

THE HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

"He was a friend to man, and lived in a house by the side of the road"
(Homer, *Iliad*, vi.14-15, of the slain Axylos.)

(I am indebted to my Classical Mods tutor, Dr J. B. Hainsworth of New College, Oxford, for this reference.)

There are hermit souls that live withdrawn
in the peace of their self content;
There are souls like stars that dwell apart,
in a fellowless firmament,
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths
where highways never ran;
But let me live by the side of the road
and be a friend to man.

Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by -
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in a scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban; -
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I see from the house by the side of the road
By the side of the highway of life,
The men who press with the ardour of hope,
The men who faint with the strife.
But I turn not away from their smiles nor their tears -
Both parts of an infinite plan;
Let me live in a house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I know there are brook-gladdened meadows ahead
And mountains of wearsome height;
The road passes on through the long afternoon
And stretches away to the night,
But still I rejoice when the travellers rejoice,
And weep with the strangers that moan,
Nor live in my house by the side of the road
Like a man that dwells alone.

Let me live in my house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by.
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong,
Wise, foolish - so am I.
Then why should I sit in a scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban ?
Let me live in my house by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Sam Walter Foss (1858-1911).