

Classic Poetry Series

Fitz-Greene Halleck
- poems -

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Fitz-Greene Halleck(1790-1867)

Fitz-Greene Halleck (July 8, 1790 – November 19, 1867) was an American poet, born and died at Guilford, Connecticut.

A Poet's Daughter

'A lady asks the Minstrel's rhyme.'
A lady asks? There was a time
When, musical as play-bell's chime
To wearied boy,
That sound would summon dreams sublime
Of pride and joy.

But now the spell hath lost its sway,
Life's first-born fancies first decay,
Gone are the plumes and pennon's gay
Of young Romance;
There linger but her ruins gray,
And broken lance.

'Tis a new world—no more to maid,
Warrior or bard, is homage paid;
The bay-tree's, laurel's, myrtle's shade,
Men's thoughts resign;—
Heaven placed us here to vote and trade,
Twin tasks divine!

'Tis youth, 'tis beauty asks,—the green
'And growing leaves of seventeen
'Are round her; and, half hid, half seen,
'A violet flower,
'Nursed by the virtues she hath been
'From childhood's hour.'

Blind passion's Picture,—yet for this
We woo the life-long bridal kiss,
And blend our every hope of bliss
With her's we love;
Unmindful of the serpent's hiss
In Eden's grove.

Beauty—the fading rainbow's pride,
Youth—'twas the charm of her who died
At dawn, and by her coffin's side
A grandsire stands,

Age-strengthened, like the oak storm-tried
Of mountain lands.

Youth's coffin—hush the tale it tells,
Be silent, memory's funeral bells!
Lone in one heart, her home, it dwells
Untold till death,
And where the grave-mound greenly swells
O'er buried faith.

'But what if her's are rank and power,
'Armies her train, a throne her bower,
'A kingdom's gold her marriage dower,
'Broad seas and lands?
'What if from bannered hall and tower
'A queen commands?'

A queen? Earth's regal moons have set.
Where perished Marie Antoinette?
Where's Bordeaux's mother? Where the jet-
Black Haytian dame?
And Lusitania's coronet?
And Angoulême?

Empires to-day are upside down,
The castle kneels before the town,
The monarch fears a printer's frown,
A brickbat's range;
Give me, in preference to a crown,
Five shillings change.

'But her who asks, though first among
'The good, the beautiful, the young,
'the birthright of a spell more strong
'Than these have brought her;
'She is your kinswoman in song,
'A Poet's daughter.'

A Poet's daughter? Could I claim
The consanguinity of fame,
Veins of my intellectual frame!
Your blood would glow

Proudly to sing that gentlest name
Of aught below.

A Poet's daughter—dearer word
Lip hath not spoke nor listener heard,
Fit theme for song of bee and bird
From morn till even,
And wind-harp by the breathing stirred
Of star-lit heaven.

My spirit's wings are weak, the fire
Poetic comes but to expire,
Her name needs not my humble lyre
To bid it live;
She hath already from her sire
All bard can give.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

A Sketch

HER Leghorn hat was of the bright gold tint
The setting sunbeams give to autumn clouds;
The ribband that encircled it as blue
As spots of sky upon a moonless night,
When stars are keeping revelry in heaven;
A single ringlet of her clustering hair
Fell gracefully beneath her hat, in curls
As dark as down upon the raven's wing;
The kerchief, partly o'er her shoulders flung,
And partly waving in the wind, was woven
Of every colour the first rainbow wore,
When it came smiling in its hues of beauty,
A promise from on high to a lost world.
Her robe seemed of the snow just fallen to earth,
Pure from its home in the far winter clouds,
As white, as stainless; and around her waist,
(You might have spanned it with your thumb and finger,)
A girdle of the hue of Indian pearls
Was twined, resembling the faint line of water
That follows the swift bark o'er quiet seas.
Her face I saw not—but her shape—her form,
Was one of those with which creating bards
People a world of their own fashioning,
Forms for the heart to love and cherish ever,
The visiting angels of our twilight dreams.
Her foot was loveliest of remembered things,
Small as a fairy's on a moonlit leaf
Listening the wind-harp's song, and watching by
The wild-thyme pillow of her sleeping queen,
When proud Titania shuns her Oberon.
But 'twas that foot which broke the spell alas!
Its stocking had a deep, deep tinge of blue,—
I turned away in sadness, and passed on.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Alnwick Castle

HOME of the Percy's high-born race,
Home of their beautiful and brave,
Alike their birth and burial place,
Their cradle, and their grave!
Still sternly o'er the castle gate
Their house's Lion stands in state,
As in his proud departed hours;
And warriors frown in stone on high,
And feudal banners II flout the sky
Above his princely towers.
A gentle hill its side inclines,
Lovely in England's fadeless green,
To meet the quiet stream which winds
Through this romantic scene
As silently and sweetly still,
As when, at evening, on that hill,
While summer's wind blew soft and low,
Seated by gallant Hotspur's side,
His Katherine was a happy bride,
A thousand years ago.

Gaze on the Abbey's ruined pile:
Does not the succouring Ivy, keeping
Her watch around it, seem to smile,
As o'er a loved one sleeping?
One solitary turret gray
Still tells, in melancholy glory,
The legend of the Cheviot day,
The Percy's proudest border story.
That day its roof was triumph's arch;
Then rang, from aisle to pictured dome,
The light step of the soldier's march,
The music of the trump and drum;
And babe, and sire, the old, the young,
And the monk's hymn, and minstrel's song,
And woman's pure kiss, sweet and long,
Welcomed her warrior home.

