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Can These Bones Live?

J. H. McCANDLESS

At least the furniture is familiar. Friends
being in all things non-essential slow to change
cling still to these rude benches, and arrange
benches and bones alike to fit the ends
of faded faith, and all the outworn gear
of men who talked with God within this hall.
Now these stone walls cry out for voices: all
is silence, and the speech is silence, here
where even silence once was speech, and stones could rest.

Restless, we probe the pottage of our souls,
finding no birthright, seeking to compose
disordered minds in primly ordered rows.
Not God, but peace and quiet are the goals,
and strength to bear our share of social sins
that man no longer shuns; to mitigate
the pain of our accepted low estate
with old, well-watered wine in modern skins,
and soothe the crying stone within each breast.

Now all is method, and there's magic in it:
technique to turn the times, or turn
us with the times. For us no bush will burn,
no voice invade the unconsuming minute
of our collected piety. Alone,
we worship our own shadows, and contrive
new platitudes to bring the dead alive,
ransack mankind to flesh the bleaching bone,
yet lack the power to save, or force to damn.

Afraid, we dare not strike the rock; events
dam up our thirst. Within these aging walls
we whistle, shaken reeds, against the squalls
of brutal time, and history's grim fence.

Yet these walls speak, rebuking our dry bones
that rattle in whatever winds may blow
about the room. Be still. Let them cry out who know
that Christ may yet come down, and of these stones
raise up new children unto Abraham.