

A Selection of Shorter Poems

Thomas Love Peacock

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Thomas Love Peacock

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Beyond the Sea

BEYOND the sea, beyond the sea,
My heart is gone, far, far from me;
And ever on its track will flee
My thoughts, my dreams, beyond the sea.

Beyond the sea, beyond the sea,
The swallow wanders fast and free:
Oh, happy bird! were I like thee,
I, too, would fly beyond the sea.

Beyond the sea, beyond the sea,
Are kindly hearts and social glee:
But here for me they may not be;
My heart is gone beyond the sea.

notes

A Bill for the Better Promotion of Oppression on the Sabbath Day

FORASMUCH as the Canter's and Fanatic's Lord
Sayeth peace and joy are by me abhorred;
And would fill each Sunday with gloom and pain
For all too poor his regard to obtain;
And forasmuch as the laws heretofore
Have not sufficiently squeezed the poor
Be it therefore enacted by Commons, King
And Lords, a crime for any thing
To be done on the Sabbath by any rank
Excepting the rich. No beer may be drank,
Food eaten, rest taken, away from home,
And each House shall a Sunday prison become;
And spies and jailers must carefully see,
Under severest penalty,
None stirs but to conventicle,
Thrice a day at toll of bell.
And each sickly cit who dare engage
His place by steamer, fly or stage,
With owner thereof shall by this said bill,
Be punished with fine, imprisonment or treadmill.
But nothing herein is designed to discourage
Priest, noble or squire from the use of his carriage.
No ship shall move however it blow,
The Devil a bit shall said ship go
Whether the winds will let it or no;
And, as winds and weather we cannot imprison,
Owners, Captain and sailors we therefore shall seize on,
And whereas oxen, lambs and sheep
About the roads and lanes will creep,
And cocks and hens and ducks and geese
Will not on Sunday hold their peace,
Be it enacted that foresaid beasts,
If not belonging to gentry or priests,
Be caught and whipped and pounded on Sunday,
And sold to pay expences on Monday.
The drunkard, who paid five shillings before,
Shall now pay twenty shillings more,
And mine host, if on Sabbath he dare unloose
A bolt, shall be fined and his licence lose.
All oranges, cakes lollypop
Shall be sized; every open shop
Shall be fined a pound an hour till it stop.
Till nine the milkman may ply his trade,
For pious breakfasts must be made
At he risk of his soul. And the bakers at last,
When the poor man's dinner is clearly past,
Must set to work, the godly scorning
Stale rolls and bread on a Monday morning.

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That Justices may have less to do,
'Tis enacted they may convict on view,
And shall, if they think the cause more drastic
Transfer to Courts Ecclesiastic.
All informers shall pass scot free,
However false their averments may be;
And witnesses who have no mind
To convict shall be imprisoned and fined.
And whereas from this act's operation
Are exempted the following ranks in this nation:
The rich man's servants—they cannot be spared
(In spite of Scripture) from working hard—;
Milkmen in the morning; at evening the bakers,
With constables, doctors, thieves, parsons, tollmakers;
And parties for music, gambling or dinners
Are hereby exempt, when the rich are the sinners;
For no party whatever has aught to fear
From said act who has more than £500 a year.

notes

Castles in the Air

MY thoughts by night are often filled

With visions false as fair:

For in the past alone I build

My castles in the air.

I dwell not now on what may be:

Night shadows o'er the scene:

But still my fancy wanders free

Through that which might have been.

notes

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Duet

Milestone: ALL my troubles disappear,
When the dinner-bell I hear,
Over woodland, dale, and fell,
Swinging slow with solemn swell,—
The dinner-bell! the dinner-bell!

Hippy: What can bid my heart-ache fly?
What can bid my heart-ache die?
What can all the ills dispel,
In my morbid frame that dwell?
The dinner-bell! the dinner-bell!

Both: Hark!—along the tangled ground,
Loudly floats the pleasing sound!
Sportive Fauns to Dryads tell,
'Tis the cheerful dinner-bell!
The dinner-bell! the dinner-bell!

notes

A Fragment

NAY, deem me not insensible, Cesario,
To female charms; nor think this heart of mine
Is cas'd in adamant; because, forsooth,
I cannot ogle, and hyperbolize,
And whisper tender nothings in the ear
Of ev'ry would-be beauty, holding out
The bright but treacherous flame of flattery,
To watch the she-moths of a drawing room
Sport round the beam, and burn their pretty wings,
Ere conscious of their danger: yet, believe me,
I love a maid whose untranscended form
Is yet less lovely than her spotless mind.
With modest frankness, unaffected genius,
Unchang'd good humour, beauty void of art,
And polish'd wit that seeks not to offend,
And winning smiles that seek not to betray,
She charms the sight, and fascinates the soul.
Where dwells this matchless nymph? alas, Cesario,
'Tis but a sickly creature of my fancy,
Unparallel'd in nature.