Wild roses by the Abbey towers

Are gay in their young bud and bloom:
They were born of a race of funeral flowers
That garlanded, in long-gone hours,
A Templar's knightly tomb.
He died, the sword in his mailed hand,
On the holiest spot of the Blessed Land,
Where the Cross was damped with his dying breath;
When blood ran free as festal wine,
And the sainted air of Palestine
Was thick with the darts of death.

Wise with the lore of centuries,
What tales, if there be 'tongues in trees,'
Those giant oaks could tell,
Of beings born and buried here;
Tales of the peasant and the peer,
Tales of the bridal and the bier,
The welcome and farewell,
Since on their boughs the startled bird
First, in her twilight slumbers, heard
The Norman's curfew-bell.

I wandered through the lofty halls
Trod by the Percys of old fame,
And traced upon the chapel walls
Each high, heroic name,
From him 2 who once his standard set
Where now, o'er mosque and minaret,
Glitter the Sultan's crescent moons
To him who, when a younger son, 3
Fought for King George at Lexington,
A Major of Dragoons.

That last half stanza—it has dashed
From my warm lip the sparkling cup;
The light that o'er my eye-beam flashed,
The power that bore my spirit up
Above this bank-note world—is gone;
And Alnwick's but a market town,
And this, alas! its market day,
And beasts and borderers throned the way;

Oxen, and bleating lambs in lots,
Northumbrian boors, and plaided Scots,
Men in the coal and cattle line;
From Teviot's bard and hero land,

From royal Berwick's beach of sand,
From Wooller, Morpeth, Hexham, and
Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

These are not the romantic times
So beautiful in Spenser's rhymes,
So dazzling to the dreaming boy:
Ours are the days of fact, not fable,
Of Knights, but not of the Round Table,
Of Bailie Jarvie, not Rob Roy:
'Tis what 'our President,' Munro,
Has called 'the era of good feeling:'
The Highlander, the bitterest foe
To modern laws, has felt their blow,
Consented to be taxed, and vote,
And put on pantaloons and coat,
And leave off cattle-stealing :
Lord Stafford mines for coal and salt,
The Duke of Norfolk deals in malt,
The Douglas in red herrings;
And noble name, and cultured land,
Palace, and park, and vassal band
Are powerless to the notes of hand
Of Rothschild, or the Barings.

The age of bargaining, said Burke,
Has come: to-day the turbaned Turk,
(Sleep, Richard of the lion heart!
Sleep on, nor from your cearments start,)
Is England's friend and fast ally;
The Moslem tramples on the Greek,
And on the Cross and altar stone,
And Christendom looks tamely on,
And hears the Christian maiden shriek,
And sees the Christian father die;
And not a sabre blow is given
For Greece and fame, for faith and heaven,

By Europe's craven chivalry.
You'll ask if yet the Percy lives
In the armed pomp of feudal state
The present representatives
Of Hotspur and his 'gentle Kate,'
Are some half-dozen serving men,
In the drab coat of William Penn;
A chambermaid, whose lip and eye,
And check, and brown hair, bright and curling,
Spoke nature's aristocracy;
And one, half groom half seneschal,
Who bowed me through court, bower, and hall,
From donjon-keep to turret wall,
For ten-and-sixpence sterling.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Burns

WILD ROSE of Alloway! my thanks:
Thou 'mindst me of that autumn noon
When first we met upon 'the banks
And braes o'bonny Doon.'

Like thine, beneath the thorn-tree's bough,
My sunny hour was glad and brief,
We've crossed the winter sea, and thou
Art withered,—flower and leaf.

And will not thy death-doom be mine,—
The doom of all things wrought of clay,—
And withered my life's leaf like thine,
Wild rose of Alloway?

Not so his memory, for whose sake
My bosom bore thee far and long,
His—who a humbler flower could make
Immortal as his song,

The memory of Burns—a name
That calls, when brimmed her festal cup,
A nation's glory, and her shame,
In silent sadness up.

A nation's glory—be the rest
Forgot—she's canonized his mind;
And it is joy to speak the best
We may of human kind.

I've stood beside the cottage bed
Where the Bard-peasant first drew breath;
A straw-thatched roof above his head,
A straw-wrought couch beneath.

And I have stood beside the pile,
His monument—that tells to Heaven
The homage of earth's proudest isle
To that Bard-peasant given!

Bid thy thoughts hover o'er that spot,
Boy-Minstrel, in thy dreaming hour;
And know, however low his lot,
A Poet's pride and power.

The pride that lifted Burns from earth,
The power that gave a child of song
Ascendancy o'er rank and birth,
The rich, the brave, the strong;

And if despondency weigh down
Thy spirit's fluttering pinions then,
Despair—thy name is written on
The roll of common men.

There have been loftier themes than his,
And longer scrolls, and louder lyres,
And lays lit up with Poesy's
Purer and holier fires:

Yet read the names that know not death;
Few nobler ones than Burns are there;
And few have won a greener wreath
Than that which binds his hair.

His is that language of the heart,
In which the answering heart would speak,
Thought, word, that bids the warm tear start,
Or the smile light the cheek;

And his that music, to whose tone
The common pulse of man keeps time,
In cot or castle's mirth or moan,
In cold or sunny clime.

And who hath heard his song, nor knelt
Before its spell with willing knee,
And listened, and believed, and felt
The Poet's mastery

O'er the mind's sea, in calm and storm,

O'er the heart's sunshine, and its showers,
O'er Passion's moments, bright and warm,
O'er Reason's dark, cold hours;

On fields where brave men 'die or do,'
In halls where rings the banquet's mirth,
Where mourners weep, where lovers woo,
From throne to cottage hearth?

What sweet tears dim the eyes unshed,
What wild vows falter on the tongue,
When 'Scots wha hae wi'Wallace bled,'
Or 'Auld Lang Syne' is sung!

