

Classic Poetry Series

Park Benjamin
- poems -

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Park Benjamin(1809-1864)

Park Benjamin (1849–1922) was an American patent lawyer, physician, and writer. He was born in New York City, graduated at the United States Naval Academy in 1867, resigned from the Navy in 1869, and graduated at the Albany Law School in the following year. He was associate editor of *The Scientific American* from 1872 to 1878 and subsequently edited *Appleton's Cyclopedia of Applied Mechanics* and *Cyclopædia of Modern Mechanism*.

A Great Name

Time! thou destroyest the relics of the past,
And hidest all the footprints of thy march
On shattered column and on crumbled arch,
By moss and ivy growing green and fast.
Hurled into fragments by the tempest-blast
The Rhodian monster lies; the obelisk
That with sharp line divided the broad disk
Of Egypt's sun, down to the sands was cast:
And where these stood, no remnant-trophy stands,
And even the art is dead by which they rose:
Thus, with the monuments of other lands,
The place that knew them now no longer knows.
Yet triumph not, O, Time; strong towers decay,
But a great name shall never pass away.

Park Benjamin

Battle-Worn Banners

I saw the soldiers come today
From battlefield afar;
No conquerors rode before their way
On his triumphal car;
But captains, like themselves, on foot
And banners sadly torn,
All grandly eloquent, though mute,
By pride and glory borne.

Those banners soiled with dirt and smoke,
And rent by shot and shell;
That through the serried phalanx broke -
What terrors they could tell!
What tales of sudden pain and death
In every cannon's boom,
When even the bravest held his breath
And waited for his doom.

By hands of steel those flags were waved
Above the carnage dire,
Almost destroyed, yet always saved,
'Mid battle-clouds and fire.
Though down at times, still up they rose
And kissed the breeze again,
Dread tokens to the rebel foes
Of true and loyal men,

And here the true and loyal still
Those famous banners bear;
The bugles wind, the fifes blow shrill,
And clash the cymbals, where
With decimated ranks they come,
And through the crowded street
March to the beating of the drum
With firm though weary feet.

God bless the soldiers! Cry the folk
Whose cheers of welcome swell;
God bless those banners, black with smoke

And torn by shot and shell!
They should be hung on sacred shrines,
Baptized with grateful tears,
And live embalmed in poetry's lines
Through all succeeding years.

No grander trophies could be brought
By patriot sire to son,
Of glorious battles nobly fought,
Brave deeds sublimely done.
And so, today, I chanced with pride
And solemn joy to see
Those remnants from the bloody tide
Of Victory!

Park Benjamin

New York Harbor On A Calm Day

Is this a painting? Are those pictured clouds
Which on the sky so movelessly repose?
Has some rare artist fashioned forth the shrouds
Of yonder vessel? Are these imaged shows
Of outline, figure, form, or is there life
Life with a thousand pulses-in the scene
We gaze upon? Those towering banks between,
E'er tossed these billows in tumultuous strife?
Billows! there's not a wave! the waters spread
One broad, unbroken mirror; all around
Is hushed to silence-silence so profound,
That a bird's carol, or an arrow sped
Into the distance, would, like larum bell,
Jar the deep stillness and dissolve the spell.

Park Benjamin

Sonnets (From Harper's Monthly, 1854)

What though my years are falling like thy leaves,
Oh, Autumn! When the winds are plumed with night
They have thy colors, thy enameled light,
And all the fullness of thy ripened sheaves.
Of verdant joys aggressive Time bereaves,
And the glad transports of unclouded dawn;
But though the shadows deepen on Life's lawn,
Rays of serene and solemn beauty shed
A mellow lustre on my fading hours,
And with a calm and tempered joy I tread
Paths still bedecked with iridescent flowers
Like thine, oh, Autumn! ere the sober gray
Of Winter steals thy glorious tints away.

Upon an eminence I seem to stand,
And look around me. Backward I survey
A lovely prospect, stretching far away
Through mists that curtain all the nearer land.
There once I wandered gayly, hand in hand
With the companions of my happy spring;
It was Life's realm of Fairy, rainbow-spanned,
Where birds and brooks together loved to sing,
And every cloud made pictures as it sailed.
That music yet resounds, those pictures shine
Through the far distance Time has faintly veiled,
Though many a rock, stream, valley intervene
Between me and that fairy-haunted scene.

Park Benjamin

The Old Sexton

Nigh to a grave that was newly made,
Leaned a sexton old on his earth-worn spade;
His work was done, and he paused to wait
The funeral train at the open gate.
A relic of bygone days was he,
And his locks were white as the foamy sea;
And these words came from his lips so thin:
'I gather them in: I gather them in.

'I gather them in! for man and boy,
Year after year of grief and joy,
I 've builded the houses that lie around,
In every nook of this burial ground;
Mother and daughter, father and son,
Come to my solitude, one by one:
But come they strangers or come they kin--
I gather them in, I gather them in.

'Many are with me, but still I'm alone,
I'm king of the dead--and I make my throne
On a monument slab of marble cold;
And my sceptre of rule is the spade I hold:
Come they from cottage or come they from hall,
Mankind are my subjects, all, all, all!
Let them loiter in pleasure or toilfully spin--
I gather them in, I gather them in.

'I gather them in, and their-final rest
Is here, down here, in earth's dark breast!
And the sexton ceased, for the funeral train
Wound mutely o'er that solemn plain!
And I said to my heart, when time is told,
A mightier voice than that sexton's old
Will sound o'er the last trump's dreadful din--
'I gather them in, I gather them in.'

Park Benjamin

Tributary Sonnet

Heart, that with warm and generous feeling beat
How strange it seems to one who loved thee well,
That over thee has pealed the solemn knell,
And not one spark of all that genial heat
Remains each high-born sympathy to greet,
And glow with fond affection, when some word
Uttered in tone harmonious, low, and sweet,
Thy fervent depths to kind emotions stirred!
Alas-that thou, when life was doubly dear,
When once more reunited to thine own,
After such weary years of absence flown,
Should'st be translated-though to that bright sphere
On which, in child-like earnestness and faith,
Thy looks were turned beyond the door of death.

Park Benjamin