In the Past

By Trumbull Stickney

There lies a somnolent lake
   Under a noiseless sky,
   Where never the mornings break
   Nor the evenings die.

Mad flakes of colour
   Whirl on its even face
   Iridescent and streaked with pallour;
   And, warding the silent place,

The rocks rise sheer and gray
   From the sedgeless brink to the sky
   Dull-lit with the light of pale half-day
   Thro’ a void space and dry.

And the hours lag dead in the air
   With a sense of coming eternity
   To the heart of the lonely boatman there:
   That boatman am I,

I, in my lonely boat,
   A waif on the somnolent lake,
   Watching the colours creep and float
   With the sinuous track of a snake.

Now I lean o’er the side
   And lazy shades in the water see,
   Lapped in the sweep of a sluggish tide
   Crawled in from the living sea;

And next I fix mine eyes,
   So long that the heart declines,
   On the changeless face of the open skies
   Where no star shines;

And now to the rocks I turn,
   To the rocks, around
   That lie like walls of a circling sun
   Wherein lie bound

The waters that feel my powerless strength
   And meet my homeless oar
   Labouring over their ashen length
   Never to find a shore.

But the gleam still skims
   At times on the somnolent lake,
   And a light there is that swims
   With the whirl of a snake;
And tho' dead be the hours i' the air,
    And dayless the sky,
The heart is alive of the boatman there:
That boatman am I.