Pure hopes, that lift the soul above,
Come with his Cotter's hymn of praise,
And dreams of youth, and truth, and love,
With 'Logan's' banks and braes.

And when he breathes his master-lay
Of Alloway's witch-haunted wall,
All passions in our frames of clay
Come thronging at his call.

Imagination's world of air,
And our own world, its gloom and glee,
Wit, pathos, poetry, are there,
And death's sublimity.

And Burns—though brief the race he ran,
Though rough and dark the path he trod,
Lived—died—in form and soul a Man,
The image of his God.

Though care, and pain, and want, and woe,
With wounds that only death could heal,
Tortures—the poor alone can know,
The proud alone can feel;

He kept his honesty and truth,
His independent tongue and pen,
And moved, in manhood, as in youth,

Pride of his fellow men.

Strong sense, deep feeling, passions strong,
A hate of tyrant and of knave,
A love of right, a scorn of wrong,
Of coward, and of slave;

A kind, true heart, a spirit high,
That could not fear, and would not bow,
Were written in his manly eye,
And on his manly brow.

Praise to the bard!—his words are driven,
Like flower-seeds by the far winds sown,
Where'er, beneath the sky of heaven,
The birds of fame have flown.

Praise to the man! a nation stood
Beside his coffin with wet eyes,
Her brave, her beautiful, her good,
As when a loved one dies.

And still, as on his funeral day,
Men stand his cold earth-couch around,
With the mute homage that we pay
To consecrated ground.

And consecrated ground it is,
The last, the hallowed home of one
Who lives upon all memories,
Though with the buried gone.

Such graves as his are pilgrim-shrines,
Shrines to no code or creed confined,—
The Delphian vales, the Palestines,
The Meccas of the mind.

Sages, with wisdom's garland wreathed,
Crowned kings, and mitred priests of power,
And warriors with their bright swords sheathed,
The mightiest of the hour;

And lowlier names, whose humble home
Is lit by Fortune's dimmer star,
Are there-o'er wave and mountain come,
From countries near and far;

Pilgrims whose wandering feet have prest
The Switzer's snow, the Arab's sand,
Or trod the piled leaves of the West,
My own green forest-land.

All ask the cottage of his birth,
Gaze on the scenes he loved and sung,
And gather feelings not of earth
His fields and streams among.

They linger by the Doon's low trees,
And pastoral Nith, and wooded Ayr,
And round thy sepulchres, Dumfries!
The Poet's tomb is there.

But what to them the sculptor's art,
His funeral columns, wreaths, and urns?
Wear they not graven on the heart
The name of Robert Burns?

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Connecticut

—still her gray rocks tower above the sea
That crouches at their feet, a conquered wave;
'Tis a rough land of earth, and stone, and tree,
Where breathes no castled lord or cabined slave;
Where thoughts, and tongues, and hands, are bold and free,
And friends will find a welcome, foes a grave;
And where none kneel, save when to heaven they pray,
Nor even then, unless in their own way.

Theirs is a pure republic, wild, yet strong,
A 'fierce democracie,' where all are true
To what themselves have voted—right or wrong—
And to their laws denominated blue;
(If red, they might to Draco's code belong,)
A vestal state, which power could not subdue,
Nor promise win—like her own eagle's nest,
Sacred—the San Marino of the west.

A justice of the peace, for the time being,
They bow to, but may turn him out next year;
They reverence their priest, but disagreeing
In price or creed, dismiss him without fear;
They have a natural talent for foreseeing
And knowing all things;—and should Park appear
From his long tour in Africa, to show
The Niger's source, they'd meet him with—we know.

They love their land, because it is their own,
And scorn to give aught other reason why;
Would shake hands with a king upon his throne,
And think it kindness to his majesty;
A stubborn race, fearing and flattering none.
Such are they nurtured, such they live and die:
All—but a few apostates, who are meddling
With merchandise, pounds, shillings, pence and peddling;

Or wandering through the southern countries, teaching
The A. B. C. from Webster's spelling-book;
Gallant and godly, making love and preaching,

And gaining, by what they call 'hook and crook,'
And what the moralists call overreaching,
A decent living. The Virginians look
Upon them with as favourable eyes
As Gabriel on the devil in paradise.

But these are but their outcasts. View them near
At home, where all their worth and pride is placed;
And there their hospitable fires burn clear,
And there the lowliest farm-house hearth is graced
With manly hearts, in piety sincere,
Faithful in love, in honour stern and chaste,
In friendship warm and true, in danger brave,
Beloved in life, and sainted in the grave.

And minds have there been nurtured, whose control
Is felt even in their nation's destiny;
Men who swayed senates with a statesman's soul,
And looked on armies with a leader's eye;
Names that adorn and dignify the scroll,
Whose leaves contain their country's history,
And tales of love and war—listen to one,
Of the Green-Mountaineer—the Stark of Bennington.

When on that field his band the Hessians fought,
Briefly he spoke before the fight began—
'Soldiers! those German gentlemen are bought
For four pounds eight and seven pence per man,
By England's king—a bargain, as is thought.
Are we worth more? Let's prove it now we can—
For we must beat them, boys, ere set of sun,
OR MARY STARK'S A WIDOW.'—It was done.

Her's are not Tempe's nor Arcadia's spring,
Nor the long summer of Cathayan vales,
The vines, the flowers, the air, the skies, that fling
Such wild enchantment o'er Boccaccio's tales
Of Florence and the Arno—yet the wing
Of life's best angel, Health, is on her gales
Through sun and snow—and in the autumn time
Earth has no purer and no lovelier clime.

