Classic Poetry Series

Barry Cornwall

- poems -

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Barry Cornwall (1787-1874)

Bryan Waller Procter who wrote under the name Barry Cornwall was an English poet.

Life

Born at Leeds, Yorkshire, he was educated at Harrow School, where he had for contemporaries Lord Byron and Robert Peel. On leaving school he was placed in the office of a solicitor at Calne, Wiltshire, remaining there until about 1807, when he returned to London to study law. By the death of his father in 1816 he became possessed of a small property, and soon after entered into partnership with a solicitor; but in 1820 the partnership was dissolved, and he began to write under the pseudonym of "Barry Cornwall".

After his marriage in 1824 to Miss Skepper, daughter of Mrs Basil Montague, he returned to his profession as a conveyancer, and was called to the bar in 1831. In the following year he was appointed, metropolitan commissioner of lunacy -- an appointment annually renewed until his election as one of the Commissioners in Lunacy constituted by the Lunacy Act 1845. He resigned in 1861. Most of his verse was composed between 1815, when he began to contribute to the Literary Gazette, and 1823, or at latest 1832. His daughter, Adelaide Anne, was also a poet.

Works

His principal poetical works were: Dramatic Scenes and other Poems (1819), A Sicilian Story (1820), Marcian Colonna (1820), Mirandola, a tragedy performed at Covent Garden with Macready, Charles Kemble and Miss Foote in the leading parts (1821), The Flood of Thessaly (1823). and English Songs (1832). He was also the author of Effigies poetica (1824), Life of Edmund Kean (1835), Essays and Tales in Prose (1851), Charles Lamb; a Memoir (1866), and of memoirs of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare for editions of their works. A posthumous autobiographical fragment with notes of his literary friends, of whom he had a wide range from William Lisle Bowles to Robert Browning, was published in 1877, with some additions by Coventry Patmore.

Charles Lamb gave the highest possible praise to his friend's Dramatic Sketches when he

said that had he found them as anonymous manuscript in the Garrick Collection he would have had no hesitation about including them in his Dramatic Specimens. He was perhaps not an impartial critic. "Barry Cornwall's" songs have caught some notes from the Elizabethan and Cavalier lyrics, and blended them with others from the leading poets of his own time; and his dramatic fragments show a similar infusion of the early Victorian spirit into pre-Restoration forms and cadences. The results are varied, and lack unity, but they abound in pleasant touches, with here and there the flash of a higher, though casual, inspiration.

Rather unknown outside Britain in his times and largely considered to be imitator of greater romantic authors, Barry Cornwall however inspired Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin to some translations and imitations in 1830. Just hours before his last duel in 1837 Pushkin sent a collection by Cornwall to a fellow author, Mrs. Ishimova, suggesting that she should translate some poems selected by him.

William Makepeace Thackeray dedicated Vanity Fair to B.W. Procter.

A Petition To Time

TOUCH us gently, Time!
 Let us glide adown thy stream
Gently,—as we sometimes glide
 Through a quiet dream.
Humble voyagers are We,
Husband, wife, and children three—
(One is lost,—an angel, fled
To the azure overhead.)

Touch us gently, Time!
 We ’ve not proud nor soaring wings:
Our ambition, our content,
 Lies in simple things.
Humble voyagers are We,
O’er Life’s dim, unsounded sea,
Seeking only some calm clime;—
Touch us gently, gentle Time!

Barry Cornwall

A Poet’s Thought

TELL me, what is a poet’s thought?
 Is it on the sudden born?
Is it from the starlight caught?
Is it by the tempest taught,
 Or by whispering morn?

Was it cradled in the brain?
 Chain’d awhile, or nurs’d in night?
Was it wrought with toil and pain?
Did it bloom and fade again,
 Ere it burst to light?

No more question of its birth:
 Rather love its better part!
’T is a thing of sky and earth,
Gathering all its golden worth
 From the Poet’s heart.

Barry Cornwall

Golden-Tressed Adelaide

SING, I pray, a little song,
 Mother dear!
Neither sad nor very long:
It is for a little maid,
Golden-tressed Adelaide!
Therefore let it suit a merry, merry ear,
 Mother dear!

Let it be a merry strain,
 Mother dear!
Shunning e’en the thought of pain:
For our gentle child will weep,
If the theme be dark and deep;
And we will not draw a single, single tear,
 Mother dear!

