

Classic Poetry Series

Frederick George Scott

- poems -

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At Nightfall

O little hands, long vanished in the night--
Sweet fairy hands that were my treasure here--
My heart is full of music from some sphere,
Where ye make melody for God's delight.
Though autumn clouds obscure the starry height,
And winds are noisy and the land is drear,
In this blank room I feel my lost love near,
And hear you playing--hands so small and white.
The shadowy organ sings its songs again,
The dead years turn to music at its voice,
And all the dreams come back my brain did store.
Once more, dear hands, ye soothe me in my pain,
Once more your music makes my heart rejoice--
God speed the day we clasp for evermore!

Frederick George Scott

Requiescant

In lonely watches night by night
Great visions burst upon my sight,
For down the stretches of the sky
The hosts of dead go marching by.

Strange ghostly banners o'er them float,
Strange bugles sound an awful note,
And all their faces and their eyes
Are lit with starlight from the skies.

The anguish and the pain have passed
And peace hath come to them at last,
But in the stern looks linger still
The iron purpose and the will.

Dear Christ, who reign'st above the flood
Of human tears and human blood,
A weary road these men have trod,
O house them in the home of God!

In a Field near Ypres
April, 1915

Frederick George Scott

Samson

Plunged in night, I sit alone
Eyeless on this dungeon stone,
Naked, shaggy, and unkempt,
Dreaming dreams no soul hath dreamt.

Rats and vermin round my feet
Play unharmed, companions sweet;
Spiders weave me overhead
Silken curtains for my bed.

Day by day the mould I smell
Of this fungus-blistered cell;
Nightly in my haunted sleep
O'er my face the lizards creep.

Gyves of iron scrape and burn
Wrists and ankles when I turn,
And my collared neck is raw
With the teeth of brass that gnaw.

God of Israel, canst Thou see
All my fierce captivity?
Do Thy sinews feel my pains?
Hearest Thou the clanking chains?

Thou who madest me so fair,
Strong and buoyant as the air,
Tall and noble as a tree,
With the passions of the sea,

Swift as horse upon my feet,
Fierce as lion in my heat,
Rending, like a wisp of hay,
All that dared withstand my way,

Canst Thou see me through the gloom
Of this subterranean tomb, --
Blinded tiger in his den,
Once the lord and prince of men?

Clay was I; the potter Thou
With Thy thumb-nail smooth'dst my brow,
Rolltdst the spittle-moistened sands
Into limbs between Thy hands.

Thou didst pour into my blood
Fury of the fire and flood,
And upon the boundless skies,
Thou didst first unclothe my eyes.

And my breath of life was flame,
God-like from the source it came,

Whirling round like furious wind,
Thoughts upgathered in the mind.

Strong Thou mad'st me, till at length
All my weakness was my strength;
Tortured am I, blind and wrecked,
For a faulty architect.

From the woman at my side,
Was I woman-like to hide
What she asked me, as if fear
Could my iron heart come near?

Nay, I scorned and scorn again
Cowards who their tongues restrain;
Cared I no more for Thy laws
Than a wind of scattered straws.

When the earth quaked at my name
And my blood was all aflame,
Who was I to lie, and cheat
Her who clung about my feet?

From Thy open nostrils blow
Wind and tempest, rain and snow;
Dost Thou curse them on their course,
For the fury of their force?

Tortured am I, wracked and bowed,
But the soul within is proud;
Dungeon fetters cannot still
Forces of the tameless will.

Israel's God, come down and see
All my fierce captivity;
Let Thy sinews feel my pains,
With Thy fingers lift my chains,

Then, with thunder loud and wild,
Comfort Thou Thy rebel child,
And with lightning split in twain
Loveless heart and sightless brain.

Give me splendour in my death --
Not this sickening dungeon breath,
Creeping down my blood like slime,
Till it wastes me in my prime.

Give me back for one blind hour,
Half my former rage and power,
And some giant crisis send,
Meet to prove a hero's end.

Then, O God, Thy mercy show --
Crush him in the overthrow
At whose life they scorn and point,
By its greatness out of joint.

Frederick George Scott

Sunrise

O rising Sun, so fair and gay,
What are you bringing me, I pray,
Of sorrow or of joy to-day?

You look as if you meant to please,
Reclining in your gorgeous ease
Behind the bare-branched apple-trees.

The world is rich and bright, as though
The pillows where your head is low
Had lit the fields of driven snow.

The hoar-frost on the window turns
Into a wood of giant ferns
Where some great conflagration burns.

And all my children comes again
As lightsome and as free from stain
As those frost-pictures on the pane.

I would that I could mount on high
And meet you, Sun--that you and I
Had to ourselves the whole wide sky.