Her clear, warm heaven at noon,—the mist that shrouds
Her twilight hills,—her cool and starry eyes,
The glorious splendour of her sunset clouds,
The rainbow beauty of her forest leaves,
Come o'er the eye, in solitude and crowds,
Where'er his web of song her poet weaves;
And his mind's brightest vision but displays
The autumn scenery of his boyhood's days.

And when you dream of woman, and her love;
Her truth, her tenderness, her gentle power;
The maiden, listening in the moonlight grove,
The mother smiling in her infant's bower;
Forms, features, worshipped while we breathe or move,
Be by some spirit of your dreaming hour
Borne, like Loretto's chapel, through the air
To the green land I sing, then wake, you'll find them there.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Domestic Happiness

I.

'BESIDE the nuptial curtain bright'
The Bard of Eden sings,
'Young Love his constant lamp will light,
'And wave his purple wings.'
But rain-drops from the clouds of care
May bid that lamp be dim,
And the boy Love will pout and swear
'Tis then no place for him.

II

So mused the lovely Mrs. Dash;
'Tis wrong to mention names;
When for her surly husband's cash
She urged in vain her claims.
I want a little money, dear,
'For Vandervoort and Flandin,
Their bill, which now has run a year,
To-morrow mean to hand in.'

III

'More?' cried the husband, half asleep,
'You'll drive me to despair;'
The lady was too proud to weep,
And too polite to swear.
She bit her lip for very spite,
He felt a storm was brewing,
And dreamed of nothing else all night
But brokers, banks, and ruin.

IV

He thought her pretty once, but dreams
Have sure a wondrous power,
For to his eye the lady seems
Quite altered since that hour—
And Love, who on their bridal eve,
Had promised long to stay,
Forgot his promise—took French leave—
And bore his lamp away.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

From The Italian

EYES with the same blue witchery as those
Of Psyche, which caught Love in his own wiles;
Lips of the breath and hue of the red rose,
That move but with kind words, and sweetest smiles;
A power of motion and of look, whose art
Throws, silently, around the wildest heart
The net it would not break; a form which vies
With that the Grecian imaged in his mind,
And gazed upon in dreams, and sighed to find
His breathing marble could not realize.

Know ye this picture? There is one alone
Can call its penciled lineaments her own.
She whom, at morning, when the summer air
Wanders, delighted, o'er her face of flowers,
And lingers in the ringlets of her hair,
We deem the Hebe of Jove's banquet hours;
She who, at evening, when her fingers press
The harp, and wake its harmonies divine,
Seems sweetest-voiced and loveliest of the Nine,
The minstrel of the bowers of happiness.
She whom the Graces nurtured— at her birth,
The sea-born Goddess, and the Huntress maid,
Beings whose beauty is not of the earth,
Came from their myrtle home, and forest shade,
Blending immortal joy with mortal mirth:
And Dian said, 'Fair sister, be she mine
'In her heart's purity, in beauty thine.'
The smiling infant listened, and obeyed.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Love

..... The imperial votress passed on
In maiden meditation, fancy free.

Midsummer Night's Dream,
Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again?

BENEDICT, in Much Ado about Nothing.

I
WHEN the tree of Love is budding first,
Ere yet its leaves are green,
Ere yet, by shower and sunbeam nurst
Its infant life has been;
The wild bee's slightest touch might wring
The buds from off the tree,
As the gentle dip of the swallow's wing
Breaks the bubbles on the sea.

II
But when its open leaves have found
A home in the free air,
Pluck them, and there remains a wound
That ever rankles there.
The blight of hope and happiness
Is felt when fond ones part,
And the bitter tear that follows is
The life-blood of the heart.

III.
When the flame of love is kindled first,
'Tis the fire-fly's light at even,
'Tis dim as the wandering stars that burst
In the blue of the summer heaven.
A breath can bid it burn no more,
Or if, at times, its beams
Come on the memory, they pass o'er
Like shadows in our dreams.

IV

But when that flame has blazed into
A being and a power,
And smiled in scorn upon the dew
That fell in its first warm hour,
'Tis the flame that curls round the martyr's head,
Whose task is to destroy;
'Tis the lamp on the altars of the dead,
Whose light but darkens joy!

V

Then crush, even in their hour of birth,
The infant buds of Love,
And tread his glowing fire to earth,
Ere 'tis dark in clouds above;
Cherish no more a cypress tree
To shade thy future years,
Nor nurse a heart-flame that may be
Quenched only with thy tears.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Marco Bozzaris

At midnight, in his guarded tent,
The Turk was dreaming of the hour
When Greece, her knee in suppliance bent,
Should tremble at his power;
In dreams, through camp and court he bore.
The trophies of a conqueror;
In dreams his song of triumph heard;
Then wore his monarch's signet ring;
Then pressed that monarch's throne-a king:
As wild his thoughts and gay of wing
As Eden's garden bird.

At midnight, in the forest shades,
Bozzaris ranged his Suliote band,
True as the steel of their tried blades,
Heroes in heart and hand.
There had the Persian's thousands stood,
There had the glad earth drunk their blood
On old Plataea's day;
And now there breathed that haunted air
The sons of sires who conquered there,
With arm to strike, and soul to dare,
As quick, as far as they.

An hour passed on-the Turk awoke;
That bright dream was his last;
He woke-to hear his sentries shriek,
'To arms! they come! the Greek! the Greek!'
He woke-to die midst flame and smoke,
And shout and groan and sabre-stroke,
And death-shots falling thick and fast
As lightnings from the mountain-cloud;
And heard, with voice as trumpet loud,
Bozzaris cheer his band:
Strike-till the last armed foe expires!
Strike-for your altars and your fires!
Strike-for the green graves of your sires,
God, and your native land!'

