

Classic Poetry Series

Gamaliel Bradford

- poems -

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Gamaliel Bradford(9 October 1863 - 11 April 1932)

Gamaliel Bradford was an American biographer, critic, poet, and dramatist. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, the sixth of seven men called Gamaliel Bradford in unbroken succession, of whom the first, Gamaliel Bradford, was a great-grandson of Governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Colony.

Bradford attended Harvard University briefly with the class of 1886, then continued his education with a private tutor, but is said to have been educated "mainly by ill-health and a vagrant imagination. As an adult, Bradford lived in Wellesley, Massachusetts. The building and student newspaper for the Wellesley High School (where [Sylvia Plath](http://www.poemhunter.com/sylvia-plath/) received her secondary school education) are named after Gamaliel Bradford.

In his day Bradford was regarded as the "Dean of American Biographers. He is acknowledged as the American pioneer of the psychographic form of written biographies, after the style developed by Lytton Strachey. Despite suffering poor health during most of his life, Bradford wrote 114 biographies over a period of 20 years.

A Thousand Years

Just to utter a word,
That is all I desire;
That may still be heard,
When I expire;
That still may glow,
Like a soft, sweet flame,
When others go,
As they lightly came;
That may still be sung
With hopes and fears,
By a careless tongue
In a thousand years.

Gamaliel Bradford

Anacreon's Apology

An eye where love with laughter twinkles,
And songs on kisses still insistent,
Blended with graying hair and wrinkles,
To you, my child, seem inconsistent?

In fact, you think such conduct shocking?
The old should mind their souls and purses?
Ah, youthful blood, refrain from mocking
Till you can only kiss in verses.

Gamaliel Bradford

Ardor

Others make verses of grace.
Mine are all muscle and sinew.
Others can picture your face.
But I all the tumult within you.

Others can give you delight,
And delight I confess is worth giving.
But my songs must tickle and bite
And burn with the ardor of living

Gamaliel Bradford

Brown Leaves

The passage of dead leaves in spring
Is like the aged vanishing.
Amid the bustle and delight
Of beauty thronging sound and sight,
Their lengthened course we hardly know
Nor mark their exit when they go.
Yet through the burst of budding green
And blossoms rich with varied sheen
A brown leaf sometimes flutters by
And breeds a sombre revery.

Gamaliel Bradford

Comedy

I'm writing comedy again,
The daintiest pleasure known to men;
Unless a daintier might be
To watch your acted comedy:
The airy ladies gaily dressed,
And much adored, and much caressed,
The men who swagger like game cocks,
Or undermine, like cunning fox,
And over all these shaken free
The spangled gleam of repartee—
No keener joy awaits us here.
And yet each day I write with fear.

Gamaliel Bradford

Disorder

My life is governed by the clock,
All duly mapped and plotted;
And only with a nervous shock
I miss the time allotted.

My course without has always been
Set straight to hedge and border;
But I confess that all within
Is vast and vague disorder.

Gamaliel Bradford

Exit God

Of old our father's God was real,
Something they almost saw,
Which kept them to a stern ideal
And scourged them into awe.

They walked the narrow path of right
Most vigilantly well,
Because they feared eternal night
And boiling depths of Hell.

Now Hell has wholly boiled away
And God become a shade.
There is no place for him to stay
In all the world He made.

The followers of William James
Still let the Lord exist,
And call Him by imposing names,
A venerable list.
But nerve and muscle only count,
Gray matter of the brain,
And an astonishing amount
Of inconvenient pain.

I sometimes wish that God were back
In this dark world and wide;
For though sonic virtues He might lack,
He had his pleasant side.

Gamaliel Bradford

Expenses

I'm sick to death of money, of the lack of it, that is,
And of practising perpetually small economies;
Of paring off a penny here, another penny there,
Of the planning and the worrying, the everlasting care.

The savages went naked and no doubt digested fruit,
And when they longed for partridge all they had to do was shoot.
But it may be Mrs. Savage was extravagant in paint
And all the little Savages made juvenile complaint.