But here my poor soul has to stay,
So tell me, rising Sun, I pray,
What are you bringing me to-day?

What shall this busy brain have thought,
What shall these hands and feet have wrought,
What sorrows shall the hours have brought,

Before thy brilliant course is run,
Before this new-born day is done,
Before you set, O rising Sun?

Frederick George Scott

The Burden of Time

Before the seas and mountains were brought forth,
I reigned. I hung the universe in space,
I capped earth's poles with ice to South and North,
And set the moving tides their bounds and place.

I smoothed the granite mountains with my hand,
My fingers gave the continents their form;
I rent the heavens and loosed upon the land
The fury of the whirlwind and the storm.

I stretched the dark sea like a nether sky
Fronting the stars between the ice-clad zones;
I gave the deep his thunder; the Most High
Knows well the voice that shakes His mountain thrones.

I trod the ocean caverns black as night,
And silent as the bounds of outer space,
And where great peaks rose darkly towards the light
I planted life to root and grow apace.

Then through a stillness deeper than the grave's,
The coral spires rose slowly one by one,
Until the white shafts pierced the upper waves
And shone like silver in the tropic sun.

I ploughed with glaciers down the mountain glen,
And graved the iron shore with stream and tide;
I gave the bird her nest, the lion his den,
The snake long jung~le-grass wherein to hide.

In lonely gorge and over hill and plain,
I sowed the giant forests of the world;
The great earth like a human heart in pain
Has quivered with the meteors I have hurled.

I plunged whole continents beneath the deep,
And left them sepulchred a million years;
I called, and lo, the drowned lands rose from sleep,
Sundering the waters of the hemispheres.

I am the lord and arbiter of man --
I hold and crush between my finger-tips
Wild hordes that drive the desert caravan,
Great nations that go down to sea in ships.

In sovereign scorn I tread the races down,
As each its puny destiny fulfils,
On plain and island, or where huge cliffs frown,
Wrapt in the deep thought of the ancient hills.

The wild sea searches vainly round the land
For those proud fleets my arm has swept away;

Vainly the wind along the desert sand
Calls the great names of kings who once held sway.

Yea, Nineveh and Babylon the great
Are fallen -- like ripe ears at harvest-tide;
I set my heel upon their pomp and state,
The people's serfdom and the monarch's pride.

One doom waits all -- art, speech, law, gods, and men,
Forests and mountains, stars and shining sun, --
The hand that made them shall unmake again,
I curse them and they wither one by one.

Waste altars, tombs, dead cities where men trod,
Shall roll through space upon the darkened globe,
Till I myself be overthrown, and God
Cast off creation like an outworn robe.

Frederick George Scott

The Feud

I hear a cry from the Sansard cave,
O mother, will no one hearken?
A cry of the lost, will no one save?
A cry of the dead, though the oceans rave,
And the scream of a gull as he wheels o'er a grave,
While the shadows darken and darken.'

'Oh, hush thee, child, for the night is wet,
And the cloud-caves split asunder,
With lightning in a jagged fret,
Like the gleam of a salmon in the net,
When the rocks are rich in the red sunset,
And the stream rolls down in thunder.'

'Mother, O mother, a pain at my heart,
A pang like the pang of dying.'
'Oh, hush thee, child, for the wild birds dart
Up and down, and close and part,
Wheeling round where the black cliffs start,
And the foam at their feet is flying.'

'O mother, a strife like the black clouds'
And a peace that cometh after.'
'Hush, child, for peace is the end of life,
And the heart of a maiden finds peace as a wife,
But the sky and the cliffs and the ocean are rife
With the storm and thunder's laughter.'

'Come in, my sons, come in and rest,
For the shadows darken and darken,
And your sister is pale as the white swan's breast,
And her eyes are fixed and her lips are pressed
In the death of a name ye might have guessed,
Had ye twain been here to hearken.'

'Hush, mother, a corpse lies on the sand,
And the spray is round it driven,
It lies on its face, and one white hand
Points through the mist on the belt of strand
To where the cliffs of Sansard stand,
And the ocean's strength is riven.'

'Was it God, my sons, who laid him there?
Or the sea that left him sleeping?'
'Nay, mother, our dirks where his heart was bare,
As swift as the rain through the teeth of the air;
And the foam-fingers play in the Saxon's hair,
While the tides are round him creeping.'

'Oh, curses on you, hand and head,
Like the rains in this wild weather
The guilt of blood is swift and dread,

Your sister's face is cold and dead,
Ye may not part whom God would wed
And love hath knit together.'