They fought like brave men, long and well;
They piled that ground with Moslem slain;
They conquered-but Bozzaris fell,
Bleeding at every vein.
His few surviving comrades saw
His smile when rang their proud hurrah,
And the red field was won;
Then saw in death his eyelids close
Calmly, as to a night's repose,
Like flowers at set of sun.

Come to the bridal chamber, Death!
Come to the mother's when she feels,
For the first time, her first-horn's breath;
Come when the blessed seals
That close the pestilence are broke,
And crowded cities wail its stroke;
Come in consumption's ghastly form,
The earthquake shock, the ocean storm;
Come when the heart beats high and warm
With banquet-song and dance and wine;
And thou art terrible-the tear,
The groan, the knell, the pall, the bier,
And all we know or dream or fear
Of agony, are thine.

But to the hero, when his sword
Has won the battle for the free,
Thy voice sounds like a prophet's word,
And in its hollow tones are heard
The thanks of millions yet to be.
Come when his task of fame is wrought,
Come with her laurel-leaf, blood-bought,
Come in her crowning hour, and then
Thy sunken eye's unearthly light
To him is welcome as the sight
Of sky and stars to prisoned men;
Thy grasp is welcome as the hand
Of brother in a foreign land;
Thy summons welcome as the cry
That told the Indian isles were nigh
To the world-seeking Genoese,

When the land-wind, from woods of palm
And orange-groves and fields of balm,
Blew oer the Haytian seas.

Bozzaris, with the storied brave
Greece nurtured in her glory's time,
Rest thee-there is no prouder gave.
Even in her own proud clime.
She wore no funeral-weeds for thee,
Nor bade the dark hearse wave its plume,
Like torn branch from death's leafless tree,
In sorrow's pomp and pageantry,
The heartless luxury of the tomb.
But she remembers thee as one
Long loved and for a season gone;
For thee her poet's lyre is wreathed,
Her marble wrought, her music breathed;
For thee she rings the birthday bells;
Of thee her babes' first lisping tells;
For throe her evening prayer is said
At palace-couch and cottage-bed;
Her soldier, closing with the foe,
Gives for thy sake a deadlier blow;
His plighted maiden, when she fears
For him, the joy of her young years,
Thinks of thy fate and checks her tears;
And she, the mother of thy boys,
Though in her eye and faded cheek
Is read the grief she will not speak,
The memory of her buried joys,
And even she who gave thee birth,
Will, by their pilgrim-circled hearth,
Talk of thy doom without a sigh,
For thou art Freedom's now and Fame's,
One of the few, the immortal names,
That were not born to die.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Music: To A Boy Of Four Years Old, On Hearing Him Play The Harp

SWEET boy! before thy lips can learn
In speech thy wishes to make known,
Are 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn'
Heard in thy music's tone.

Were Genius tasked to prove the might,
The magic of her hidden spell,
She well might name thee with delight
As her own miracle.

Who that hath heard, from summer trees,
The sweet wild song of summer birds,
When morning to the far-off breeze
Whispers her bidding words;

Or listened to the bird of night,
The minstrel of the star-light hours,
Companion of the fire-fly's flight,
Cool dews, and closed flowers;

But deemed that spirits of the air
Had left their native homes in heaven,
And that the music warbled there
To earth awhile was given?

For with that music came the thought
That life's young purity was theirs,
And love, all artless, and untaught,
Breathed in their woodland airs.

And when, sweet boy! thy baby fingers
Wake sounds of heaven's own harmony,
How welcome is the thought that lingers
Upon thy lyre and thee!

It calls up visions of past days,
When life was infancy and song

To us, and old remembered lays,
Unheard, unheeded long;

Revive in joy or grief within us,
Like lost friends wakened from their sleep,
With all their early power to win us
Alike to smile or weep.

And when we gaze upon that face,
Blooming in innocence and truth,
And mark its dimpled artlessness,
Its beauty and its youth;

We think of better worlds than this,
Of other beings pure as thou,
Who breathe, on winds of Paradise,
Music as thine is now.

And know the only emblem meet
Of that pure Faith the heart adores,
To be a child like thee, whose feet
Are strangers on Life's shores.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

On The Death Of Joseph Rodman Drake

Green be the turf above thee,
Friend of my better days!
None knew thee but to love thee,
Nor named thee but to praise.

Tears fell, when thou went dying,
From eyes unused to weep,
And long where thou art lying,
Will tears the cold turf steep.

When hearts, whose truth was proven,
Like throe, are laid in earth,
There should a wreath be woven
To tell the world their worth;

And I, who woke each morrow
To clasp thy hand in mine,
Who shared thy joy and sorrow,
Whose weal and woe were thine;

It should be mine to braid it
Around thy faded brow,
But I've in vain essayed it,
And I feel I cannot now.

While memory bids me weep thee,
Nor thoughts nor words are free,
The grief is fixed too deeply
That mourns a man like thee.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

On The Death Of Lieut. William Howard Allen, Of The American Navy

He hath been mourned as brave men mourn the brave,
And wept as nations weep their cherished dead,
With bitter, but proud tears, and o'er his head
The eternal flowers whose root is in the grave,
The flowers of Fame, are beautiful and green;
And by his grave's side pilgrim feet have been,
And blessings, pure as men to martyrs give,
Have there been breathed by those he died to save.
—Pride of his country's banded chivalry,
His fame their hope, his name their battle cry;
He lived as mothers wish their sons to live,
He died as fathers wish their sons to die.
If on the grief-worn cheek the hues of bliss,
Which fade when all we love is in the tomb,
Could ever know on earth a second bloom,
The memory of a gallant death like his
Would call them into being—but the few,
Who as their friend, their brother, or their son,
His kind warm heart and gentle spirit knew,
Had long lived, hoped, and feared for him alone;
His voice their morning music, and his eye
The only starlight of their evening sky,
Till even the sun of happiness seemed dim,
And life's best joys were sorrows but with him;
And when—the Burning bullet in his breast,
He dropped, like summer fruit from off the bough,
There was one heart that knew and loved him best—
It was a mother's—and is broken now.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Psalm Cxxxviii

WE sat us down and wept,
Where Babel's waters slept,
And we thought of home and Zion as a long-gone, happy dream;
We hung our harps in air
On the willow boughs, which there,
Gloomy as round a sepulchre, were drooping o'er the stream.

