santa Clara County published by the local newspaper in 1895, *Sunshine, Fruit and Flower*. [51]

Another important poem was Urmey’s “Peace,” that won the prize offered by the San Francisco *Chronicle* for the best poem to celebrate the armistice of November 1918. As *Out West Magazine* explained when reporting on Urmey’s triumph: “To the grandson of such a man [as the Rev. Thomas, murdered as a peace commissioner] peace was no empty word.” Neither were the words of the recurring line that concluded each stanza of the poem: “To be at peace, acquaint themselves with God.” [52.]

These later poems for public occasions were not typical of Urmy's usual nature poetry. His nature poetry sought to find meaning or validation solely with reference to the self, within the limits of subjectivity. But for a man like Clarence Urmy, though, subjectivity was only a method and not a cosmology. For Urmy there was another reality beside the one of his inner thoughts and personal consciousness, and beyond the Romantic cult of the beatified individual genius. For him reality lay in another dimension, in a living God. It would take more than nature poems to satisfy a devout man who led his choir week after week in singing the "Jubilate" (Psalm 100) from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

Be ye sure that the Lord he is God;
It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves [53]

After writing "acquaint thyself with God" what was left for Clarence Urmy to say? Though he may not have given into such a thought himself, his later poems suggest that he was aware he had said it all—had gone as far as his understanding of poetry would take him. Thus, we see that many of his mature poems led to silence. This was prefigured in "Blondel," the troubadour who no longer sings, and fulfilled in another poem about World War I called "Vale" that ends:

naught may amend—Time, the repairer,
Now shakes his drooped head, and is speechless. ("The Vale," pages H-I).

That was the last poem in his manuscript "Wild Willow." The last poem he wrote closed his poetic career with an unbreakable silence:

Thus round the Poet's lute fond Fancies throng
Awaiting dulcet trysting-time with Song.
Till smiling Death at his worn portal stands
To sever strings, seal lips, and still his hands. ("The Poet and His Lute, page I)

13. Parallel Careers: Newspaperman, Musician, Professor

Though poetry was Clarence Urmy's primary preoccupation for all his adult life, it never paid the bills. He earned some additional money writing light verse for magazines such as *Life*, using the penname Winthrop Gray, and short fiction under the name Felix Jose. He earned as much as sixty dollars per article—top dollar in Urmy's experience—writing pieces on church music for *Ladies Home Journal*. But this writing never amounted to a sufficiency. [54]

His principle source of income for more than three decades came from private lessons in voice and especially piano. He taught more than a generation of young musicians in San Jose, but grew exhausted in the process and longed to give it up. [55]

After he returned from New York in 1908, Urmy became the music and drama critic for the San Jose newspaper and became a respected member of *Mercury* staff. (After 1913, and until 1950, the paper was *The Mercury-Herald*.) Among his colleagues he was remembered for his hat and his overcoat, draped over his shoulders and trailing cape-like, as he hurried in the night to the newspaper offices. They saw him as “quiet, unassuming, modest to an extreme.” They noted that he stood apart, but also that he was approachable and unfailingly polite to everyone—“a natural gentleman.” Even his hardened editor recognized in him “a refined nature” that stemmed from “a consecrated heritage.” [56]

The hundreds of reviews that Urmy wrote show that he was a sensitive critic. He often took the audience's point of view, especially when writing about comedies or farces, and

responded enthusiastically to modern drama, explaining for his readers the difficulties of such playwrights as Ibsen. [57]

In addition to reviews, Urmy wrote Sunday features and became an all-round cultural reporter. He wrote, for example, historical accounts of San Jose street names and compiled a page of drawings, prose and poems depicting the willows trees that lined The Alameda. He described “San Jose as a Book Town,” giving an extensive account of its public and private libraries, book shops, and school, club and hotel books shelves. He also covered important religious events, such as special services or ordinations. His poems appeared in the newspaper, too, on occasions such as Christmas and Easter [58].

Newspaper work never fully replaced his income from teaching music, and never relieved the anxiety about money that was a constant of his life. He was only able to give them up private lessons completely after he was appointed to the faculty of the Methodist college in San Jose. For the last four years of his life he taught at San Jose State Teachers College, earning a comfortable and reliable income for the first time.

