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## Gideon's Camp

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# Gideon's Camp . . .

. . . John A. Eastman

## Notes on 'Gideon's Camp:'

*Gideon's Camp* is frankly a series of short poems held together by the common thread of the concept, Quest. These remarks are not an attempt to clarify the Quest, nor to defend its consistency with an elaborate paraphrase, but are meant to help the reader avoid a certain initial confusion by erecting a few rather obvious guideposts toward greater appreciation of the journey.

First of all, let us assume that the Quest is an ascent from the river bed to the valley, for young traveler begins with nothing; he does not know mountains exist. As he begins, he has an assurance of the light that he can only *feel*, and his journey will be a series of felt impressions. Intuitively, he will experience the fagged-out horror of the urbanized community, the song of aloneness, and the cruel truth of inhumanity. But he will also become aware of joy, song for its own desperate self, and the light that does not cease to call softly. At the camp, his host, fatal with knowledge, plays the intellectual game with the usual symptoms. After a pathetic fit of erotic desperation, the traveler realizes the Quest is over and enters resignedly into Gideon's Camp to assume the rational mind. . . . *J. M.*

## Gideon's Camp . . .

Scene: The interior of a tent. Lying on a cot in one corner is a bearded man (M). A flap opens and a servant enters with a youth (P). M rises, and the servant goes out.

P. Traveling a rutty road  
From dawn to noon to now,  
I saw at dusk this village—  
The first, it seems, in ages—  
and ask if I may spend the night  
in human company.

M. Your face is scratched and weary.  
Who are you and where are you from?

P. The name is not important  
But the place is infamous.  
A refugee from Goliath, I am,  
God pity me.

M. What?

P. Setting out for Gideon's camp I found  
Higher airs made blood a beating thing  
Alive at last and though the sun was not the while in sight—  
Ah, my comrade, I could feel it there.

Sight set for Gideon's camp I walked  
Where balanced needles twinkled quivered pointed  
Into foggy sulphur smelling glens and though I gasped and throb-  
bed in bog—  
Ah, my comrade, I could hear birds sing.

Pushing on for Gideon's camp I slipped  
On glowing boulder coals while hotter yet my blood  
Thau these and though I shrieked in moving to get up—  
Ah, my comrade, I can bear not this.

When I'm there at Gideon's camp I think  
My eyes will not be customed to the light  
I find and though the sun is not the while in sight—  
Ah, my comrade, I will make it yet!

M. But Gideon's fire to you  
Will be no warmer than Goliath's.

P. Deep under  
Sifting an eon's pile of bleached chowder  
I probed a million tombs with the one tired agony hissing  
A dry whisper through the dark  
. . . Maybe in the next cool one.

Close about  
Milling in a generation's throng of faggedout faces

I probed a million vanities with the one impressive agony grinding  
A rasp over the wheel  
. . . Maybe in the next hot one.

High up  
Breathing a light year's cosmic winds  
I probed a million airs and vacuums with the one desperate  
scream ripping  
A hole in my throat  
  
. . . and Gideon answered.

M. The youth of you astounds me—  
Devils play about your ears  
For know that this is Gideon's camp,  
And you are not welcome here.

P. (*Pausing . . . then, aside*)

I swallowed air  
Before there was much water  
And, dwelling in the arid vapor-volumes  
(rushed as far as the horizon),  
My tongue, a cranial appendix,  
Burst now and then with desert song  
Between impassive sucking.  
I lived, as was my duty,  
And this before the water.

M. Devils do not cease  
Their war upon your ears,  
For I have spoken:  
Go away from here!

P. (*aside*)

A bubble or an odd, improper fusion  
Was enough to cool the soft manfence of beating blood  
Into an iron, binding rope . . .  
Back there in the sheltered, throbbing darkness  
I each year on piling year

Unti! a score of iron turns had wound me to my waist,  
Each weave more tempered link on link  
And now no holes between.

You will not see an outward rage  
That better men engage to make them better;  
But hurricanes are zephyrs as compared  
To Furies' scratch and tear that rips inside.

M. Since I cannot rid my tent of you  
Please tell me the nature of Gideon's call—  
Did he shout? Did he signal?  
Or whisper?

P. Aye, he whispered.  
For word summons further by whisper  
And deeper, and lasts longer,  
Than loud ranting.  
What is there that is beautiful that shouts?  
Love?  
God?  
Truth?  
Always the tinkle has outsounded the blast.

M. (aside)

Ah, see if there is substance of two fingers to hold up  
In praise and glory  
Of mutual stimulation.

Thumb back through musty, crinkling calendars—  
When did the final human being die?  
And did they mob his hearse  
Or chant his sodden body to the sky?

When will we live again,  
Be resurrected from the vast demesne?

No, there is no substance of two fingers to hold up—  
Metallic clanking  
Sounds from the amputation.

P. Speak so I may hear.

M. After the halfdwindle wreck of the flesh  
Of ten million, ah, ten billion more  
The you and the I of us may crush lesser lives of us,  
After ten million, ah, ten billion more.

The future divine of us is human sign of us  
And after ten million, ah, ten billion more,  
May blossom or wilt from us, Gods from the mad of us  
When ten million, ah, ten billion more  
Are all gone.

P. Be kind, O be kind  
To my kind and my kindred  
Come kinder than yet the cold clasp of your curse  
Cut a kingdom of kitchen  
Conspiring to kill us  
Bequeath to my comrades in coming a coffin—

O the powder dry corpse in  
The kiln of my soul.

M. Your shaven face betrayed you  
To my eyes before your speech—  
You are not one of us.  
Lord, how I loathe this!  
I cannot avalanche myself to the  
Lee side of the mountain mind.  
But if I must prattle with you  
Let it not be a game.  
Think on this, dolt,  
And then be silent:

Beyond all else that is or believes to be  
Our God is a syllogism  
And if you cannot argue It  
You carry a lost soul and need to have it cut out  
On the high altar we have here.

Compassion we crucified,  
Medieval as your mind,

And laughter, being rather crude,  
Except titters for delicate things.  
There is more, but your eyes are fogged already.  
Come with a heavy headed rebuttal,  
If you have one.

P. (pausing)

I woud but, sir, of no avail to myself—  
I am in Gideon's camp, and my mouth is closed.

## Comment on Human Winters . . .

Now come the gray dawns,  
Now the time of sleeping mirth  
And hollow laughter,  
Where blase chatter and bright music  
Fill the emptiness.

Within, cocoons of warmth distill  
The talk and soundings into meaningless noise;  
Without, the icy armor is silk lined—  
Protection from the cold.

The hibernation begins :  
A yawn; a smile at a passing thought;  
A settling adjustment to position;  
A nod; and last, a frozen attitude

No notice taken of gray dawns.  
A butterfly appears in spring,  
But now—a long and dazed sleep.

. . . Mary Lou Lemon