The foes, whose chain we wore,
Were with us on that shore,
Exulting in our tears that told the bitterness of woe.
'Sing us,' they cried aloud,
'Ye, once so high and proud,
'The songs ye sang in Zion ere we laid her glory low.'

And shall the harp of heaven
To Judah's monarch given
Be touched by captive fingers, or grace a fettered hand?
No! sooner be my tongue
Mute, powerless, and unstrung,
Than its words of holy music make glad a stranger land.

May this right hand, whose skill
Can wake the harp at will,
And bid the listeners, joys or griefs in light or darkness come,
Forget its godlike power,
If for one brief, dark hour,
My heart forgets Jerusalem, fallen city of my home!

Daughter of Babylon!
Blest be that chosen one,
Whom God shall send to smite thee when there is none to save;
He from the mother's breast,
Shall pluck the babe at rest,
And lay it in the sleep of death beside its father's grave.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Red Jacket

A Chief Of The Indian Tribes, The Tuscaroras.
On Looking At His Portrait By Weir

COOPER, whose name is with his country's woven,
First in her files, her PIONEER of mind—
A wanderer now in other climes, has proven
His love for the young land he left behind;

And throned her in the senate hall of nations,
Robed like the deluge rainbow, heaven-wrought,
Magnificent as his own mind's creations,
And beautiful as its green world of thought;

And faithful to the Act of Congress, quoted
As law authority,—it passed nem. con.—
He writes that we are, as ourselves have voted,
The most enlightened people ever known.

That all our week is happy as a Sunday
In Paris, full of song and dance and laugh;
And that, from Orleans to the Bay of Fundy,
There's not a bailiff, or an epitaph.

And furthermore—in fifty years, or sooner,
We shall export our poetry and wine;
And our brave fleet, eight frigates and a schooner,
Will sweep the seas from Zembla to the Line.

If he were with me, King of Tuscarora!
Gazing, as I, upon thy portrait now,
In all its medalled, fringed, and beaded glory,
Its eye's dark beauty, and its thoughtful brow—

Its brow, half martial, and half diplomatic,
Its eye, upsoaring like an eagle's wings;
Well might he boast that we, the Democratic,
Outrival Europe, even in our Kings!

For thou wast monarch born. Tradition's pages
Tell not the planting of thy parent tree,
But that the forest tribes have bent for ages
To thee, and to thy sires, the subject knee.

Thy name is princely,—if no poet's magic
Could make RED JACKET grace an English rhyme,
Though some one with a genius for the tragic
Hath introduced it in a pantomime,

Yet it is music in the language spoken
Of thine own land; and on her herald roll;
As bravely fought for, and as proud a token
As Cœur de Lion's, of a warrior's soul.

Thy garb—though Austria's bosom-star would frighten
That medal pale, as diamonds the dark mine,
And George the Fourth wore, at his court at Brighton,
A more becoming evening dress than thine;

Yet 'tis a brave one, scorning wind and weather,
And fitted for thy couch, on field and flood,
A Rob Roy's tartan for the Highland heather,
Or forest green for England's Robin Hood.

Is strength a monarch's merit, like a whale's?
Thou art as tall, as sinewy, and as strong
As earth's first kings,—the Argo's gallant sailors,
Heroes in history, and gods in song.

Is beauty?—Thine has with thy youth departed;
But the love-legends of thy manhood's years,
And she who perished, young and broken hearted,
Are—but I rhyme for smiles and not for tears.

Is eloquence?—Her spell is thine that reaches
The heart, and makes the wisest head its sport;
And there's one rare, strange virtue in thy speeches,
The secret of their mastery,—they are short.

The monarch mind, the mystery of commanding,
The birth-hour gift, the art Napoleon,

Of winning, fettering, moulding, wielding, banding
The hearts of millions till they move as one;

Thou hast it. At thy bidding men have crowded
The road to death as to a festival;
And minstrels, at their sepulchres, have shrouded
With banner-folds of glory the dark pall.

Who will believe? Not I—for in deceiving
Lies the dear charm of life's delightful dream;
I cannot spare the luxury of believing
That all things beautiful are what they seem.

Who will believe that, with a smile whose blessing
Would, like the Patriarch's, sooth a dying hour,
With voice as low, as gentle, and caressing,
As e'er won maiden's lip in moonlit bower;

With look, like patient Job's, eschewing evil;
With motions graceful, as a bird's in air;
Thou art, in sober truth, the veriest devil
That e'er clenched fingers in a captive's hair!

That in thy breast there springs a poison fountain,
Deadlier than that where bathes the Upas tree;
And in thy wrath, a nursing cat-o'-mountain
Is calm as her babe's sleep, compared with thee!

And underneath that face, like summer ocean's,
Its lip as moveless, and its cheek as clear,
Slumbers a whirlwind of the heart's emotions,
Love, hatred, pride, hope, sorrow,—all save fear.

Love—for thy land, as if she were thy daughter,
Her pipe in peace, her tomahawk in wars;
Hatred—of missionaries and cold water;
Pride—in thy rifle-trophies and thy scars;

Hope—that thy wrongs, may be by the Great Spirit
Remembered and revenged, when thou art gone;
Sorrow—that none are left thee to inherit
Thy name, thy fame, thy passions, and thy throne!

