

WASTE LAND

Madison Julius Cawein

a poem

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Briar and fennel and chincapin,
And rue and ragweed everywhere;
The field seemed sick as a soul with sin,
Or dead of an old despair,
Born of an ancient care.

The cricket's cry and the locust's whirr,
And the note of a bird's distress,
With the rasping sound of the grasshopper,
Clung to the loneliness
Like burrs to a trailing dress.

So sad the field, so waste the ground,
So curst with an old despair,
A woodchuck's burrow, a blind mole's mound,
And a chipmunk's stony lair,
Seemed more than it could bear.

So lonely, too, so more than sad,
So droning-lone with bees –
I wondered what more could Nature add
To the sum of its miseries ...
And *then*—I saw the trees.

Skeletons gaunt that gnarled the place,
Twisted and torn they rose —
The tortured bones of a perished race
Of monsters no mortal knows,
They startled the mind's repose.

And a man stood there, as still as moss,
A lichen form that stared;
With an old blind hound that, at a loss,
Forever around him fared
With a snarling fang half bared.

I looked at the man; I saw him plain;
Like a dead weed, gray and wan,
Or a breath of dust. I looked again –
And man and dog were gone,
Like wisps of the graying dawn. . . .

Were they a part of the grim death there –
Ragweed, fennel, and rue?
Or forms of the mind, an old despair,
That there into semblance grew
Out of the grief I knew?



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