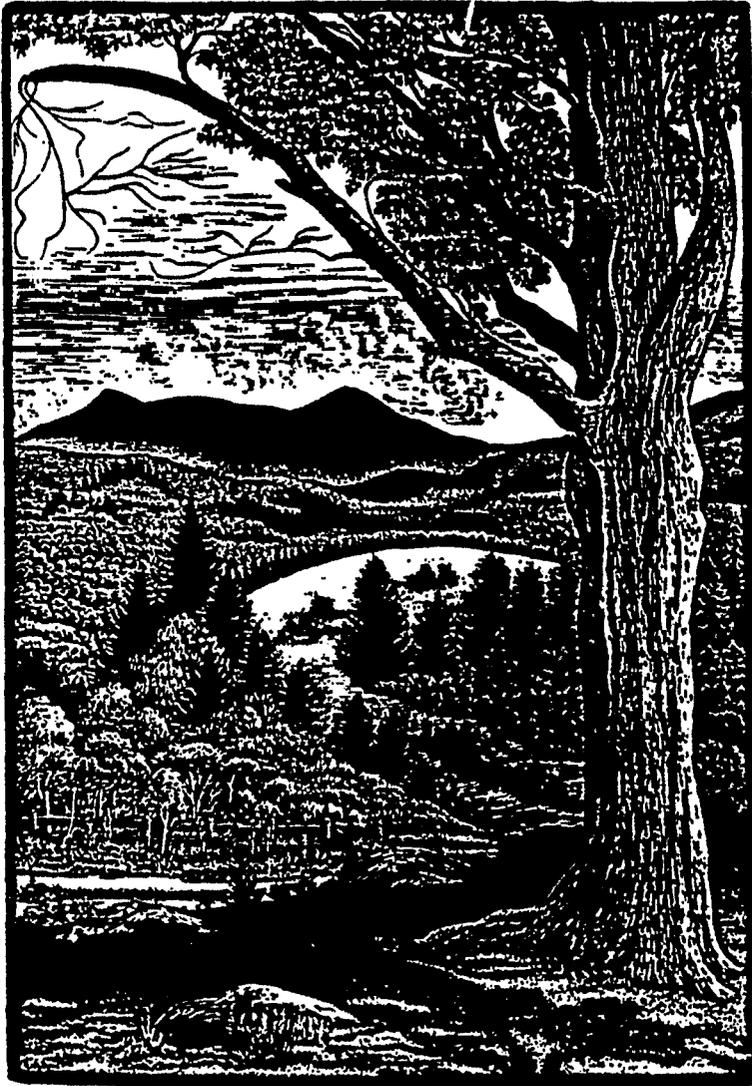


# The Mooneys

*The poet, Jeanne Robert Foster, 1879-1970, was a fashion model turned literary editor of the American Review of Reviews. A friend of the Irish painter John Yeats, his son William Butler Yeats, and New York lawyer John Quinn, Jeanne Foster traveled Europe collecting contemporary art for Quinn, meeting along the way James Joyce, A.E. (Russell), T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Ford Madox Ford. Foster's poem "The Mooneys" is based on a Famine-era Irish family she knew growing up in the Adirondack Mountains.*



I saw them every Sunday when we drove to church,  
Beyond the schoolhouse, up the slanting hill  
Beside the creek, and then a level space  
Before you saw the house set to the right  
Back from the road in the lush meadow grass.  
And every Sunday she was sitting there  
Dressed in a decent faded basque and skirt  
With her hands folded in her ample lap.  
And on the other side of the scant porch,  
In checkered shirt thrown open at the throat,  
Bill Mooney sat with pipe between his teeth  
And chair tipped back to balance with his weight.  
Every Sunday from late spring to fall, they sat there  
Like two stones, or like two trees rooted in earth.

"Father," I said, "do they not go to church?"  
"They're Catholics," father said beneath his breath.  
"But don't they drive to Mass with their own kind?"  
"No," father said. "The priest comes here to see them.  
French Louis says they will not go to church;  
They do not want to leave the house for fear  
It might burn down, or cattle should get out,  
Or other damage come. They go to town sometimes  
On Saturday nights and bargain for their groceries  
At the store. Folks say they're surely touched.  
French Louis knows them better than I do.  
He says they came from Ireland years ago  
When there was famine. For a while they worked  
In logging camps, or anywhere, and saved  
Enough to buy their farm; then land was cheap.  
They kept on working till they built a house;  
The neighbors made a bee to raise their barn.

"I've asked the Mooneys if they wouldn't come  
And visit us out on our farm someday.  
They said, 'I know you'll think we are queer folks.  
We feel sometimes that we are deep in sin;  
We're happy to stay home, sit on the stoop,  
And look out on our fields of oats and rye  
And watch the cows down in the pasture lot,  
And sheep and the young lambs up on the hill.  
It's strange to you who never wanted land  
To call your own that we are filled with fear  
That some old spell might sweep it all away.  
Sometimes I take a sod the plow has turned  
And hold it in my hands and think of years  
When not a cackling hen or bit of turf  
Could be our very own.

"We know it's wrong —  
To never leave our land and cows and sheep  
To kneel in church — but still we say our prayers  
And ask God to forgive us for our fault.  
We feel that surely He will understand."

**Jeanne Robert Foster**