notes

A Glee

QUICKLY pass the social glass,
Hence with idle sorrow!
No delay—enjoy today,
Think not of tomorrow!
Life at best is but a span,
Let us taste it whilst we can;
Let us still with smiles confess,
All our aim is happiness!
Childish fears, and sighs and tears
Still to us are strangers;
Why destroy the bud of joy
With ideal dangers?
Let the song of pleasure swell;
Care with us shall never dwell;
Let us still with smiles confess,
All our aim is happiness!

notes

I Dug, Beneath a Cypress Shade

I DUG, beneath a cypress shade,
What well might seem an elfin's grave;
And every pledge in earth I laid,
That erst thy false affection gave.
I press'd them down the sod beneath;
I placed one mossy stone above;
And twined the rose's fading wreath
Around the sepulchre of love.
Frail as thy love, the flowers were dead
Ere yet the evening sun was set:
But years shall see the cypress spread,
Immutable as my regret.

notes

Instead of Sitting Wrapped up in Flannel

INSTEAD of sitting wrapped up in flannel
With rheumatism in every joint,
I wish I was in the English Channel,
Just going 'round the Lizard Point
All southward bound, with the seas before me,
I should not care whether smooth or rough,
For then no visitors would call to bore me,
Of whose 'good-mornings' I have had enough.

notes

Life's Uncertain Day

THE briefest part of life's uncertain day,
Youth's lovely blossom, hastes to swift decay:
While love, wine, song, enhance our gayest mood
Old age creeps on, nor thought, nor understood.

notes

Lines on the Death of Julia

ACCEPT, bright spirit, reft in life's best bloom
This votive wreath to thy untimely tomb.
Formed to adorn all scenes, and charm in all,
The fire-side circle, and the courtly hall;
Thy friends to gladden, and thy home to bless;—
Fair form thou hadst, and grace, and graciousness;
A mind that sought, a tongue that spoke, the truth,
And thought mature beneath the smiles of youth.
Dear, dear young friend! ingenuous, cordial heart!
And can it be, that thou shouldst first depart?
That age should sorrow o'er thy youthful shrine?
It owns more near, more sacred griefs than mine;
Yet, midst the many who thy loss deplore,
Few loved thee better, and few mourn thee more.

notes

Love and Age

I PLAY'D with you 'mid cowslips blowing,
When I was six and you were four;
When garlands weaving, flower-balls throwing,
Were pleasures soon to please no more.
Through groves and meads, o'er grass and heather,
With little playmates, to and fro,
We wander'd hand in hand together;
But that was sixty years ago.

You grew a lovely roseate maiden,
And still our early love was strong;
Still with no care our days were laden,
They glided joyously along;
And I did love you very dearly,
How dearly words want power to show;
I thought your heart was touch'd as nearly;
But that was fifty years ago.

Then other lovers came around you,
Your beauty grew from year to year,
And many a splendid circle found you
The centre of its glimmering sphere.
I saw you then, first vows forsaking,
On rank and wealth your hand bestow;
O, then I thought my heart was breaking!—
But that was forty years ago.

And I lived on, to wed another:
No cause she gave me to repine;
And when I heard you were a mother,
I did not wish the children mine.
My own young flock, in fair progression,
Made up a pleasant Christmas row:
My joy in them was past expression;
But that was thirty years ago.

You grew a matron plump and comely,
You dwelt in fashion's brightest blaze;
My earthly lot was far more homely;
But I too had my festal days.
No merrier eyes have ever glisten'd
Around the hearth-stone's wintry glow,
Than when my youngest child was christen'd;
But that was twenty years ago.

Time pass'd. My eldest girl was married,
And I am now a grandsire gray;
One pet of four years old I've carried
Among the wild-flower'd meads to play.
In our old fields of childish pleasure,
Where now, as then, the cowslips blow,
She fills her basket's ample measure;
And that is not ten years ago.

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But though first love's impassion'd blindness
Has pass'd away in colder light,
I still have thought of you with kindness,
And shall do, till our last good-night.
The ever-rolling silent hours
Will bring a time we shall not know,
When our young days of gathering flowers
Will be an hundred years ago.

notes

Margaret Love Peacock

LONG night succeeds thy little day;
Oh blighted blossom! can it be,
That this grey stone, and grassy clay,
Have clos'd our anxious care of thee?
The half-form'd speech of artless thought
That spoke a mind beyond thy years;
The song, the dance, by nature taught;
The sunny smiles, the transient tears;
The symmetry of face and form,
The eye with light and life replete;
The little heart so fondly warm,
The voice so musically sweet;
These, lost to hope, in memory yet
Around the hearts that lov'd thee cling,
Shadowing, with long and vain regret,
The too fair promise of thy spring.

notes

Newark Abbey

August, 1842

with a remembrance of August, 1807

I GAZE, where August's sunbeam falls
Along these grey and lonely walls,
Till in its light absorbed appears
The lapse of five-and-thirty years.