Fitz-Greene Halleck

The Field Of The Grounded Arms, Saratoga

STRANGERS! your eyes are on that valley fixed
Intently, as we gaze on vacancy,
When the mind's wings overspread
The spirit-world of dreams.

True, 'tis a scene of loveliness—the bright
Green dwelling of the summer's first-born Hours,
Whose wakened leaf and bud
Are welcoming the morn.

And morn returns the welcome, sun and cloud
Smile on the green earth from their home in heaven,
Even as a mother smiles
Above her cradled boy,

And wreath their light and shade o'er plain and mountain,
O'er sleepless seas of grass whose waves are flowers,
The rivers' golden shores,
The forests of dark pines.

The song of the wild bird is on the wind,
The hum of the wild bee, the music wild
Of waves upon the bank,
Of leaves upon the bough.

But all is song and beauty in the land,
Beneath her skies of June; then journey on,
A thousand scenes like this
Will greet you ere the eve.

Ye linger yet—ye see not, hear not now
The sunny smile, the music of to-day,
Your thoughts are wandering up
Far up the stream of time;

And boyhood's lore and fireside listened tales
Are rushing on your memories, as ye breathe
That valley's storied name,
FIELD OF THE GROUNDED ARMS.

Strangers no more, a kindred 'pride of place,'
Pride in the gift of country and of name
Speaks in your eye and step—
Ye tread your native land.

And your high thoughts are on her glory's day,
The solemn Sabbath of the week of battle,
Whose tempests bowed to earth
Her foeman's banner here.

The forest leaves lay scattered cold and dead,
Upon the withered grass that autumn morn,
When, with as withered hearts
And hopes as dead and cold,

A gallant army formed their last array
Upon that field, in silence and deep gloom,
And at their conqueror's feet
Laid their war-weapons down.

Sullen and stern, disarmed but not dishonoured;
Brave men, but brave in vain, they yielded there:
The soldier's trial task
Is not alone 'to die.'

Honour to chivalry! the conqueror's breath
Stains not the ermine of his foeman's fame,
Nor mocks his captive's doom—
The bitterest cup of war.

But be that bitterest cup the doom of all
Whose swords are lightning flashes in the cloud
Of the Invader's wrath,
Threatening a gallant land.

His armies' trumpet-tones wake not alone
Her slumbering echoes; from a thousand hills
Her answering voices shout,
And her bells ring to arms!

Then danger hovers oer the Invader's March,

On raven wings, hushing the song of fame,
And glory's hues of beauty
Fade from the check of death.

A foe is heard in every rustling leaf,
A fortress seen, in every rock and tree,
The eagle eye of art
Is dim and power-less then,

And war becomes a people's joy, the drum
Man's merriest music, and the field of death
His couch of happy dreams,
After life's harvest home.

He battles heart and arm, his own blue sky
Above him, and his own green land around,
Land of his father's grave,
His blessing and his prayers,

Land where he learnt to lisp a mother's name,
The first beloved in life, the last forgot,
Land of his frolic youth,
Land of his bridal eve,

Land of his children,—vain your columned strength
Invaders! vain your battles' steel and fire!
Choose ye the morrow's doom,—
A prison or a grave.

And such were Saratoga's victors—such
The Yeomen-Brave, whose deeds and death have given
A glory to her skies,
A music to her name.

In honourable life her fields they trod,
In honourable death they sleep below;
Their sons' proud feelings here
Their noblest monuments.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

The World

THE world is bright before thee,
Its summer flowers are thine,
Its calm blue sky is o'er thee,
Thy bosom Pleasure's shrine;
And thine the sunbeam given
To Nature's morning hour,
Pure, warm, as when from heaven
It burst on Eden's bower.
There is a song of sorrow,
The death-dirge of the gay,
That tells, ere dawn of morrow,
These charms may melt away,
That sun's bright beam be shaded,
That sky be blue no more,
The summer flowers be faded,
And youth's warm promise o'er.
Believe it not—though lonely
Thy evening home may be;
Though Beauty's bark can only
Float on a summer sea;
Though Time thy bloom is stealing,
There's still beyond his art
The wild-flower wreath of feeling,
The sunbeam of the heart.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

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Fitz-Greene Halleck

Twilight

THERE is an evening twilight of the heart,
When its wild passion-waves are lulled to rest,
And the eye see's life's fairy scenes depart,
As fades the day-beam in the rosy west.
'Tis with a nameless feeling of regret
We gaze upon them as they melt away,
And fondly would we bid them linger yet,
But Hope is round us with her angel lay,
Hailing afar some happier moonlight hour;
Dear are her whispers still, though lost their early power.

In youth the cheek was crimsoned with her glow;
Her smile was loveliest then; her matin song
Was heaven's own music, and the note of woe
Was all unheard her sunny bowers among.
Life's little world of bliss was newly born;
We knew not, cared not, it was born to die,
Flushed with the cool breeze and the dews of morn,
With dancing heart we gazed on the pure sky,
And mocked the passing clouds that dimmed its blue,
Like our own sorrows then—as fleeting and as few.

And manhood felt her sway too,—on the eye,
Half realised, her early dreams burst bright,
Her promised bower of happiness seemed nigh,
Its days of joy, its vigils of delight;
And though at times might lower the thunder storm,
And the red lightnings threaten, still the air
Was balmy with her breath, and her loved form,
The rainbow of the heart, was hovering there.
'Tis in life's noontide she is nearest seen,
Her wreath the summer flower, her robe of summer green.