Probably the career that gave Clarence Urmy the greatest satisfaction was his work as a church musician that spanned thirty-three years at Trinity Episcopal Church, San Jose (later Trinity Cathedral). The Episcopal Church appealed to him. The Elizabethan cadences of its prayer book spoke to the poet in Urmy, and the ritual and sanctity of its divine offices won his life-long devotion. The opening canticle in *The Book of Common Prayer* sets the tone: “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” Such was his attachment to Trinity that he declined an offer to become organist at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. [59]



He took particular pains in his dual role as choirmaster, and he was a lasting influence in the lives of many choristers. His sister wrote: “Deep within him also was the glory of his work with his choir boys which was as important as though he had dedicated his life to the church of God as a priest.” [60]

Renaldo Coe, crucifer and choir boy under Clarence Urmy at Trinity Episcopal Church. California State Library photo.

As important as his New York year of 1907-1908 was to Clarence Urmy as a poet, it was even more significant to him as a man of faith. He visited several churches each Sunday in New York and stayed at an Episcopal monastery. He wrote from New York to his sister:

I have had a strange experience in New York. I came to ‘be literary’, and lo, *The Church* has come between me and everything else in my life and I must give a whole separate letter to that phase of my visit. You will probably not be able to understand it; I don’t understand it myself.” [61]

None of the surviving correspondence explains this passage; the only explanation is in Urmy’s subsequent actions. He wrote: “I have begun to lay some plans for religious work that I think is going to count” [62]

14. An Episcopal Mission in Sunnyvale

Clarence Urmy's plans centered particularly round his role as music director at Trinity Church, but he had more church work in mind than that. Within the year he was licensed as a lay-reader by the Right Rev. William Ford Nichols, Bishop of the Diocese of California. Urmy was initially authorized to read the scriptures and preside over Morning and Evening Prayer at Trinity and at a mission church, St. John's in Saratoga. [63]

Urmy's interest in serving the church did not end there. In his mature years he assumed the work his father had done as a pioneer missionary and began working himself to establish new religious foundations to meet the demand of a new population.

Thus, Clarence Urmy responded when in 1911 a group of Episcopalians in Sunnyvale appealed to Trinity Church for help in establishing a mission. Sunnyvale was rural then, with about 1,500 residents who lived surrounded by orchards, especially of cherries, peaches, apricots and plums. The land developer who had named the town, Walter E. Crossman, had enticed the Joshua Hendy Iron Works of San Francisco there following the 1906 earthquake, allowing Sunnyvale to call itself not only "the garden spot of California" but also "the manufacturing center of Santa Clara County." Sunnyvale's growing and largely immigrant population either worked on ranches, in the iron works or canneries. [64]

Urmy first met with Episcopalians in Sunnyvale in September 1911, and in October he returned to lead Evening Prayer and to chair meetings on prospects for a mission. He began regular Sunday afternoon services. Urmy's hand-written notes tell us that at a mid-October meeting the name of the doubting apostle St. Thomas was proposed for the

mission because many doubted its success. One of the founding women, Anna Berry, remarked: that Urmy was “the ardent soul whose efforts brought this little mission into being, and who as ably conducted its services through a period of years.” He gave the mission, she added, “a beautiful example of devotion.” [65]

The records suggest that Urmy continued to lead Sunnyvale Episcopalians for about two years, and was succeeded by an ordained clergyman. With a sense of accomplishment, Urmy could again devote himself to music at Trinity Church and regular support of St. John’s in Saratoga. For more than a century Clarence Urmy’s name has been associated with Trinity Church. After his death, and in fulfillment of his wishes, a processional cross was presented to Trinity in his memory. In 2011 when St. Thomas Church in Sunnyvale celebrated its centennial, the Clarence Urmy cross (borrowed from Trinity Cathedral) led the procession. [66]

15. Saratoga’s Poet

While he retained his hotel room and P. O. Box 605 in San Jose, in the last years of his life Clarence Urmy spent as much time as he could at the Saratoga cottage he dubbed “El Retiro.” He had first found his way to Saratoga on walking excursions when he was young. In the beginning he would take the trolley to Los Gatos and then trek westward along the highway to the village nestled on the leeward slope of the Coast Range. Later the interurban railway put his chosen corner of the Santa Clara Valley within easier reach.

