

# **Palmyra (1st edition)**

Thomas Love Peacock



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## Thomas Love Peacock

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---anankta ton pantan huperbal-  
lonta chronon makaran.

Pind[ar. Hymn. frag. 33].

As the mountain–torrent rages,  
Loud, impetuous, swift, and strong,  
So the rapid streams of ages  
Rolls with ceaseless tide along.  
Man's little day what clouds o'ercast!  
How soon his longest day is past!  
All–conquering DEATH, in solemn date unfurl'd,  
Comes, like the burning desert blast,  
    And sweeps him from the world.  
The noblest works of human pow'r  
In vain resist the fate–fraught hour;  
The marble hall, the rock–built tow'r,  
    Alike submit to destiny:  
OBLIVION's awful storms resound;  
The massy columns fall around;  
The fabric totters to the ground,  
    And darkness veils its memory!

'Mid SYRIA's barren world of sand,  
Where THEDMOR's marble wastes expand.  
Where DESOLATION, on the blasted plain,  
Has fix'd his adamantine throne,  
I mark, in silence and alone,  
His melancholy reign.  
These silent wrecks, more eloquent than speech,  
Full many a tale of awful note impart;  
Truths more sublime than bard or sage can teach  
This pomp of ruin presses on the heart.  
Whence rose that dim, mysterious sound,  
That breath'd in hollow murmurs round?  
As sweeps the gale  
Along the vale,  
Where many a mould'ring tomb is spread,  
Awe-struck, I hear,  
In fancy's ear,  
The voices of th' illustrious dead:  
As slow they pass along, they seem to sigh,  
"Man, and the works of man, are only born to die!"



As scatter'd round, a dreary space,  
Ye spirits of the wise and just!  
In reverential thought I trace  
The mansions of your sacred dust,  
Enthusiast FANCY, rob'd in light,  
Pours on the air her many-sparkling rays,  
Redeeming from OBLIVION's deep'ning night  
The deeds of ancient days.  
The mighty forms of chiefs of old,  
To VIRTUE dear, and PATRIOT TRUTH sublime,  
In feeble splendor I behold,  
Discover'd dimly through the mists of TIME,  
As through the vapours of the mountain-stream  
With pale reflection glows the sun's declining beam.



IV

Still as twilight's mantle hoary  
Spreads progressive on the sky,  
See, in visionary glory,  
Darkly–thron'd, they sit on high.  
But whose the forms, oh FAME, declare,  
That crowd majestic on the air?  
Bright Goddess! come, on rapid wings,  
To tell the mighty deeds of kings.  
Where art thou, FAME?  
Each honor'd name  
From thy eternal roll unfold:  
Awake the lyre,  
In songs of fire,  
To chiefs renown'd in days of old.  
I call in vain!  
The welcome strain  
Of praise to them no more shall sound:  
Their actions bright  
Must sleep in night,  
Till TIME shall cease his mystic round.  
The dazzling glories of their day  
The stream of years has swept away;  
Their names, that struck the foe with fear,  
Shall ring no more on mortal ear!

V

Yet faithful MEMORY's raptur'd eye  
Can still the godlike form descry,  
Of him, who, on EUPHRATES' shore,  
From SAPOR 's brow his blood–stain'd laurels tore,  
And bade the ROMAN banner stream unfurl'd;  
When the stern GENIUS of the startling waves  
Beheld on PERSIA s host of slaves  
Tumultuous ruin hurl'd!  
Meek SCIENCE too, and TASTE refin'd,  
The grave with deathless flow'rs have dress'd,  
Of him whose virtue–kindling mind  
Their ev'ry charm supremely bless'd;  
Who trac'd the mazy warblings of the lyre  
With all a critic's art, and all a poet's fire.

VI

Where is the bard, in these degen'rate days,  
To whom the muse the blissful meed awards,  
Again the dithyrambic song to raise,  
And strike the golden harp's responsive chords?  
Be his alone the song to swell,  
The all-transcendent praise to tell  
Of yon immortal form,  
That bursting through the veil of years,  
In changeless majesty appears,  
Bright as the sun-beams thro' the scatt'ring storm!  
What countless charms around her rise!  
What dazzling splendor sparkles in her eyes!  
On her radiant brow enshrin'd,  
MINERVA 's beauty blends with JUNO 's grace;  
The matchless virtues of her godlike mind  
Are stamp'd conspicuous on her angel-face.