Childhood should be all divine,
 Mother dear!
And like an endless summer shine;
Gay as Edward’s shouts and cries,
Bright as Agnes’ azure eyes:
Therefore, bid thy song be merry:—dost thou hear,
 Mother dear?

Barry Cornwall

In France

The poplars in the fields of France
Are golden ladies come to dance;
But yet to see them there is none
But I and the September sun.

The girl who in their shadow sits
Can only see the sock she knits;
Her dog is watching all the day
That not a cow shall go astray.

The leisurely contented cows
Can only see the earth they browse;
Their piebald bodies through the grass
With busy, munching noses pass.

Alone the sun and I behold
Processions crowned with shining gold --
The poplars in the fields of France,
Like glorious ladies come to dance.

Barry Cornwall

King Death

King Death was a rare old fellow!
He sate where no sun could shine;
And he lifted his hand so yellow,
And poured out his coal-black wine.
Hurrah! for the coal-black Wine!

There came to him many a Maiden,
Whose eyes had forgot to shine;
And Widows, with grief o'erladen,
For a draught of his sleepy wine.
Hurrah! for the coal-black Wine!

The Scholar left all his learning;
The Poet his fancied woes;
And the Beauty her bloom returning,
Like life to the fading rose.
Hurrah! for the coal-black Wine!

All came to the royal old fellow,
Who laugh'd till his eyes dropped brine,
As he gave them his hand so yellow,
And pledged them in Death's black wine.
Hurrah! -Hurrah!
Hurrah! for the coal-black Wine!

Barry Cornwall

Life

WE are born; we laugh; we weep;
 We love; we droop; we die!
Ah! wherefore do we laugh or weep?
 Why do we live, or die?
Who knows that secret deep?
 Alas, not I!

Why doth the violet spring
 Unseen by human eye?
Why do the radiant seasons bring
 Sweet thoughts that quickly fly?
Why do our fond hearts cling
 To things that die?

We toil,—through pain and wrong;
 We fight,—and fly;
We love; we lose; and then, ere long,
 Stone-dead we lie.
O life! is all thy song
 "Endure and—die"?

Barry Cornwall

Peace! What Do Tears Avail?

PEACE! what do tears avail?
She lies all dumb and pale,
 And from her eye
The spirit of lovely life is fading,
 And she must die!
Why looks the lover wroth? the friend upbraiding?
 Reply, reply!

Hath she not dwelt too long
’Midst pain, and grief, and wrong?
 Then, why not die?
Why suffer again her doom of sorrow,
 And hopeless lie?
Why nurse the trembling dream until to-morrow?
 Reply, reply!

Death! Take her to thine arms,
In all her stainless charms,
 And with her fly
To heavenly haunts, where, clad in brightness,
 The Angels lie.
Wilt bear her there, O Death! in all her whiteness?
 Reply, reply!

Barry Cornwall

Serenade (Inesilla! I am here...)

Inesilla! I am here
Thy own cavalier
Is now beneath thy lattice playing:
Why art thou delaying?

He hath riden many a mile
But to see thy smile:
The young light on the flowers is shining,
Yet he is repining.

What to him is a summer star,
If his love's afar?
What to him the flowers perfuming,
When his heart's consuming?

Sweetest girl! I why dost thou hide?
Beauty may abide
Even before the eye of morning,
And want no adorning.

Now, upon their paths of lights,
Starry spirits bright
To catch thy brighter glance are staying:
Why art thou delaying ?

Barry Cornwall

Sit Down, Sad Soul

SIT down, sad soul, and count
 The moments flying:
Come,—tell the sweet amount
 That ’s lost by sighing!
How many smiles?—a score?
Then laugh, and count no more;
   For day is dying.

Lie down, sad soul, and sleep,
 And no more measure
The flight of Time, nor weep
 The loss of leisure;
But here, by this lone stream,
Lie down with us, and dream
   Of starry treasure.

We dream: do thou the same:
 We love—for ever;
We laugh; yet few we shame,
 The gentle, never.
Stay, then, till Sorrow dies;
Then—hope and happy skies
   Are thine for ever!

Barry Cornwall

Song (Here's a health to thee, Mary...)

Here's a health to thee, Mary,
Here's a health to thee;
The drinkers are gone,
And I am alone,
To think of home and thee, Mary.

There are some who may shine o'er thee, Mary,
And many as frank and free,
And a few as fair,
But the summer air
Is not more sweet to me, Mary.