Saratoga was a place where he could escape to write and walk and work in the garden. With a straw hat for shade, a blue bandana about his neck, and sleeves rolled above his elbows, he took pleasure in his flowers and tiny orchard and planted all around

the house violets in memory of his mother. There his sister remembered his “gay, infectious laughter.” [67]



Clarence Urmy spent much of the last two decades of his life at “El Retiro,” within an easy walk of the village of Saratoga.
Photo courtesy of the California State Library

Clarence Urmy was “the poet of Saratoga”, the *Saratoga Star* reported, a man “devoted to the district,” who in poems celebrated El Quito Creek and surrounding spots familiar to every resident. Ever civic-minded, he wrote verses for Saratoga’s annual Blossom Festival. The paper said that he planned to retire to Saratoga and devote the last years of his life to writing, but that didn’t come to pass. [68.]

The end came unexpectedly when Urmy was sixty-four. On a May afternoon he collapsed in a classroom at the teachers college and landed in a sanitarium on Meridian Avenue west of San Jose. There he died quietly a week later at midday on Saturday, June 2, 1923. His obituary appeared the next morning atop page one of the *San Jose Mercury-*

Herald. His friend the Very Rev. Wilmer Gresham, dean at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, conducted the service. Clarence Urmy's ashes were placed in his mother's grave in the Woodlawn cemetery in Colma under a bronze tablet that read:

He sang his songs in time in tune
and kept his garments white. [69]

In the weeks following his death there was a movement to arrange for a memorial to Clarence Urmy in San Francisco's South Park and talk of a sculpture to commemorate the California Troubadour. Those plans fell through. What did materialize was an Urmy scholarship at Stanford University awarded for the best poem by an undergraduate, and scholarships were granted annually for many years. [70]

At the end the editor at the San Jose *Mercury-Herald* tried to sum up Urmy's life. "The truth is that Clarence Urmy was different from most people in that he was true to his own convictions. . ." Material gain meant nothing to Urmy, the editor said. He was "a natural gentleman" who lived his Christian faith. Clarence Urmy influenced his neighbors as a musician, churchman and poet, but most especially by the life that he led. In celebration of that life his poetry deserves to be remembered, and especially in the Santa Clara Valley he loved. [71]

-End-

Acknowledgements

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Gage McKinney

Footnotes

Abbreviations for commonly cited sources:

CSL – Clarence Thomas Urmey papers, California State Library, Sacramento, CA.

RBV – The Rev. Ralph B. Urmey manuscript, “The Trail I Traveled,” unpublished memoir, courtesy of Thomas V. Urmey and the Urmey family.

MUS – Mabel Urmey Seares’ manuscript, “A Troubadour Sings,” Special Collections, Green Library, Stanford University

SSC – The Clarence Thomas Urmey Collection, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA, Collection no M0020.

1: Clarence Thomas Urmey, “The Day That I was Born: A Souvenir of San Francisco” (Saratoga, CA: The Troubadour Press, 1924), 13.

2: RBV, 1. The ideal of chivalry found expression in the lyric poetry of the twelfth century troubadours, as described in Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951), 181, 184-190.

3: William S. Urmey. “To C. V. Anthony.” November 23, 1898, Methodist Archives, Berkeley; *Minutes of the California Conference*, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1913, 54-55.; MUS, 3. William Smith Urmey was born in Sing Sing (now called Ossining), New York, on June 21, 1830.

4: William S. Urmey. “To C. V. Anthony.” November 23, 1898.

5: Conference Minutes, 1913, 54-55.

6: This partial list of the circuits and stations that William S. Urmey served was compiled from C. V. Anthony, *Fifty Years of Methodism* (San Francisco: Methodist Book Concern, 1901) ,and Urmey family records: Amador (1855), Alameda (1856), Santa Clara Circuit (1858), Martinez (1859), Downieville (1860), Sacramento (H Street, 1861), Suisun (1863), Folsom/Auburn (1865), Woodland (1871), North San Juan (c 1872), Vallejo (1873), Nevada City (1876), Chico (1878), Oroville (1879), Walnut Creek, (1880), Gilroy (1884), San Francisco (Powell Street, 1886, 1896 & 1897), Pacific Grove (1893). He left the ministry temporarily to serve as a customs officer in San Francisco from about 1866 to 1870.

7: MUS, 19; Thomas was admitted in 1838 into the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in western New York State.

8: Emma Thomas. “To Mary” (a New York friend). May 10, 1855; quoted in MUS, 4.

9: *The California Christian Advocate* (microfilm), Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley; C. V. Anthony, 77 & 149.