VII

Hail, sacred shade, to NaATURE dear!  
Though sorrow clos'd thy bright career,  
Though clouds obscur'd thy setting day,  
Thy fame shall never pass away!  
Long shall the mind's unfading gaze  
Retrace thy pow'r's meridian blaze,  
When o'er ARABIAN deserts, vast and wild,  
And EGYPT s land, (where REASON 's wakeful eye  
First on the birth of ART and SCIENCE smil'd,  
And bade the shades of mental darkness fly)  
And o'er ASSYRIA 's many-peopled plains,  
By Justice led, thy conqu'ring armies pour'd,  
When humbled nations kiss'd thy silken chains,  
Or fled dismay'd from zABDAS ' victor-sword:  
Yet vain the hope to share the purple robe,  
Or snatch from ROMAN arms the empire of the globe.

**VIII**

Along the wild and wasted plain  
His veteran bands the ROMAN monarch led,  
And rolled his burning wheels o'er heaps of slain:  
The prowling chacal heard afar  
The devastating yell of war,  
And rush'd, with gloomy howl, to banquet on the dead!

**IX**

For succour to PALMYRA 's walls  
Her trembling subjects fled, confounded,  
But wide amid her regal halls  
The whirling fires resounded.  
Onward the hostile legions pour'd:  
Nor beauteous youth, nor helpless age,  
Nor female charms, by savage breasts ador'd,  
Could check the ROMAN 's barb'rous rage,  
Or blunt the murd'rous sword.  
Loud, long, and fierce, the voice of slaughter roar'd,  
The night-shades fell, the work of death was o'er,  
PALMYRA 's sun had set, to rise no more!

**X**

What mystic form, uncouth and dread,  
With wither'd cheek, and hoary head,  
Swift as the death-fire cleaves the sky,  
Swept on sounding pinions by?  
'Twas TIME: I know the FOE OF KINGS,  
His scythe, and sand, and eagle wings:  
He cast a burning look around,  
And wav'd his bony hand, and frown'd.  
Far from the spectre's scowl of fire  
FANCY's feeble forms retire,  
Her air-born phantoms melt away,  
Like stars before the rising day.

**XI**

Yes, all are flown!  
I stand alone,  
At ev'ning's calm and pensive hour,  
Mid wasted domes,  
And mould'ring tombs,  
The wrecks of vanity and pow'r.  
One shadowy tint enwraps the plain;  
No form is near, no sounds intrude,  
To break the melancholy reign  
Of silence and of solitude.  
How oft, in scenes like these, since Time began,  
With downcast eye has Contemplation trod,  
Far from the haunts of Folly, Vice, and Man,  
To hold sublime communion with her God!  
How oft, in scenes like these, the pensive sage  
Has mourn'd the hand of Fate, severely just,  
War's wasteful course, and Death's unsparing rage,  
And dark Oblivion, frowning in the dust!  
Has mark'd the tombs, that king's o'erthrown declare,  
Just wept their fall, and sunk to join them there!



XII

In yon proud fane, majestic in decay,  
How oft of old the swelling hymn arose,  
In loud thanksgiving to the Lord of Day,  
Or pray'r for vengeance on triumphant foes!  
    'Twas there, ere yet Aurelian's hand  
    Had kindled Ruin's smould'ring brand,  
    As slowly mov'd the sacred choir  
    Around the altar's rising fire,  
    The priest, with wild and glowing eye,  
    Bade the flow'r-bound victim die;  
    And while he fed the incense-flame,  
        With many a holy mystery,  
    Prophetic inspiration came  
        To teach th' impending destiny,  
    And shook his venerable frame  
        With most portentous augury!  
    In notes of anguish, deep and slow,  
    He told the coming hour of woe;  
    The youths and maids, with terror pale,  
    In breathless torture heard the tale,  
        And silence hung  
        On ev'ry tongue,  
    While thus the voice prophetic rung:

**XIII**

"Whence was the hollow scream of fear,  
Whose tones appall'd my shrinking ear?  
Whence was the modulated cry,  
That seem'd to swell, and hasten by?  
What sudden blaze illum'd the night?  
Ha! 'twas Destruction's meteor-light!  
Whence was the whirlwind's eddying breath?  
Ha! 'twas the fiery blast of Death!

