

Classic Poetry Series

William Gay

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

A Sonnet of Battle

RELUCTANT Morn, whose meagre radiance lies
With doubtful glimmer on the farthest hills,
How long shall men, reiterant of their ills,
With peevish invocation bid thee rise
To burn to noontide glory in the skies
That now a gloom perplexed and starless fills,
And seek from thee and not their own strong wills
That perfect good which is not bought with sighs?
Why weep and wait for thee, though laggard, Morn,
With all thy joys of love and peace and light?
For us the mightier joy that rives the soul,
When, slaves no longer to a day unborn,
Our flag of war along the dark we unroll
For fell encounter with the hosts of Night.

William Gay

Australia 1894

SHE sits a queen whom none shall dare despoil,
Her crown the sun, her guard the vigilant sea,
And round her throne are gathered, stalwart, free,
A people proud, yet stooping to the soil,
Patient to swell her greatness with their toil,
And swift to leave, should dire occasion be,
The mine, the flock, the desk, the furrowed lea,
And force the invader to a dark recoil.—
Yet as she gazes o'er the plains that lie
Fruitful about her throne, she sighs full sore
To see the barriers Greed has builded high,
Dividing them who brothers were before,
When still they dwelt beneath a sterner sky
And heard the thunders of a wilder shore.

William Gay

Australia Infelix

HOW long, O Lord, shall this, my country, be
A nation of the dead? How long shall they
Who seek their own and live but for the day,
My country hinder from her destiny?
Around me, Lord, I seem again to see
That ancient valley where the dry bones lay,
And 'tis in vain that long I wait and pray
To see them rise to men resolved and free.
Yet sure, O Lord, upon this land of death
At last Thy Spirit will descend with power;
And Thou wilt kindle patriots with Thy breath,
Who, venturing all to win their country's good,
Shall toil and suffer for the sacred hour
That brings the fullness of her nationhood.

William Gay

Australian Federation

FROM all division let our land be free,
For God has made her one: complete she lies
Within the unbroken circle of the skies,
And round her indivisible the sea
Breaks on her single shore; while only we,
Her foster children, bound with sacred ties
Of one dear blood, one storied enterprise,
Are negligent of her integrity.—
Her seamless garment, at great Mammon's nod,
With hands unfilial we have basely rent,
With petty variance our souls are spent,
And ancient kinship underfoot is trod:
O let us rise, united, penitent,
And be one people,—mighty, serving God!

William Gay

The Crazy World

THE WORLD did say to me,
'My bread thou shalt not eat,
I have no place for thee
In house nor field nor street.

'I have on land nor sea
For thee nor home nor bread,
I scarce can give to thee
A grave when thou art dead.'

'O crazy World,' said I,
'What is it thou canst give,
Which wanting, I must die,
Or having, I shall live?

'When thou thy all hast spent,
And all thy harvests cease,
I still have nutriment
That groweth by decrease.

'Thy streets will pass away,
Thy towers of steel be rust,
Thy heights to plains decay,
Thyself be wandering dust;

'But I go ever on
From prime to endless prime,
I sit on Being's throne,
A lord o'er space and time.

'Then, crazy World,' said I,
'What is it thou canst give,
Which wanting, I must die,
Or having, I shall live?'

William Gay

To M.

IF in the summer of thy bright regard
For one brief season these poor Rhymes shall live
I ask no more, nor think my fate too hard
If other eyes but wintry looks should give;
Nor will I grieve though what I here have writ
O'er burdened Time should drop among the ways,
And to the unremembering dust commit
Beyond the praise and blame of other days:
The song doth pass, but I who sing, remain,
I pluck from Death's own heart a life more deep,
And as the Spring, that dies not, in her train
Doth scatter blossoms for the Winds to reap,
So I, immortal, as I fare along,
Will strew my path with mortal flowers of song.

William Gay

Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum

O steep and rugged Life, whose harsh ascent
Slopes blindly upward through the bitter night!
They say that on thy summit, high in light,
Sweet rest awaits the climber, travel-spent;
But I, alas, with dusty garments rent,
With fainting heart and failing limbs and sight,
Can see no glimmer of the shining height,
And vainly list, with body forward bent,
To catch athwart the gloom one wandering note
Of those glad anthems which (they say) are sung
When one emerges from the mists below:
But though, O Life, thy summit be remote
And all thy stony path with darkness hung,
Yet ever upward through the night I go.

William Gay