I have thought of thy last low sigh, Mary,
And thy dimm'd and gentle eye;
And I've called on thy name
When the night winds came,
And heard my heart reply, Mary.

Be thou but true to me, Mary,
Аnd I'll be true to thee;
Аnd at set of sun,
When my task is done,
Вe sure that I'm ever with thee, Mary.

Barry Cornwall

The Blood Horse

GAMARRA is a dainty steed,
Strong, black, and of a noble breed,
Full of fire, and full of bone,
With all his line of fathers known;
Fine his nose, his nostrils thin,
But blown abroad by the pride within!
His mane is like a river flowing,
And his eyes like embers glowing
In the darkness of the night,
And his pace as swift as light.

Look,—how ’round his straining throat
Grace and shifting beauty float!
Sinewy strength is on his reins,
And the red blood gallops through his veins;
Richer, redder, never ran
Through the boasting heart of man.
He can trace his lineage higher
Than the Bourbon dare aspire,—
Douglas, Guzman, or the Guelph,
Or O’Brien’s blood itself!

He, who hath no peer, was born
Here, upon a red March morn:
But his famous fathers dead
Were Arabs all, and Arab bred,
And the last of that great line
Trod like one of a race divine!
And yet,—he was but friend to one
Who fed him at the set of sun,
By some lone fountain ’fringed with green:
With him, a roving Bedouin,
He liv’d,—(none else would he obey
Through all the hot Arabian day,)—
And died untam’d upon the sands
Where Balkh amidst the desert stands!

Barry Cornwall

The Hunter’s Song

RISE! Sleep no more! ’T is a noble morn:
The dews hang thick on the fringed thorn,
And the frost shrinks back, like a beaten hound,
Under the steaming, steaming ground.
Behold, where the billowy clouds flow by,
And leave us alone in the clear gray sky!
Our horses are ready and steady.—So, ho!
I ’m gone, like a dart from the Tartar’s bow.
  Hark, hark!—Who calleth the maiden Morn
  From her sleep in the woods and the stubble corn?
        The horn,—the horn!
  The merry, sweet ring of the hunter’s horn.

Now, thorough the copse, where the fox is found,
And over the stream, at a mighty bound,
And over the high lands, and over the low,
O’er furrows, o’er meadows, the hunters go!
Away!—as a hawk flies full at its prey,
So flieth the hunter, away,—away!
From the burst at the cover till set of sun,
When the red fox dies, and—the day is done!
  Hark, hark!—What sound on the wind is borne?
  ’T is the conquering voice of the hunter’s horn.
        The horn,—the horn!
  The merry, bold voice of the hunter’s horn.

Sound! Sound the horn! To the hunter good
What ’s the gulley deep or the roaring flood?
Right over he bounds, as the wild stag bounds,
At the heels of his swift, sure, silent hounds.
O, what delight can a mortal lack,
When he once is firm on his horse’s back,
With his stirrups short, and his snaffle strong,
And the blast of the horn for his morning song?
  Hark, hark!—Now, home! and dream till morn
  Of the bold, sweet sound of the hunter’s horn!
        The horn,—the horn!
  O, the sound of all sounds is the hunter’s horn!

Barry Cornwall

The New-born Baby's Song

When I was twenty inches long,
I could not hear the thrush's song;
The radiance of the morning skies
Was most displeasing to my eyes.

For loving looks, caressing words,
I cared no more than sun or birds;
But I could bite my mother's breast,
And that made up for all the rest.

Barry Cornwall

The Old Witch in the Copse

I am a Witch, and a kind old Witch,
There's many a one knows that--
Alone I live in my little dark house
With Pillycock, my cat.
A girl came running through the night,
When all the winds blew free:--
"O mother, change a young man's heart
That will not look on me.
O mother, brew a magic mead
To stir his heart so cold."
"Just as you will, my dear," said I;
"And I thank you for your gold."
So here am I in the wattled copse
Where all the twigs are brown,
To find what I need to brew my mead
As the dark of night comes down.
Primroses in my old hands,
Sweet to smell and young,
And violets blue that spring in the grass
Wherever the larks have sung.
With celandines as heavenly crowns
Yellowy-gold and bright; All of these,
O all of these,
Shall bring her Love's delight.
But orchids growing snakey green
Speckled dark with blood,
And fallen leaves that curled and shrank
And rotted in the mud,
With blistering nettles burning harsh
And blinding thorns above;
All of these, O all of these
Shall bring the pains of Love.
Shall bring the pains of Love, my Puss,
That cease not night or day,
The bitter rage, nought can assuage
Till it bleeds the heart away.
Pillycock mine, my hands are full
My pot is on the fire.
Purr, my pet, this fool shall get
Her fool's desire.