**XIV**

See! the mighty God of Battle  
Spreads abroad his crimson train!  
Discord's myriad voices rattle  
O'er the terror-shaken plain.  
Banners stream, and helmets glare,  
Show'ring arrows hiss in air;  
Echoing through the darken'd skies,  
Wildly-mingling murmurs rise,  
The clash of splendor-beaming steel,  
The buckler ringing hollowly,  
The cymbal's silver-sounding peal,  
The last deep groan of agony,  
The hurrying feet  
Of wild retreat,  
The lengthening shout of victory!

**XV**

"O'er our plains the vengeful stranger  
Pours, with hostile hopes elate:  
Who shall check the coming danger?  
Who escape the coming fate?  
Thou! that through the heav'ns afar,  
When the shades of night retire,  
Proudly roll'st thy shining car,  
Clad in sempiternal fire!  
Thou! from whose benignant light  
Fiends of darkness, strange and fell,  
Urge their ebon-pinion'd flight  
To the central caves of hell!  
Sun ador'd! attend our call!  
Must thy favor'd people fall?  
Must we leave our smiling plains,  
To groan beneath the stranger's chains ?  
Rise, supreme in heav'nly pow'r,  
On our foes destruction show'r;  
Bid thy fatal arrows fly,  
Till their armies sink and die;  
Through their adverse legions spread  
Pale Disease, and with'ring Dread,  
Wild Confusion's fev'rish glare,  
Horror, Madness, and Despair!

**XVI**

"Woe to thy numbers fierce and rude,  
Thou madly-rushing multitude,  
Loud as the tempest that o'er ocean raves!  
Woe to the nations proud and strong,  
That rush tumultuously along,  
As rolls the foaming stream its long-resounding waves!  
As the noise of mighty seas,  
As the loudly-murmuring breeze,  
Shall gath'ring nations rush, a pow'rful band:  
Rise, God of Light, in burning wrath severe,  
And stretch, to blast their proud career,  
Thy arrow-darting hand!  
Then shall their ranks to certain~fate be giv'n,  
Then on their course Despair her fires shall cast,  
Then shall they fly, to endless ruin driv'n,  
As flies the thistle-down before the mountain-blast l

**XVII**

"Alas! in vain, in vain we call!  
The stranger triumphs in our fall!  
And Fate comes on, with ruthless frown,  
To strike Palmyra's splendor down.  
Urg'd by the steady breath of Time,  
The desert-whirlwind sweeps sublime,  
The eddyng sands in mountain-columns rise:  
Borne on the pinions of the gale,  
In one concenter'd cloud they sail;  
    Along the darken'd skies.  
It falls! it falls! on Thedmor's walls  
The whelming weight of ruin falls  
Th' avenging thunder-bolt is hurl'd,  
Her pride is blotted from the world,  
    Her name unknown in story:  
The trav'ller on her site shall stand,  
And seek, amid the desert-sand,  
    The records of her glory!  
Her palaces are crush'd, her tow'rs o'erthrown,  
Oblivion follows stern, and marks her for his own!"

**XVIII**

How oft, the festal board around,  
    These time-worn walls among,  
Has rung the full symphonious sound  
    Of rapture-breathing song!  
Ah! little thought the wealthy proud,  
When rosy pleasure laugh'd aloud,  
That here, amid their ancient land,  
    The wand'rer of the distant days  
    Should mark, with sorrow-clouded gaze,  
The mighty wilderness of sand;  
While not a sound should meet his ear,  
    Save of the desert-gales that sweep,  
In modulated murmurs deep,  
    The wasted graves above,  
Of those who once had revell'd here,  
    In happiness and love!

**XIX**

Short is the space to man assign'd  
    This earthly vale to tread  
He wanders, erring, weak, and blind,  
    By adverse passions led.  
Love, the balm of ev'ry woe,  
The dearest blessing man can know;  
Jealousy, whose pois'nous breath  
    Blasts affection's opining bud;  
Stern Despair, that laughs in death;  
    Black Revenge, that bathes in blood;  
Fear, that his form in darkness shrouds,  
    And trembles at the whisp'ring air;  
And Hope, that pictures on the clouds  
    Celestial visions, false, but fair;  
    All rule by turns:  
    To-day he burns  
With ev'ry pang of keen distress;  
    To-morrow's sky  
    Bids sorrow fly  
With dreams of promis'd happiness.