10: Louis B. Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier* (New York: Harper & Brother, 1955, 175; Carl F. Price, “The Methodist Book Concern,” in *One Hundred and One Methodist Stories*, New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1938 reprinted at www.nyc-architecture.com/GRP/GRP023.htm (accessed 03/03/2011).

11: MUS, 61-62.

12: Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier*, 132.

13: MUS, 28, 130 and 6; “Tribute to the California Troubadour.” *California Southland*, July 1923, 8.

14: Albert Shumate, *Rincon Hill and South Park: San Francisco's Early Fashionable Neighborhood* (Sausalito: Windgate Press, 1988), 17. Gertrude Atherton quoted in Shumate, 34.

15: C. V. Anthony, 231-232; MUS, 8-9.

16: *The Day That I Was Born*, 17.

17: MUS., 20.

18: RBV, 2.

19: RBV, 3.

20: Jeff C. Riddle, *The Indian History of the Modoc War and the Causes That Led To It* (privately printed: 1914; reprinted San Jose, CA: Urion Press: 1974, 1988), esp., 230-232; Robert J. Nixon, *Modoc War: A Brief and Authentic History* (Yreka, CA: Siskiyou County Historical Society & Siskiyou County Museum, 2002), 6 – 9.

21: Riddle, 232; Nixon, 6; quotation from C. V. Anthony, 150.

22: MUS, 20.

23: RBU, 7; quotation, RBU, 8.

24: Quotations from MUS, 19 & 33. The lines were published as “An Epitaph” in Clarence Thomas Urmy, *A Rosary of Rhyme* (San Francisco: Joseph Winterburn & Co., 1884), 69. On the relationship of mother and son: “Tributes to the California Troubadour,” 8.

25: Harold S. Jacoby’s *Pacific: Yesterday and the Day Before That* (Grass Valley, CA: Comstock Bonanza Press, 1989). The school in San Jose began as California Wesleyan College in 1851 and was changed the following year to the University of the Pacific. In about 1896 UOP absorbed Napa College under a plan that moved the Napa president to San Jose to become president of the consolidated institution. In 1911 the name was changed to College of the Pacific, and in 1924 the college relocated to Stockton. In 1961 the name “University of the Pacific” was restored. Clarence Urmy’s degree and the commencement program are in SSC. .

26: MUS, 58.

27: Clarence Urmy, “Some Ethics of Verse-Writing,” *The Writer*, July 1901, 99.

28: RBU, 21 – 22.

29: Details of Clarence Urmy’s career, CSL. Also, “Clarence Urmy is Called By Death,” San Jose *Mercury-Herald*, June 3, 1923, 1, and “Death Calls Clarence Urmy of Saratoga,” *Saratoga Star*, June 7, 1923, 1. Only a portion of Clarence Urmy’s correspondence with his family survives in the CSL and SSC collections, but Mabel Urmy Sears alludes to the continuing correspondence among the family in her manuscript, “A Troubadour Sings.” Mabel Urmy married Frederick Seares, an astronomer, who taught at the University of Missouri and later at the Mount Wilson observatory near Pasadena. W. S. Urmy obituary, *Oakland Tribune*, June 5, 1907, 4.

30: MUS, 25.

31: MUS, 51-52; quotation, MUS, 59; Mary Bowden Carroll, *Ten Years in Paradise: Leaves from A Society Reporter’s Note-Book* (San Jose, CA: Press of Popp & Hogan, 1903), 170-172. Eugene T. Sawyer, *History of Santa Clara County, California* (Los Angeles, CA: Historic Record Co., 1922), 237. Sawyer called Urmy “a power for good in the music department.”

32: MUS, 54 & 101.

33: MUS, 21.

34: “He owned it all”: MUS, 39.

35: Quotations from “Dusk,” *Rosary of Rhyme*, 10 and “California in June,” 24. For other examples in this book see especially “September Light,” 11, and “A Twilight Song,” 26.

36: Quotation from MUS, p 21. The copy of *A Rosary of Rhyme* that Urmy apparently inscribed for the New York Public Library can be seen at Google Books.com.

37: “Coming Down Mount Tamalpais” has been reprinted hundreds of times, but often as individual stanzas. See for example, Tom Killon & Gary Snyder, *Tamalpais Walking: Poetry, History & Prints* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2009), 77-78.

38: Daniel Clark., *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood, 1890-1915* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 15-18.

