

PEDDLER

(If it had not been for these things, I might have live out my life, talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. . . —Vanzetti to Judge Thayer.)

But for these things I might live out my life
On corners telling pale, disheartening slaves
Diluted truths. I might proclaim that strife
Of man with man is sin, that justice waves
A ragged cloth and holds unbalanced scales.
To die unmarked, unknown, was my poor lot;
But for these things my words were foolish tales
A peddler tells to men about to rot.
By dying I have trimmed a smoking lamp
That still lights footsteps down a narrow hall;
My pain has been sustaining fuel in damp,
Unlovely places where the ghastly pall
Of hopelessness is cast. My spirit sings,
For in my tomb a broken lantern swings.

—*Bethuel Matthew Webster, Jr.*