

Unconquerable

Obstacles always from the start—
Stone growing under weighted landscapes in primordial
Matter, whose spirit flows leanly into trees, the crabbed
Roots groping for toehold while gnarled limbs breathe
Hardness from rocks into man, original and all
Following, adamantine from mold, crossing
Equators and longitudinal lines of mind
In exploration of lands unknown, forever
Reborn in the sea change worked by earth's power
Between beckoning and opposing poles.
All are discoverers who suck unbreathed air.
The weak and rejected of another world grow stone hard here,
Made molten first in frustration, then congealing
Into flexing forms through the cold fury of work.
However they came here, all are transfigured:
From weakness to strength, from convicts to conquerors,
Serfs to survivors, meeting demands of the land.
Straddled between fire and ice these lands decree
Merging of desert and sea, of man and old habitants.
Building again the bridge leading to other worlds.
Replete with its heroes is history: resilient
Woman in wilderness childbirth, leaching legends
Of iron from hard land and looping a clevis
Of tenderness round every plow pulled in her man's world—
Dissolving gender in time's common cause
Like earth pulling to center from its separate poles.
The land is demanding—promises hard to keep—
From its pioneers, and no giving not total:
Rewarding unconquerable spirits, at long last,
With vision, turned inward, of enduring stone
Singing through fragrant forests of a sweet-won rest.

—Edward L. Hart