39: Sawyer, *History of Santa Clara County*, 237; Rockwell D. Hunt, *California and the Californian* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1926, vol 5), 176; Edwin Markham, ed., *California the Wonderful* (New York: Heart’s International Library, 1914), 366. As an example of other notices see *A Dictionary of American Authors*. Fifth edition (New York: Hughton Mufflin, Co., 1904); *Atlanta Constitution*, February 2, 1902, 18; *Current Literature*, Vol XXIII, No 4, April 1898, 304-305; *Elgin, Scotland Courant and Courier*, June 18, 1915 as reprinted in the San Jose *Mercury Herald*, July 19, 1915; *New York Times*, as reprinted in the *Oakland Tribune*, July 7, 1912, 7; Howard V. Sutherland. “To Clarence Urmy.” March 2, 1901, CLS Box 461, Folder 38; and, *California Southland*, July 1923, 8. San Francisco columnist John D. Barry was one of several writers who remarked on Urmy’s modesty: “Ways of the World,” San Francisco *Chronicle*, June 16, 1930, 20.

40: “The art school” is defined in Robert J. Scholnick, *Edmund Clarence Stedman* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 52-53. It stood in contrast to the “dramatic school” of Browning, and at least in attempt,

Matthew Arnold. For comparison to other poets such as Swinburne and Sidney Lanier: "Clarence Urmey, The California Troubadour," *Old West March* 1930, 8

41: Edmund Clarence Stedman, *An American Anthology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1900), reprinted at www.bartleby.com, 457 & 459-460; Scholnick, 100-101.

42: During a 1911 visit to Berkeley, California Santayana delivered "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" in the Philosophical Union at the University of California. George Santayana, James Seaton, ed., *The Genteel Tradition In American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2009), 4. For a historical perspective on the utilitarian origins of American gentility see Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 567- 575 & 715-717. Malcolm Cowley, "The Revolt Against Gentility" in *After the Genteel Tradition* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1937, 1964), 11-12

43: In criticizing Urmey's poetry I have drawn on Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition*, 7; San Jose *Mercury-Herald*, June 3, 1923, 1. Urmey called himself "simply a writer of verses": *Atlanta Constitution*, February 2, 1902, 18.

44: Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover, 1996 (originally 1920)), 12, 37 & 293. Turner points out that "the unequal rate of advance compels us to distinguish the frontier into the trader's frontier, the rancher's frontier, or the miner's frontier, and the farmer's frontier," which suggests as well frontiers for the preacher or poet.

45: Urmey's view on art and free verse in MUS, 23, 46, 82 & 84.

46: Mabel Urmey Seares emphasized her family's American heritage and repeatedly wrote of her brother's desire to pass them on. The transmission of such values is a recurring theme of "A Troubadour Sings." See, for example, MUS, 34, 64, 76-77, 82, 112, 129, 130 & 139. Clarence Urmey's sense of liberty is reflected in George Santayana, "English Liberty in America," in Martin A. Coleman, ed., *The Essential Santayana*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009, especially pp 541-544, 547. Originally published in *Character and Opinion in the United States: With Reminiscences of William James and Josiah Royce and Academic Life in America*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920, pp 192-233. Though he didn't refer to Santayana, the transmission of a liberty of English origins (and other aspects of British culture) is the theme of Louis B. Wright's *Culture on the Moving Frontier*; for example, 241. The emphasis on "English" liberty does some disservice to the American genius for promoting establishing liberty, especially through the creation of voluntary associations, such as churches, lodges, learned societies, private education and charitable projects and institutions. For that important part of the picture, see Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 469-479.

47: "The largest orchard" is from Yvonne Jacobson, *Passing Farms: Enduring Values: California's Santa Clara Valley*. (Cupertino, CA: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1884), 18; Urmey's appreciation of immigrants is in MUS, 77.

48: MUS, 89-102; "hayseed" quotation, 102.

49: MUS, 80 & 107.

50: SSC, box 3, folder 20.

51: Sawyer, *History of Santa Clara County*, 182; "The Story of the San Jose Pageant & Official Program," Luna Park, June 1-2, 1917, in Special Collections, San Jose State University archives.

52: San Francisco *Chronicle*, December 8, 1918, 1; *California Christian Advocate*, December 19, 1918; *Out West Magazine*, March 1930, 8. Urmey's poem on the same theme, "the Dove of Peace," using the Rondeau Villon form, appeared in the San Jose *Mercury-Herald*, November 17, 1918, 25.