Frederick George Scott

The Laurentians

These mountains reign alone, they do not share
The transitory life of woods and streams;
Wrapt in the deep solemnity of dreams,
They drain the sunshine of the upper air.
Beneath their peaks, the huge clouds, here and there,
Take counsel of the wind, which all night screams
Through grey, burnt forests where the moonlight beams
On hidden lakes, and rocks worn smooth and bare.

These mountains once, throned in some primal sea,
Shook half the world with thunder, and the sun
Pierced not the gloom that clung about their crest;
Now with sealed lips, toilers from toil set free,
Unvexed by fate, the part they played being done,
They watch and wait in venerable rest.

Frederick George Scott

The Sting of Death

`Is Sin, then, fair?'
Nay, love, come now,
Put back the hair
From his sunny brow;
See, here, blood-red
Across his head
A brand is set,
The word -- `Regret.'

`Is Sin so fleet
That while he stays,
Our hands and feet
May go his ways?'
Nay, love, his breath
Clings round like death,
He slakes desire
With liquid fire.

`Is Sin Death's sting?'
Ay, sure he is,
His golden wing
Darkens man's bliss;
And when Death comes,
Sin sits and hums
A chaunt of fears
Into man's ears.

`How slayeth Sin?'
First, God is hid,
And the heart within
By its own self chid;
Then the maddened brain
Is scourged by pain
To sin as before
And more and more,
For evermore.

Frederick George Scott

The Unnamed Lake

It sleeps among the thousand hills
Where no man ever trod,
And only nature's music fills
The silences of God.

Great mountains tower above its shore,
Green rushes fringe its brim,
And over its breast for evermore
The wanton breezes skim.

Dark clouds that intercept the sun
Go there in Spring to weep,
And there, when Autumn days are done.
White mists lie down to sleep.

Sunrise and sunset crown with gold
The pinks of ageless stone,
Her winds have thundered from of old -
And storms have set their throne.

No echoes of the world afar
Disturb it night or day,
The sun and shadow, moon and star
Pass and repass for aye.

'Twas in the grey of early dawn,
When first the lake we spied,
And fragments of a cloud were drawn
Half down the mountain side.

Along the shore a heron flew,
And from a speck on high,
That hovered in the deepening blue,
We heard the fish-hawk's cry.

Among the cloud-capt solitudes,
No sound the silence broke,
Save when, in whispers down the woods,
The guardian mountains spoke.

Through tangled brush and dewy brake,
Returning whence we came,
We passed in silence, and the lake
We left without a name.

Frederick George Scott

Time

I saw Time in his workshop carving faces;
Scattered around his tools lay, blunting griefs,
Sharp cares that cut out deeply in reliefs
Of light and shade; sorrows that smooth the traces
Of what were smiles. Nor yet without fresh graces
His handiwork, for oftentimes rough were ground
And polished, oft the pinched made smooth and round;
The calm look, too, the impetuous fire replaces.
Long time I stood and watched; with hideous grin
He took each heedless face between his knees,
And graved and scarred and bleached with boiling tears.
I wondering turned to go, when, lo! my skin
Feels crumpled, and in glass my own face sees
Itself all changed, scarred, careworn, white with years.

Frederick George Scott

To France

What is the gift we have given thee, Sister?
What is the trust we have laid in thy hand?
Hearts of our bravest, our best, and our dearest,
Blood of our blood we have sown in thy land.

What for all time will the harvest be, Sister?
What will spring up from the seed that is sown?
Freedom and peace and goodwill among Nations,
Love that will bind us with love all our own.

Bright is the path that is opening before us,
Upward and onward it mounts through the night:
Sword shall not sever the bonds that unite us
Leading the world to the fullness of light.

Sorrow hath made thee more beautiful, Sister,
Nobler and purer than ever before;
We who are chastened by sorrow and anguish
Hail thee as sister and queen evermore.

Frederick George Scott

We Hail Thee Now, O Jesus

We hail thee now, O Jesus,
thy presence here we own,
though sight and touch have failed us,
and faith perceives alone;
thy love has veiled thy glory;
and hid thy power divine,
in mercy to our weakness,
beneath an earthly sign.

We hail thee now, O Jesus,
in silence hast thou come,
for all the hosts of heaven
with wonderment are dumb:
so great the condescension,
so marvelous the love,
which for our sakes, O Savior,
have drawn thee from above.

We hail thee now, O Jesus,
for law and type have ceased,
and thou in each Communion
art Sacrifice and Priest;
we make this great memorial
in union, Lord, with thee,
and plead thy death and passion
to cleanse and set us free.

We hail thee now, O Jesus,
for death is drawing near,
and in thy presence only
its terrors disappear;
dwell with us, sweetest Savior,
and guide us through the night,
till shadows end in glory,
and faith be lost in sight.

Frederick George Scott