'I want a bow like We-We's. I want a fine canoe.
I don't have half such dandy things as other fellers do.'
And Mrs. Savage quite agreed it was an awful shame.
So Mr. Savage sighed about expenses just the same.

Gamaliel Bradford

Fear

When I was little,
My life was half fear.
My nerves were as brittle
As nature may bear.

Shapes monstrous would follow
My footsteps alone,
And night, huge and hollow,
Yawned cold as a stone.

At trifles I started,
For nothing I wept,
And terror departed
Not all when I slept.

Now I've grown older,
My nerves I restrain.
My pulses are colder,
And clearer my brain.

Yet still with a shudder
I drift through the dark
And fear holds the rudder,
A-guiding my bark.

The world's so enormous
In multiple whole,
What god can inform us
It cares for a soul?

Gamaliel Bradford

Fleas

My thoughts are like fleas,
Eternally skipping.
I try as I please
To prevent their slipping,
To probe them for more meant
Than my wit can utter;
But out of the torment
They quiver and flutter,
Dance, sparkle, and vanish
With insolent ease.
To hold or to banish
My thoughts are like fleas.

Gamaliel Bradford

God

I think about God.
Yet I talk of small matters.
Now isn't it odd
How my idle tongue chatters!
Of quarrelsome neighbors,
Fine weather and rain,
Indifferent labors,
Indifferent pain,
Some trivial style
Fashion shifts with a nod.
And yet all the while
I am thinking of God.

Gamaliel Bradford

God

Day and night I wander widely through the wilderness of thought, Catching
dainty things of fancy most reluctant to be caught. Shining tangles leading
nowhere I persistently unravel, Tread strange paths of meditation very intricate
to travel.

Gleaming bits of quaint desire tempt my steps beyond the decent.
I confound old solid glory with publicity too recent.
But my one unchanged obsession, wheresoe'er my feet have trod,
Is a keen, enormous, haunting, never-sated thirst for God

Gamaliel Bradford

Greeks

You really can't imagine how I love the ancient Greeks.
I love the dancing language where their mobile spirit speaks.
I love the songs of Homer, flowing on like streams of light,
With a touch of human kindness in the splendid shock of fight.

I love the Alexandrians whose inimitable grace
Filled the world with piping shepherds, though a far from piping place.
But my chief delight, like Arnold's, is the glory of the nine, Passion, laughter,
deathless beauty, on the Attic stage divine.

Gamaliel Bradford

Heinelet I

The huge old earth shook and quivered,
When it heard my passionate cry.
Why, even the little stars shivered
And almost went out in the sky.

But the earth and the stars knew better,
Whispering below and above,
'If the fool will be faithless, let her.'—
So nothing went out but my love.

Gamaliel Bradford

Heinelet II

They met, as it were, in a mist,
Pale, curious, eager, uncertain.
When each clasped the other and kissed,
The mist rolled aside like a curtain.

There were fields of delight to explore,
Where it seemed that their lips could not sever.
Now their lips are as lone as before
And the cold mist is thicker than ever.

Gamaliel Bradford

Hope

When I was a little boy,
I followed hope and slighted joy.
Now my wit has larger scope,
I clutch at joy and heed not hope.

At least that doctrine I profess,
For there I know lies happiness;
But hope, for all the shifts I try,
Will be my sovereign till I die.

Gamaliel Bradford

Hunger

I've been a hopeless sinner, but I understand a
saint,
Their bend of weary knees and their con-
tortions long and faint,
And the endless pricks of conscience, like a hundred
thousand pins,
A real perpetual penance for imaginary sins.

I love to wander widely, but I understand a cell,
Where you tell and tell your beads because you've
nothing else to tell,
Where the crimson joy of flesh, with all its wild
fantastic tricks,
Is forgotten in the blinding glory of the crucifix.

I cannot speak for others, but my inmost soul is
torn
With a battle of desires making all my life forlorn.
There are moments when I would untread the paths
that I have trod.
I'm a hunter of the devil, but I hunger after God.