53: "Jubilate Deo," 1892 *Book of Common Prayer*, 14. Regarding the secular outlook of other poets, in contrast to Urmey's religious outlook, see Willard Spiegelman, *How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10 - 11.

54: "Christmas Music," *Ladies Home Journal*, April 15, 1912. An article on Eastern music followed on March 3, 1914.

55: MUS, 108.

56: San Jose *Mercury-Herald*, June 3, 1923, 1; June 5, 1923, 4. Sarah Estelle Hammond Greathead, *The Story of An Inspiring Past: San Jose State Teachers College from 1862-1928* (San Jose, CA: San Jose State Teachers College, 1928). 126-127.

57: Hundreds of Urmey's reviews, especially from San Jose's Victory Theater, are in the Clarence Urmey collection at the CSL boxes 463-469.

58: Clarence Urmey, "The Old Willows of the Alameda, *San Jose Mercury-Herald*, September 9, 1917, 13 and "Old and New Streets of San Jose," February 3, 1918, 13-14; and "San Jose As A Book Town," August 12, 1917, 13; and "Mary and Her Boy" (poem), December 23, 1917, 1

59: MUS, p 24. The canticle quoted is the *Venite*, found on pp 7-8 in the 1789 *Book of Common Prayer* authorized by the Episcopal Church, the edition that Clarence Urmey owned; *The Pacific Churchman*, vol. LVIII, no. 12 (July 1923), 7-8.

60: Janice Paull, ed., "Trinity's History," an unpublished digest of vestry minutes and documents, 9; MUS, p 108; Leroy V. Brant, "Clarence Urmey Immortal," *San Jose Mercury Herald*, June 4, 1923; MUS, 25, 46 & 53; *The Pacific Churchman*, vol. XLVII, no. 6 (January 1912), 2. In appreciation a group of choir boys presented Urmey with a library table for his Saratoga home. They had made the table in the wood shop at Horace Mann School—from an undated clipping, CSL, Box 456.

61: MUS, 104. New York notebooks, Clarence Urmey collection, CSL, Box 458

62: MUS, 108.

63: Clarence Urmey was active in the Episcopal Diocese of California. In 1980 an administrative division created the Diocese of El Camino Real, extending along the Central Coast San Luis Obispo to San Jose and Palo Alto, including the churches where Urmey served.

64: Quotations from *The California Review*, vol 2 No 5 (June 1912), Sunnyvale Historical Museum archives, file 10, Box 115; Mary Jo Ingnoffo, *Sunnyvale: From City of Destiny to Heart of the Silicon Valley*, Cupertino, CA: De Anza History Center, 1994, 17 & 35.

65: *The Pacific Churchman*, vol XLVII, no. 6, (January 1912), 2-3; Anna Berry. "To Mabel Urmey Seares." June 18, 1923, CSL, Box 462, Folder 18.

66: "Missionary Work—Report of Board of Missions," Appendix E, *Journal of the Sixty-fourth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of California*, 1914; *Sunnyvale Standard*, March 23, 1913, 10. The Clarence Urmey memorial cross continued in use at Trinity Cathedral as this was written and with the permission of the Very Rev. David Bird, it was carried in procession at St. Thomas Church, Sunnyvale, during 2011, the parish's centennial year.

67: "Death Calls Clarence Urmey of Saratoga," *Saratoga Star*, June 7, 1923, 1; Urmey's laughter: *San Jose Mercury Herald*, June 16, 1924, 1.

68: The description of Urmey in Saratoga comes from an undated clipping in SSC, a letter to the *San Jose Mercury-Herald*, circa June 1923; *Saratoga Star*, June 7, 1923, p 1 See also, Florence R. Cunningham, *Saratoga's First Hundred Years*, ed. Frances L. Fox (Fresno, CA: Panorama West Books, 1967, 1985), 268-270. Urmey wrote "The Blossom Way" for Saratoga's Festival: Annette Stransky, Saratoga Historical Foundation. "To Gage McKinney." April 5, 2011 (e-mail).

69: RBU, 10; *San Jose Mercury-Herald*, June 3, 1923, 1, June 5, 1; *Oakland Tribune*, June 4, 1923, 10.

70: "Tribute Paid Clarence Urmey," *San Jose Mercury-Herald*, June 16, 1930; *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16, 1930, p 20.

71: *San Jose Mercury Herald*, June 5, 1923, 1.

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