

MARDEN CLARK

## GOD'S PLENTY

For Bishop Leon Clark\*

\* *Killed when a grain-filled silo burst.*

I

The harvest poured til you could bear  
No more, till you  
Could neither know nor care.

Immersed: the word rings clean and true,  
Immersed you in  
God's plenty that cost us you.

The best harvest you had tasted  
But a great belly  
Burst and a good man wasted.

Great concrete gates swung wide, no doubt  
But not to let  
You in: the harvest out.

You took full measure of His blessings  
And left  
To us the sad assessings.

\* \* \*

Every way I think or say  
It comes out  
Bitter irony:

Under the harvest yourself desired.

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Why?

The question teases on the edge of sense  
Suspends darkly  
Over dark parentheses

And we can only wonder. . .

II

When our father took us out to see what you had done  
With Deep Creek, out over the ridge past Bear Hollow  
To look down on rich green pasture where only sagebrush  
Interrupted by an occasional chokecherry or serviceberry  
Had grown, the hillside green sloping away toward the creek,  
Cattle near the bottoms belly deep in green by a clump of trees  
Beside the stream—a poet's pastoral dream, including the backdrop:  
First the pasture land sloping up and away, then deeper scrub-oak  
green  
Then pines covering all the steepening slopes,  
Climbing fast now, to the ragged stretches of the Wasatch range  
Defining our valley, both bounds and character,  
All the way up Monday Town (where no town was)  
Up past First Hollow, where I'd tipped my first header box over  
And been buried in harmless headings,  
Past rust-brown silhouettes of old headers and combines,  
Outline history of our dry-farm struggles,  
Past alfalfa on both sides of Monday Town gulch  
(He had to stop and wade with us out through it  
And out through wheat further on, both wondrously green  
Against my memories of six-horse teams trudging in dust  
To pull two-bottom plows along these stretching slopes  
Through almost any of my growing-up summers)  
Up and over Bear Hollow ridge and down through the hollow,  
Fallow that year, on up and over to all that green.

Outside the car, as our children scattered through the green,  
He stood and looked, stretched out his arms,  
Moved them in gentle arc,  
Then turned and looked at us, softly sharp, for long moments  
To see if we were glowing too.

An hour we stood and talked,  
Re-lived long summers of clearing and burning brush  
And burning ourselves  
And watching helplessly burning wheat  
Under the unjust sun  
And spreading bait along the squirrel-ravaged periphery  
And finding the sickly pale and acrid green of stink weed patches;  
Re-lived the early autumns of Uncle Carlos skinning header teams  
Along side hills no plow should even have touched,  
We marveling at the skill and at the stream of expletives  
When chain came off or canvas carriers clogged;  
Remembered old Brother Johansen and his threshing machines  
The slip of headings under our feet  
The trick father taught us of levering with knee  
Sewed sacks of grain onto wagon or truck  
The marvel of Mother's cooking for thirty threshing hands  
The first combine, that made such meals obsolete  
The first crawler cat, to pull the combine and to pull  
The first disc plow, that left twelve feet of new-turned soil  
Our slow discoveries about steep-slope pastures  
And how alfalfa holds moisture on gentler slopes  
And builds soil toward the best hay in the valley

Remembered all this—and saw the deepening glow  
In his eyes when he saw the answering glow  
In ours.

He turned, stretched his arms again in that slow  
Arc of benediction, full circle now  
To enclose us all,  
Saw all those years  
Fulfilled beneath his arms,  
Fulfilled in all of us,  
Fulfilled at last and most in you.

### III

. . . And satisfy ourselves in wonder  
At God's plenty that gave us you  
And that you gave us  
God's plenty in your family  
God's plenty in the memories  
God's plenty under the arc  
Of Father's arms.