Barry Cornwall

The Poet's Song To His Wife

HOW many summers, love,
 Have I been thine?
How many days, thou dove,
 Hast thou been mine?
Time, like the winged wind
 When ’t bends the flowers,
Hath left no mark behind,
 To count the hours.

Some weight of thought, though loth,
 On thee he leaves;
Some lines of care round both
 Perhaps he weaves;
Some fears,—a soft regret
 For joys scarce known;
Sweet looks we half forget;—
 All else is flown!

Ah!—With what thankless heart
 I mourn and sing!
Look, where our children start,
 Like sudden Spring!
With tongues all sweet and low,
 Like a pleasant rhyme,
They tell how much I owe
 To thee and Time!

Barry Cornwall

The Sea

THE SEA! the sea! the open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!
Without a mark, without a bound,
It runneth the earth's wide regions round;
It plays with the clouds; it mocks the skies;
Or like a cradled creature lies.

I 'm on the sea! I 'm on the sea!
I am where I would ever be;
With the blue above, and the blue below,
And silence wheresoe'er I go;
If a storm should come and awake the deep,
What matter? I shall ride and sleep.

I love, O, how I love to ride
On the fierce, foaming, bursting tide,
When every mad wave drowns the moon
Or whistles aloft his tempest tune,
And tells how goeth the world below,
And why the sou'west blasts do blow.

I never was on the dull, tame shore,
But I lov'd the great sea more and more,
And backwards flew to her billowy breast,
Like a bird that seeketh its mother's nest;
And a mother she was, and is, to me;
For I was born on the open sea!
The waves were white, and red the morn,

In the noisy hour when I was born;
And the whale it whistled, the porpoise roll'd,
And the dolphins bared their backs of gold;
And never was heard such an outcry wild
As welcom'd to life the ocean-child!

I 've liv'd since then, in calm and strife,
Full fifty summers, a sailor's life,
With wealth to spend and a power to range,
But never have sought nor sighed for change;
And Death, whenever he comes to me,
Shall come on the wild, unbounded sea!

Barry Cornwall

The Song Of A Felon's Wife

The brand is on thy brow,
A dark and guilty spot;
'Tis ne'er to be erased!
'Tis ne'er to be forgot!

The brand is on thy brow!
Yet I must shade the spot:
For who will love thee now,
If I love thee not?

Thy soul is dark, — is stained; —
From out the bright world thrown;
By God and man disdained,
But not by me, — thy own!

Oh! even the tiger slain
Hath one who ne'er doth flee,
Who soothes his dying pain!
— That one am I to thee!

Barry Cornwall

The Stormy Petrel

A THOUSAND miles from land are we,
Tossing about on the roaring sea;
From billow to bounding billow cast,
Like fleecy snow on the stormy blast:
The sails are scatter'd abroad, like weeds,
The strong masts shake like quivering reeds,
The mighty cables, and iron chains,
The hull, which all earthly strength disdains,
They strain and they crack, and hearts like stone
Their natural hard, proud strength disown.

Up and down! Up and down!
From the base of the wave to the billow's crown,
And midst the flashing and feathery foam
The Stormy Petrel finds a home,—
A home, if such a place may be,
For her who lives on the wide, wide sea,
On the craggy ice, in the frozen air,
And only seeketh her rocky lair
To warm her young, and to teach them spring
At once o'er the waves on their stormy wing.

O'er the Deep! O'er the Deep!
Where the whale, and the shark, and the sword-fish sleep,
Outflying the blast and the driving rain,
The Petrel telleth her tale—in vain;
For the mariner curseth the warning bird
Who bringeth him news of the storms unheard!
Ah! thus does the prophet, of good or ill,
Meet hate from the creatures he serveth still:
Yet he ne'er falters:—So, Petrel! spring
Once more o'er the waves on thy stormy wing!

Barry Cornwall

The Watch

I wakened on my hot, hard bed;
Upon the pillow lay my head;
Beneath the pillow I could hear
My little watch was ticking clear.
I thought the throbbing of it went
Like my continual discontent;
I thought it said in every tick:
I am so sick, so sick, so sick:
O death, come quick, come quick, come quick,
Come quick, come quick, come quick, come quick...

Barry Cornwall