**XX**

From the earliest twilight-ray,  
That mark'd Creation's natal day,  
    Till yesterday's declining fire,  
Thus still have roll'd, perplex'd by strife,  
The many-clashing wheels of life,  
And still shall roll, till Time's last beams expire  
And thus, in ev'ry age, in ev'ry clime,  
While circling years shall fly,  
The varying deeds that mark the present time  
Will be but shadows of the days gone by.

**XXI**

Along the desolated shore,  
Where, broad and swift, Euphrates flows,  
The trav'ler's anxious eye can trace no more  
The spot where once the Queen of Cities rose.  
Where old Persepolis sublimely tow'r'd,  
In cedar-groves embow'r'd,  
A rudely-splendid wreck alone remains,  
The course of Fate no pomp or pow'r can shun  
Pollution tramples on thy giant-fanes,  
Oh City of the Sun!  
Fall'n are the Tyrian domes of wealth and joy,  
The hundred gates of Thebes, the tow'rs of Troy;  
In shame and sorrow pre-ordain'd to cease,  
Proud Salem met th' irrevocable doom;  
In darkness sunk the arts and arms of Greece,  
And the long glories of imperial Rome.

**XXII**

When the tyrants iron hand  
The mountain-piles of Memphis rais'd,  
That still the storms of angry Time defy,  
In self-adoring thought he gaz'd,  
And bade the massive labors stand,  
    Till Nature's self should die!;  
Presumptuous fool! the death-wind came,  
And swept away thy worthless name;  
And ages, with insidious flow,  
Shall lay those blood-bought fabrics low.  
Then shall the stranger pause, and oft be told,  
"Here stood the mighty Pyramids of old!"  
And smile, half-doubtful, when the tale he hears,  
That speaks the wonders of the distant years

**XXIII**

Though Night awhile usurp the skies,  
Yet soon the smiling Morn shall rise,  
    And light and life restore;  
Again the sun-beams gild the plain;  
The youthful day returns again,  
    But man returns no more.  
    Though Winter's frown severe  
    Deform the wasted year,  
Spring smiles again, with renovated bloom;  
    But what sweet Spring, with genial breath,  
    Shall chase the icy sleep of death,  
The dark and cheerless winter of the tomb ?  
    Hark! from the mansions of the dead,  
What thrilling sounds of deepest import spread I  
    Sublimely mingled with the eddying gale,  
Full on the desert-air these solemn accents sail:

**XXIV**

"Unthinking man! and cost thou weep,  
That clouds o'er cast thy little day?  
That Death's stern hands so quickly sweep  
Thy ev'ry earthly hope away?  
Thy rapid hours in darkness flow, '  
But well those rapid hours employ,  
And they shall lead from realms of woe  
To realms of everlasting joy.  
For though thy Father and thy God  
Wave o'er thy head his chast'ning rod,  
Benignantly severe,  
Yet future blessings shall repair,  
In tenfold measure, ev'ry care,  
That marks thy progress here.

**XXV**

"BOW THEN TO HIM, FOR HE IS GOOD,  
And loves the works His hands have made;  
In earth, in air, in fire, in flood,  
His parent-bounty shines display'd.  
BOW THEN TO HIM, FOR HE IS JUST,  
Though mortals scan His ways in vain;  
Repine not, children of the dust!  
For HE in mercy sends ye pain.  
BOW THEN TO HIM, FOR HE IS GREAT,  
And was, ere NATURE, TIME, and FATE,  
Began their mystic flight;  
And still shall be, when consummating flame  
Shall plunge this universal frame  
In everlasting night.  
BOW THEN TO HIM, the LORD of ALL.  
Whose nod bids empires rise and fall,  
EARTH, HEAV'N, and NATURE's SIRE;  
To HIM, Who, matchless and alone,  
Has fix'd in boundless space His throne,  
Unchang'd, unchanging still, while worlds and suns expire!"