 If change there be, I trace it not
In all this consecrated spot:
No new imprint of Ruin's march
On roofless wall and frameless arch:
The hilss, the woods, the fields, the stream,
Are basking in the self-same beam:
The fall, that turns the unseen mill
As then it murmured, murmurs still:
It seems, as if in one were cast
The present and the imaged past,
Spanning, as with bridge sublime,
That awful lapse of human time,
That gulph, unfathomably spread
Between the living and the dead.

 For all too well my spirit feels
The only change this place reveals:
The sunbeams play, the breezes stir,
Unseen, unfelt, unheard by her,
Who, on that long-past August day,
First saw with me those ruins grey.

 Whatever span the fates allow,
Ere I shall be as she is now,
Still in my bosom's inmost cell
Shall that deep-treasured memory dwell:
That, more than language can express,
Pure miracle of loveliness,
Whose voice so sweet, whose eyes so bright,
Were my soul's music, and its light,
In those blest days, when life was new,
And hope was false, but love was true.

notes

Rich Poor; or Saint Sinner

THE poor man's sins are glaring;
In the face of ghostly warning
He is caught in the fact
Of an overt act—
Buying greens on a Sunday morning.
The rich man's sins are hidden
In the pomp of wealth and station;
And escape the sight
Of the children of light,
Who are wise in their generation.
The rich man has a kitchen,
And cooks to dress his dinner;
The poor who would roast
To the baker's must post,
And thus becomes a sinner.
The rich man has a cellar,
And a ready butler by him;
The poor man must steer
For his pint of beer
Where the saint can't choose but to spy him.
The rich man's painted windows
Hide the concerts of the quality;
The poor can but share
A crack'd fiddle in the air,
Which offends all sound morality.
The rich man is invisible
In the crowd of his gay society;
But the poor man's delight
Is a sore in the sight,
And a stench in the nose of piety.

notes

There is a Fever of the Spirit

THERE is a fever of the spirit,
The brand of Cain's unresting doom,
Which in the lone dark souls that bear it
Glows like the lamp in Tullia's tomb:

 Unlike that lamp, its subtle fire
Burns, blasts, consumes its cell, the heart,
Till, one by one, hope, joy, desire,
Like dreams of shadowy smoke depart.

 When hope, love, life itself, are only
Dust—spectral memories—dead and cold—
The unfed fire burns bright and lonely,
Like that undying lamp of old:

 And by that drear illumination,
Till time its clay-built home has rent,
Thought broods on feeling's desolation
The soul is its own monument.

notes

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notes

- 1 From Chapter XI of *Crotchet Castle* (1831).
- 2 First published 1931, written in 1837.
- 3 Written, apparently, towards the end of TLP's life.
- 4 From *The Three Doctors* (first published in 1903, written before 1815).
- 5 From *Palmyra and Other Poems* (1812).
- 6 First published 1931, written in 1803.
- 7 This (untitled) poem, found among TLP's papers after his death, was probably written *circa* 1807. Edith Nicholls, TLP's grand-daughter, wrote of a young woman, Fanny Falkner, whom TLP had loved:
"The two young people were engaged when she was eighteen, and he was twenty-two. For a few months they were entirely happy in mutual affection and sympathy. Their favourite place of meeting was the old ruin of Newark Abbey. . . .
"The engagement was broken off in an unjustifiable manner by the underhand interference of a third person, and the young lady, supposing herself deserted, married another man, and died in the year 1808."
The word "regret" had a much stronger meaning in 1807 than it now has.
Quiller-Couch included this poem in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (1919) as "The Grave of Love."
- 8 First published in 1875 and written, apparently, towards the end of TLP's life.
- 9 Written, apparently, towards the end of TLP's life, and first published in 1875.
- 10 Lord Broughton's eldest daughter, Julia, died in 1849.
- 11 from Chapter XV of *Gryll Grange* (1860).
- 12 Despite the opposition of the vicar of Chertsey, who objected to this poem (since it contains no mention of God); these verses were inscribed on the tombstone of Margaret Love Peacock, TLP's daughter, who died on 13 January, 1826 at the age of three.
- 13 Fairly self-explanatory.
- 14 Peacock's note: 'This is a correct copy of a little poem which has been often printed, and not quite accurately. It first appeared, many years ago, in the *Globe and Traveller* and was suggested by a speech in which Mr. Wilberforce, replying to an observation of Dr. Lushington, that "the Society for the Suppression of Vice meddled with the poor alone," said that "the offences of the poor came more under observation than those of the rich." '
- 15 The song sung by Mr Cypress (parodying Lord Byron) after dinner in chapter XI of *Nightmare Abbey* (1818).

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