Gamaliel Bradford

I Might-And I Might Not

I might forget ambition and the hunger for success.
I might forget the passion to escape from nothingness.
I might forget the curious dreams of ecstasy that haunt
My fancy day and night. I might forget them. But I can't.

If I could let the pen alone and leave the inkstand dry,
And forego perpetual effort to be climbing, climbing high,
And lay aside my mad designs to startle and enchant,
I might enjoy the sweet of common living. But I can't.

I might be just a Philistine, and eat, and drink, and sleep,
And drive a dusty motor and pile money in a heap,
And let the stream of life run through my brain and be forgot.
If I did, I might be happier. I might—and I might not.

Gamaliel Bradford

Imagination

Imagination plays me most intolerable tricks.
To enumerate them all would be unbearably prolix.
Just a trifle bids them gather and a trifle bids them go.
And they tease me and torment me more than anyone can know.

Tricks of strange, disordered action, tricks of strange disordered thought.
Tricks of seeking explanations most unprofitably sought.
But my will is learning daily, when the creatures growl and leap,
That a stern voice and a stinging lash will drive them back to sleep.

Gamaliel Bradford

Leaves

Down come the leaves,
Like fleeting years,
Or idle tears
Of love that grieves.

A tinkling trill,
A pallid flight
Like brief delight --
And all is still.

Gamaliel Bradford

My Youth

Oh, my youth was hot and eager,
And my heart was burning, burning,
And the present joy seemed meagre,
Dwarfed by that perpetual yearning.

I was always madly asking
Ampler beauty, keener pleasure,
Had not wit enough for basking
In the sunshine, rich with leisure.

Now with ripeness of October
I have reasoned and reflected.
And I feed my soul, grown sober,
With the crumbs that I rejected.

Gamaliel Bradford

Nerves

Nerves are most extraordinary,
Full of useful information,
At a moment's notice merry
With abounding cacchination,
Then with subtle transformation,
Dreary as a cemetery
Just prepared for occupation.—
Nerves are most extraordinary.

Gamaliel Bradford

Perhaps

<i>'He who knows What life and death is, is above all law.'
Chapman.</i>

He who knows what life and death is
Walks superior to fate.
Every word that Fortune saith is
Just accordant to his state.

Unto him indifferent breath is
Nature's bitter use and wont.
He who knows what life and death is!—
Ah, perhaps you do, I don't.

Gamaliel Bradford

Robert E. Lee

O Robert Lee, you paladin,
I wonder how my words would strike you.
I know the portrait might have been
In many, many ways more like you.

But you would not have had me plan
To make your figure more heroic;
For you would rather be a man
Than just a marble hearted stoic.

And I can often hear you say,
When they condemn and when they flatter,
In your divinely tender way,
'Good friend, it really doesn't matter.'

Gamaliel Bradford

Rousseau

That odd, fantastic ass, Rousseau,
Declared himself unique.
How men persist in doing so,
Puzzles me more than Greek.

The sins that tarnish whore and thief
Beset me every day.
My most ethereal belief
Inhabits common clay.

Gamaliel Bradford

Seals

I deliver a lecture
And pour out my soul,
Its full architecture,
All rounded and whole.

But with those I love best
I stammer and mutter,
And gossip and jest
Are all I can utter:

Quip, quirk, and derision;
And what my heart feels,
My soul's purest vision,
Are under the seals.

Gamaliel Bradford

Taken All Together

I've had a few diseases,
And trifled with despair,
Tried failure which displeases,
And coquetted with care.

But through the stormy weather
There come delicious days
When, taken altogether,
You half believe it pays.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Best Of All

Sleep and turn and sleep again,
Spite of the morning birds.
I am weary of strife with men,
Weary of fruitless words.

Once I traveled in blossomed ways,
Ere I had learned to weep.
Sleep is better than loveless days.
Death is better than sleep.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Congregation

The ghost of night's long hours depart
In congregation dreary,
And leave my sorrow-trampled heart
Intolerably weary.