But though less dazzling in her twilight dress,
There's more of heaven's pure beam about her now;
That angel-smile of tranquil loveliness,
Which the heart worships, glowing on her brow;
That smile shall brighten the dim evening star
That points our destined tomb, nor e'er depart

Till the faint light of life is fled afar,
And hushed the last deep beating of the heart;
The meteor-bearer of our parting breath,
A moon-beam in the midnight cloud of death.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Woman

LADY, although we have not met,
And may not meet, beneath the sky;
And whether thine are eyes of jet,
Gray, or dark blue, or violet,
Or hazel—heaven knows, not I;

Whether around thy cheek of rose
A maiden's glowing locks are curled,
And to some thousand kneeling beaux,
Thy frown is cold as winter's snows,
Thy smile is worth a world;

Or whether, past youth's joyous strife,
The calm of thought is on thy brow,
And thou art in thy noon of life,
Loving, and loved, a happy wife,
And happier mother now,

I know not—but whate'er thou art,
Whoe'er thou art, were mine the spell,
To call Fate's joys, or blunt his dart,
There should not be one hand or heart
But served or wished thee well.

For thou art Woman—with that word
Life's dearest hopes and memories come,
Truth, Beauty, Love—in her adored,
And earth's lost Paradise restored
In the green bower of home.

What is man's love? His vows are broke
Even while his parting kiss is warm,—
But woman's love all change will mock,
And, like the ivy round the oak,
Cling closest in the storm.

And well the Poet at her shrine
May bend, and worship while he woos;
To him she is a thing divine,

The inspiration of his line,
His loved one, and his Muse.

If to his song the echo rings
Of Fame—'tis Woman's voice he hears;
If ever from his lyre's proud strings
Flow sounds, like rush of angel wings,
'Tis that she listens while he sings,
With blended smiles and tears:

Smiles,—tears,—whose blest and blessing power,
Like sun and dew o'er summer's tree,
Alone keeps green through Time's long hour,
That frailer thing than leaf or flower,
A Poet's immortality.

Fitz-Greene Halleck

Wyoming

I.

THOU com'st, in beauty, on my gaze at last,
'On Susquehannah's side, fair Wyoming!'
Image of many a dream, in hours long past,
When life was in its bud and blossoming,
And waters, gushing from the fountain spring
Of pure enthusiast thought, dimmed my young eyes,
As by the poet borne, on unseen wing,
I breathed, in fancy, 'neath thy cloudless skies,
The summer's air, and heard her echoed harmonies.

II.

I then but dreamed: thou art before me now,
In life, a vision of the brain no more.
I've stood upon the wooded mountain's brow,
That beetles high thy lovely valley o'er;
And now, where winds thy river's greenest shore,
Within a bower of sycamores am laid;
And winds, as soft and sweet as ever bore
The fragrance of wild flowers through sun and shade,
Are singing in the trees, whose low boughs press my head.

III.

Nature hath made thee lovelier than the power
Even of Campbell's pen hath pictured: he
Had woven, had he gazed one sunny hour
Upon thy smiling vale, its scenery
With more of truth, and made each rock and tree
Known like old friends, and greeted from afar:
And there are tales of sad reality,
In the dark legends of thy border war,
With woes of deeper tint than his own Gertrude's are.

IV

But where are they, the beings of the mind,
The bard's creations, moulded not of clay,
Hearts to strange bliss and suffering assigned—
Young Gertrude, Albert, Waldegrave—where are they?
We need not ask. The people of to-day

Appear good, honest, quiet men enough,
And hospitable too—for ready pay,—
With manners like their roads, a little rough,
And hands whose grasp is warm and welcoming, tho' tough.

V

Judge Hallenbach, who keeps the toll-bridge gate,
And the town records, is the Albert now
Of Wyoming: like him, in church and state,
Her doric column; and upon his brow
The thin hairs, white with seventy winters' snow,
Look patriarchal. Waldegrave 'twere in vain
To point out here, unless in yon scare-crow,
That stands full-uniformed upon the plain,
To frighten flocks of crows and blackbirds from the grain.

VI

For he would look particularly droll
In his 'Iberian boot' and 'Spanish plume,'
And be the wonder of each Christian soul
As of the birds that scare-crow and his broom.
But Gertrude, in her loveliness and bloom,
Hath many a model here,—for Woman's eye,
In court or cottage, wheresoe'er her home
Hath a heart-spell too holy and too high
To be o'er-praised even by her worshipper—Poesy.

VII

There's one in the next field—of sweet sixteen—
Singing and summoning thoughts of beauty born
In heaven—with her jacket of light green,
'Love-darting eyes, and tresses like the morn,'
Without a shoe or stocking,—hoeing corn.
Whether, like Gertrude, she oft wanders there,
With Shakspeare's volume in her bosom borne,
I think is doubtful. Of the poet-player
The maiden knows no more than Cobbett or Voltaire.

VIII

There is a woman, widowed, gray, and old,
Who tells you where the foot of Battle stept
Upon their day of massacre. She told

Its tale, and pointed to the spot, and wept,
Whereon her father and five brothers slept
Shroudless, the bright-dreamed slumbers of the brave,
When all the land a funeral mourning kept.
And there, wild laurels planted on the grave
By Nature's hand, in air their pale red blossoms wave.

IX

And on the margin of yon orchard hill
Are marks where time-worn battlements have been,
And in the tall grass traces linger still
Of 'arrowy frieze and wedged ravelin.'
Five hundred of her brave that Valley green
Trode on the morn in soldier-spirit gay;
But twenty lived to tell the noon-day scene—
And where are now the twenty? Passed away.
Has Death no triumph-hours, save on the battle-day?

Fitz-Greene Halleck