But Chirpings bright in dewy woods
Foretell divine tomorrows,
And little birds are very good
To dissipate great sorrows.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Curtain

Others may seem gay and certain,
Steering one unbroken line.
But lift up the heart's dim curtain,
It might prove as frail as mine.

Full of shift and light vagary,
Thirsting, shrinking from the cup.
Truly, we had best be wary
And not lift the curtain up.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Dainty Virtue

She fled me through the meadow,
She fled me o'er the hill.
With such a fling she fled, oh,
She may be flying still.

But doubtless she grew weary
By thicket or by wood.—
A dainty virtue, dearie,
That fled when none pursued.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Divagator

You think my songs are strange.
I think they are myself.
I let my fancy range—
The divagating elf.

Don't say my songs are common.
For though my soul I seek
In every man and woman,
I want my songs unique.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Drone

I might have been a worker, but I'm nothing but a drone.
I tell my idle stories in a philosophic tone.
In a fuzzy, spiny mantle of remoteness softly furled
I lie and watch with half-shut eyes the stupefying world.

And they bustle and they rustle with their self-consuming din.
And eager feet go hurrying out and tired feet come in.
Like Bottom, when they hear a sound they all must rush to see.
They're always running after life. I let it come to me.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Idle Wind

The idle wind blows all the day.
I wish it blew my care away.
The idle wind blows all day long
And weaves a burden to my song
Upon the melancholy flight
Of youth and beauty and delight.
The idle wind blows all the day.
I wish it blew my care away.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Pack

A bit of metaphysics or a psychologic catch
Will sit upon my breast all day and scratch and scratch and
scratch. Now isn't it a pity that the ragged thorns of culture
Should be tearing at my vitals, as Prometheus's the vulture?

I really have no liking for abstruse and subtle question.
I prefer to laugh in sunshine and to cherish my digestion.
But a pack of eager queries, barking, barking, hound me on,
Until I find an hour of life's pure delight is gone.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Pursuit

I had visited her often,
Long had sought, with vain endeavor,
Her obdurate heart to soften;
But she answered, 'never, never.'

Then it softened and ran widely,
Like an ink-dropp on a blotter.
I ceased labor, tasted idly,
Found it bitter, and forgot her.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Riot

You may think my life is quiet.
I find it full of change,
An ever-varied diet,
As piquant as 'tis strange.

Wild thoughts are always flying,
Like sparks across my brain,
Now flashing out, now dying,
To kindle soon again.

Fine fancies set me thrilling,
And subtle monsters creep
Before my sight unwilling:
They even haunt my sleep.

One broad, perpetual riot
Enfolds me night and day.
You think my life is quiet?
You don't know what you say.

Gamaliel Bradford

The Tickle

I like to read confessions
As lengthy as Rousseau's,
With all their slow processions
Of innumerable woes.

I revel in Cellini,
Augustine, Amiel
Dumas's Memoirs so sheeny,
Lies no one else could tell.

I love each peccadillo
Of honest Mr. Pepys,
Confided to his pillow
Before his conscience sleeps.

But I prefer in verses
To hand my life to time:
You may forgive what worse is
For tickle of the rhyme.

Gamaliel Bradford

Things Of Clay

Sing a little, play a little,
Laugh a little; for
Life is so extremely brittle,
Who would think of more?

Every long-laid project shatters,
Framed by things of clay:
He who knows that nothing matters
Smiles and slips away.

Gamaliel Bradford

Who Cares?

Who cares,
Though age oppress,
And griefs distress,
And the long, long day
Rolls slow away
Its charge of pain?
Joy comes again
And charms our sight
With fresh delight.
Meantime—
Who cares?

Gamaliel Bradford

Why?

Hist! Zop!

The world is all awry.

Think that you can mend it?

Take a turn and try.

Virtue gets a fall or two,

Vice careers on high.

I had rather sing myself,

Sick of asking why.

Gamaliel Bradford

Winds Of Wrath

Silly little bird,
Singing of its love,
Sang and never heard
Winds of wrath above.

Winds of wrath came down,
Tossed the world about.
Bird and song were gone
When the stars came out.

Gamaliel Bradford